Contents

List of Maps, vii
Foreword by Dennis E. Showalter, ix
Preface, xi
Acknowledgments, xv
Translators’ Note, xvii
A Note on Wargaming, xxi
1. The Context of the Campaign, 1
2. The Opening of the Campaign to the Battle of Dego, 17
3. The Defeat of Piedmont, 47
4. Bonaparte Crosses the Po, 60
5. Bonaparte Tightens His Grip, 88
6. The First Campaign for Mantua, 107
7. The Changing Strategic Situation, 139
8. The Second Campaign for Mantua, 148
9. The Campaign and Battle of Arcole, 161
10. The Crushing of Austria in Italy, 213
11. The 1797 Campaign in the Alps, 257
12. Conclusions, 275
    Appendix: Select Orders of Battle, 293
    Bibliography, 305
    Index, 309
Maps

1.1. Central Europe in 1792, 2
1.2. Disposition of Main Armies in March 1796, 3
1.3. The States of Northern Italy in 1796, 16
2.1. Northern Italian Theater, 24
2.2. The Initial Positions and Moves, 10–14 April 1796, 25
3.1. Defeating Piedmont, 15–23 April, 49
4.1. Crossing the Po, 24 April to 9 May, 63
5.1. Pursuit of Beaulieu, 10 May to 4 June, 91
6.1. First Campaign for Mantua, 28 July to 5 August, 111
8.1. Second Campaign for Mantua, 2–15 September, 151
9.1. Third Campaign for Mantua, 1–23 November, 169
10.1. Final Campaign to Relieve Mantua, 7–16 January, 220
11.1. Bonaparte Marches into Austria, 10 March to 7 April, 263
12.1. Central Europe after the Treaty of Campo Formio (18 October 1797), 289
Foreword

Dennis E. Showalter

The work of Carl von Clausewitz resembles the Bible in being more often cited than studied, and in too often acting as a source of support for preconceptions. That in turn reflects the fact that Clausewitz’s writings are usually discussed in their theoretical contexts: recognition of his acknowledged position as Western culture’s foremost philosopher of war. But Clausewitz himself considered his historical writing no less important than his analytical work. Beginning in the 1820s and continuing until his death, he completed a massive amount of writing on the wars of the Revolutionary/Napoleonic era—not separate from but in conjunction with his philosophically oriented studies.

Clausewitz saw military history as the basis of military theory. History, he asserted, “makes us see things as they are and as they function.” War’s diversity was no less significant than its commonalities. But it could be a good deal more difficult to determine and present. That was especially true in the modern era, with its plethora of sources whose details and interactions, given war’s nature as the province of confusion, could be mutually exclusive or simply contradictory. Theory provided matrices for structuring, analyzing, and defining facts.

This case study is particularly useful because it was largely written toward the end of Clausewitz’s career and correspondingly addresses in practical contexts a broad spectrum of the ideas raised theoretically in On War. The Clausewitzian triad of people, army, and government contributes to shaping the work without dominating the presentation. The synergy of marginal operations and major actions provides an understanding of the campaign as an entity shaped and structured by particular decisions, but with its own objective dynamic. And Clausewitz’s constant comparison of contemporary reports and narrations with subsequent glosses is a model of textual criticism—particularly when Napoleon’s memoirs are involved. These emerge as not exactly mendacious but definitely tendentious: the life story of a military genius

by one who knows. In that sense, they establish a pattern all too familiar to historians—one Clausewitz presents a model for addressing.

_Napoleon’s 1796 Italian Campaign_ is an exercise in the appropriate use of limited sources. Clausewitz is doing detailed operational analysis from what would be considered by contemporary standards a significantly restricted database. In particular, he had no access to Austrian archival material. But war is a dialectical process, not an experience conducted in a vacuum. Explaining the Austrian perspective is vital for understanding Napoleon’s decisions and behaviors. Clausewitz’s painstaking care in reconstructing events and motives, the attention he gives to distinguishing reasoned inference from specific documentation, is a model for any military historian constrained, as is often the case, by the destruction of source material, as occurred in Germany during World War II, or its inaccessibility for political reasons, as is still the case with the archives and libraries of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

The production of this work is outstanding. “To translate is to betray” may be a familiar metaphor, but in this case, it is completely inapplicable. The editors are faithful to the sense of the manuscript as well as the text—not always easily achieved in Clausewitz’s work. Their reference apparatus matches the body of the work in quality. The content footnotes are extremely valuable in developing the kinds of casual references that would have been familiar to soldiers a century ago but might be obscure to even knowledgeable contemporary readers. They reflect a solid, comprehensive command of the operational, institutional, and political aspects of an often convoluted operation. The extensive reference quotations from Jean Colin’s nineteenth-century translation are a welcome bonus, providing an alternative perspective from an author and a source now unfortunately obscure.

Academic presses and academic faculties can contribute significantly to the historical profession and the historian’s craft, even in this electronic age, by supporting what might be described as “reference texts.” These works are valuable in themselves and in their ramifications to scholars—and often general readers as well—but difficult to access and often swingeingly expensive. This volume qualifies as a reference text for its own qualities and because the campaign itself has been significantly and oddly neglected. To all involved, a heartfelt “well done!”
Preface

The writings of Carl von Clausewitz are among the most important works on war ever written. Much of the focus has understandably been on his great theoretical work *On War*, which has been translated and reprinted across the world. That work, however, formed only the first three of the ten volumes of his published writings. This is significant because despite the importance of *On War*, it can be difficult to understand and decipher. This is where his historical writing and analysis play an exceptionally important role. He made it clear that his foundational writing helped him think through and more clearly form his theoretical understanding of war and that the process of so doing was difficult.\(^1\) Given that, our neglect of his historical analysis when attempting to understand *On War* impedes our understanding of his main theoretical writing. This is criminally negligent (as Clausewitz might have put it), since Clausewitz spent a great deal of time analyzing the conflicts he fought in and creating, in the process, the theoretical underpinnings of *On War*. Thus, by reading and analyzing his histories of the series of wars from 1789 to 1815, the reader can more fully understand *On War* itself.

What Clausewitz tells us about his historical writing is important, and he addresses this in several of his notes. In *To an Unpublished Manuscript on the Theory of War* (Howard and Paret list this as being written between 1816 and 1818) Clausewitz criticizes past military writers for their lack of effective analysis of the evidence—that is, surely, the history.\(^2\) He goes further in *On the Genesis of His Early Manuscript on the Theory of War*, where he states:

The manner in which Montesquieu dealt with his subject is vaguely in my mind.\(^3\) I thought that such concise, aphoristic chapters, which at the outset


\(^3\) The structure of *On War* resembles that of Montesquieu’s *De l’Esprit des Loix*. That is, the work is divided into multiple smaller books, with each book consisting of multiple chapters, all punctuated with analysis and historical examples.
I simply wanted to call kernels, would attract the intelligent reader by what they suggested as much as by what they expressed; in other words, I had an intelligent reader in mind, who was already familiar with the subject…. From the studies I wrote on various topics in order to gain a clear and complete understanding of them, I managed for a time to lift only the most important conclusions and thus concentrate their essence in smaller compass. But eventually my tendency completely ran away with me; I elaborated as much as I could, and of course now had in mind a reader who was not yet acquainted with the subject.4

In other words, his histories and other writings were fundamental to the development of his understanding of war, and it seems reasonable to assume that this would be the case for a reader unfamiliar with the topic too. In his Note of 10 July 1827 (and an unfinished note possibly from 1830),5 Clausewitz again drives home the point about the historical study underpinning his work: “If critics would go to the trouble of thinking about the subject for years on end and testing each conclusion against the actual history of war, as I have done, they would undoubtedly be more careful of what they said.”6 With this criticism ringing in our ears, perhaps it is time to introduce Clausewitz’s histories to a broader audience so that they too might benefit from his historical analysis and the testing of his theoretical models against the campaigns themselves. Indeed, that was our primary motivation for translating this work.

With this, it is important to turn to the text we chose to use. We selected the original version of the text published in 1833: Carl von Clausewitz, Der Feldzug von 1796 in Italien (Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler, 1833). We made this choice because it reduced the chance of encountering the changes and errors sometimes found in subsequent publications. It is also the version of the work sanctioned by Clausewitz’s widow, Marie von Clausewitz. Although she did not edit the work herself, she did rely on a trusted family friend, Major Franz August O’Etzel,7 who was familiar with Clausewitz’s writings, to compile the fourth of the ten volumes planned for publication—the first three volumes being On War itself. Indeed, because of the publication schedule, the campaign history translated in this book appeared before volume 3 (books 7 and

4. Clausewitz, On War, 63. Howard and Paret date this note between 1816 and 1818.
5. Howard and Paret believe this note to be from 1830. Ibid., 70.
7. See Marie von Clausewitz’s preface, ibid., 65–67.
Major O’Etzel stringently denied editing the text, so if we take him at his word—and we have no reason not to—the text is largely as Clausewitz left it. Thus it is ideal for our purpose of using it as a tool better to understand On War.

In the translators’ note we describe how we approached the translation, and we followed much the same ethos when it came to editors’ commentary and analysis. Our use of modern terms such as “combat power” is intended to make the text more accessible rather than to replicate Clausewitz’s words exactly. We have provided cross-references to On War, as well as explanations of what Clausewitz means and how his theoretical ideas relate to the campaign history that is the focus of this work. As such, we hope to make On War itself more understandable and usable for students and scholars alike.

In addition to translating Clausewitz’s campaign history into English, for the sake of completeness we have included the explanatory notes from Captain J. Colin’s translation of the same campaign history. Captain Colin wrote extensively for the Historical Section of the French General Staff and translated Clausewitz’s campaign history into French. Colin is often critical of Clausewitz, and not always fairly, as he seems to be intent on defending Napoleon against even reasonable criticism. Thus it behooves the reader to keep an open mind when reading Colin’s comments, as well as closely examining what Clausewitz actually wrote. That being said, we believe that Colin’s commentary aids in understanding Clausewitz’s history, in that it provokes the reader to reflect critically on Clausewitz’s own critical remarks. Furthermore, many of Colin’s notes are valuable because they provide historical details that either correct errors on Clausewitz’s part or add information that enables a more complete account of a given action.

Our commentary is not limited to Clausewitz’s theory. We also tried to make the campaign narrative clearer and, where possible, to fill in gaps in our knowledge of the history of the campaign. We referred to other published campaign histories to ensure that the narrative is as accurate as possible, and


we used and referenced Napoleon’s memoirs and his correspondence to shed light on his thinking where Clausewitz did not do so or where he provides no clear reference. All this was done to enable the reader to better understand what Clausewitz was saying, both here and in *On War*. Ultimately, we hope to further discussion of this important historical work and provide a tool that allows more people to access his writing and understand his ideas.
Acknowledgments

It is an honor for us to recognize the assistance we received in the completion of this book. We would like to thank Professor Hew Strachan of the School of International Relations at the University of St. Andrews, who patiently answered questions and provided guidance for our work. Lieutenant Colonel Anders Palmgren of the Swedish army generously shared his research and writing on Clausewitz, which was particularly helpful with regard to some of the key terminology. Dr. Jan Willem Honig of King’s College, London, kindly assisted, on short notice, in answering a couple of important questions about the chronology and purpose of Clausewitz’s publications. In addition, Harmut Steffin gave greatly of his time and knowledge to help us with particularly tricky German idioms, and Dr. Mark Hull of the US Army Command and General Staff College was kind enough to read the first few chapters and offer suggestions as to language. Dr. Dennis Showalter of Colorado College provided much appreciated encouragement for this project, and Dr. Mark Gerges of the US Army Command and General Staff College provided some extremely helpful suggestions for edits and source material. Finally, Drs. Anand Toprani and Michael Dennis, both of the US Naval War College, contributed much needed intellectual rigor when thinking through and interpreting Clausewitz’s ideas.

In spite of their help, it is likely we missed something. Thus, any flaws contained herein are our own.
Translators’ Note

Any translation presents challenges, the most obvious being the tension between adhering to the literal meaning of the author’s original words and capturing the spirit of what he is trying to convey. A direct word-for-word translation inevitably sounds cumbersome and clunky, especially if the same sentence structure is retained. Some degree of rephrasing is always necessary, as well as reorganizing sentences and even whole paragraphs to make the work read more fluently. The problem is that the freer the translation, the greater the risk that some important nuance or emphasis may be lost. We have attempted to strike a balance and hope that in doing so, we have made the work easy to read while still allowing Clausewitz to make his points as he intended to make them and to speak in his own distinctive voice.

In fact, Clausewitz speaks to us with three different voices. The first is for the bald description of events in chronological order: “A and B did X and Y. C moved to Z. On the nth, W happened.” Clausewitz’s language here is clear and simple. His sentences are brief. His descriptions are unornamented. That is not to say that this voice is dull. On the contrary, his narration marches briskly and gives us a clear picture of each battle. Furthermore, his selective use of the historic present tense makes certain passages especially vivid. In German as in English, the historic present serves to lend a sense of drama and urgency to descriptions of past events. The effect of this in section 9, the battle of Montenotte, when Bonaparte first goes on the offensive, is tremendously powerful. It strikingly conveys the energy and vigor of the youthful Bonaparte bursting onto the scene and emphasizes the contrast between him and his ponderous, elderly Austrian opponent.

Clausewitz’s second voice is for expounding on strategic theory and its implications. Here, his prose is as verbose and florid as his first voice is terse and clipped, and he allows himself lengthy and laborious philosophical discursions. The German language is notorious for its long sentences with multiple nested clauses—the so-called Bandwurmsatz, or tapeworm sentence. Clausewitz seems especially fond of the humble tapeworm (though we often felt obliged to cut the creature up). This, together with a penchant for not using a simple word or phrase when a more complicated one will do, results in what our good friend Hartmut “Hardy” Steffin exasperatedly dubbed “Clausewitzi-
Clausewitz is not averse to a rather English usage of the understated double negative that means "very." If at times the translation seems not considerably long-winded, it is not necessarily our fault nor that of the German language; it is simply Clausewitz in pontificatory mode.

But it is worth putting up with Clausewitz’s pontifications for the delight that is his third voice. This is when he wields his quill like a scalpel to dissect the actions of the French and Austrian commanders, viewing them through the prism of his strategic analysis and flaying them for their manifold failings. He frequently claims to be baffled by their decisions, and his evaluation is littered with phrases such as “it is incomprehensible,” “there seems to be no good reason why,” or “it makes no sense.” His bafflement often provokes him to lapse from philosophical or scientific language into idiom and vernacular: generals are likened to “feeble-minded beetles,” their plans are “egomaniacal,” they are “clueless.” The remorseless logic he deploys to crush the beetles is a pleasure to read, as he shows step by unarguable step exactly why they were wrong and what they should have done instead.

Identifying geographic locations was not always straightforward. He sometimes gives German names that are long obsolete, now that these places are in Italy or Slovenia. This would have been less of a problem if his spellings were not so idiosyncratic, and occasionally a misspelled Italian name directs us to a different part of the country entirely. Near-contemporary maps from the Austrian Second Military Survey of 1806–1869 were helpful and can be found online.¹

The names of the commanders presented similar challenges. In section 16 a chap named “Gugeur” crops up. Later on, we meet a brigadier named “Guyeur.” Could these two be one and the same? And if so, could he in turn be related to the French general Jean Joseph Guieu, also known as Guyeux? Then there is the Croat general in Austrian service whom Clausewitz identifies as Wukassowitsch but who, in his native Croatian, would be Vukasović and appears in other histories variously as Vukassovich, Wukassovich, Vukassevich, or Vukaszovich.

The convention we used for the names of both places and individuals is as follows: When they first appear, we give Clausewitz’s spelling, followed by the modern name in brackets. Thereafter, we use the modern name. For places

that have different names in different languages, we give both or all—for example, Botzen (Bozen/Bolzano)—and then use one of those names consistently thereafter.

When it comes to distances, Clausewitz uses miles, German miles, toises, lieues, and leagues. Given the inherent problems with this and the lack of standardization at the time, we have chosen to translate German miles at the rate of 4.5 to 1 modern standard mile; leagues and lieues at 3.5 to 1; and toises into miles at the rate of 1 toise equals 1.94 miles.

This translation owes a great deal to the linguistic talents of Hardy Steffin. As a native German speaker with an excellent command of English and an interest in translation and wordplay, Hardy was consulted whenever we encountered an obscure or archaic idiom or a particularly tangled passage of Clausewitzification. His generous help was invaluable in eliminating many misunderstandings and the occasional crass error and in tracking down or teasing out the meanings of phrases we could not find in the dictionary. Still, there were some sentences that even Hardy struggled to make sense of. This is perhaps because Clausewitz’s writings are often technical and abrupt, as readers of On War can attest, and the original work was published after his death. Some of the denser Clausewitzifications and ambiguities are probably due to the fact that Clausewitz never finished editing his work. A number of obvious mistakes he made (such as referring to the wrong bank of a river) tend to confirm this.

No doubt this work still contains some errors or interpretations that some will find problematic. We request the reader’s indulgence, as we were not privy to Clausewitz’s thoughts, and the work of translation is as much art as science. If any reader discovers an error, we would welcome being apprised of the correction.

Any such imperfections notwithstanding, we trust that we have done Clausewitz justice and have prepared a translation that is as faithful and authentic as possible. We hope you enjoy reading this work as much as we enjoyed translating it.
A Note on Wargaming

Clausewitz’s theoretical writings are just one symptom of the broader phenomenon of the increasingly systematic approach to war adopted by the Prussian military in the nineteenth century. Another aspect of this phenomenon was the development of wargaming as a tool for professional military education.¹

Since then, wargaming has been widely used by militaries around the world. At the time of this writing, there is renewed professional interest in wargaming in the United States in particular,² a movement in which we are directly involved. Wargaming gives participants the opportunity to practice rapid decision making in conditions of uncertainty, under time pressure, and in a competitive environment, which can offer profound insights and teach enduring lessons. It is “learning by doing,” and it can be tremendously powerful.

As far as the present work is concerned, we encourage readers to explore wargaming as a method to gain a deeper appreciation of how and why the campaigns and battles described and analyzed by Clausewitz took the course they did. For an understanding of the campaign as a whole, one of us (Nick Murray) has developed a game for his students, which is also used by the US Army and US Marine Corps for training and education. For the grand tactical level, many commercial games are available; we favor Bloody Big Battles! (BBB), which Nick has also used in class. Scenarios for the major battles of the 1796 campaign are available for free via the BBB Yahoo group at https://uk.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/BBB_wargames/info.

1. The Context of the Campaign

The great events of the Italian campaign of 1796 demand that we understand the true shape of this campaign as a whole, and that we examine the causes of the momentous decisions reached during it; yet the urgency of this demand is matched only by the inadequacy of the history written about it, and by the grimness of the task of trying to give even a very general overview of it.

In the second edition of his history of the revolutionary wars, Jomini has presented this campaign as well as the poverty of his sources allowed; but his account is poor, sketchy, obscure, contradictory, in short everything that a coherent presentation of events in their relation to one another should not be. Still, he does at least provide the essential numbers and the major movements from the French side. However, he offers little about Austrian positions, intentions, or movements—all of which can easily be discovered from Austrian military journals—in short, Jomini’s account is so ignorant and confused about the main events that it appears to be a mere collection of fragments.

1. Lieutenant-Général Jomini, *Histoire Critique et Militaire des Guerres de la Révolution*, 15 vols. (Paris: Chez Anselin et Pochard, 1819–1824). Antoine-Henri Jomini was a Swiss who served in the French and Russian armies during the Napoleonic Wars. He was a prominent writer on military affairs and is perhaps best known for his *Précis de l’Art de la Guerre*. His works, including history and theory, have often been compared with Clausewitz’s, and there was certainly a rivalry of sorts between the two while Clausewitz was still alive.


3. Clausewitz’s criticism of Jomini’s account of the 1796 campaign, and of the latter’s defense of Archduke Charles regarding the 1799–1800 campaigns, irritated Jomini for the rest of his life. However, this was not the only source of friction between them. See Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 71.
The borders of the many minor German states were a complex patchwork. The largest three were Bavaria, Saxony, and Hannover. Their borders are omitted for clarity.
Map 1.2: Disposition of Main Armies in March 1796

- Archduke Charles's Austrian Army: ca. 94,000
- Wurmser's Austrian Army: 83,000
- Moreau's Army of the Rhine-Moselle: 79,000
- Jourdan's Army of the Sambre-Meuse: 78,000
- Kellerman's Army of the Alps: 18,000
- Bonaparte's Army of Italy: 58,000
- Colli: 25,000
- Beaulieu: 30,000
- Austrian Army of Observation: 80,000
- French Army: 40,000

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Napoleon’s *Memoirs,* which should give us a ready source of great information about the whole campaign, deceive all our hopes in this respect. The events of earlier times pass by the prisoner of St. Helena like a vision in a dream, and the last thing one can hope to find in a dream is precision. This complete lack of interest in the truth also means his historical recollections are of no value as far as numbers are concerned. Even the motives and reflections that constitute the real content of these *Memoirs* are infected and corrupted by this spirit of deliberate untruth. To grasp how little Bonaparte knew of actual tactical matters in this campaign, one has only to look at the reports contained in this volume that were sent to him by individual generals in reply

4. It is not clear to which edition of Napoleon’s *Memoirs* Clausewitz is referring. However, in section 13 of chapter 2, Clausewitz provides a reference that matches the edition we have chosen to use here: Général Montholon, ed., *Mémoires pour servir à l’Histoire de France sous Napoléon,* 8 vols. (Paris: F. Didot, Père et Fils; Bossange, Frères, 1823–1825). Elsewhere, the citations do not consistently match up. It is worth noting that Montholon was a somewhat shady character (there were a number of incidents involving false claims about military service, corruption, and the like); thus, Napoleon’s *Mémoires* need to be treated with extra caution, both for the reasons Clausewitz provides and because Montholon was described as a “poltroon and a liar” by Barry O’Meara, Napoleon’s medical attendant (he had served in the British Royal Navy as a surgeon) on St. Helena. See William Forsyth, *History of the Captivity of Napoleon at St. Helena; from the Letters and Journals of the Late Lieut.-Gen. Sir Hudson Lowe,* 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1853), 1:76–77, 184, 186.

5. Colin, 2, notes: “Bonaparte’s reports to the Directory have been published in various places, notably in the *Campagne du général Buonaparte en Italie pendant les années IV et V, par un officier général,* which Clausewitz had; they are only unclear concerning the actions at Lonato, which could have been clarified in part by certain sections of the *Correspondance inédite,* and for the rest from the Austrian accounts. The *Mémoires de Napoléon* were only inaccurate as far as numbers of men were concerned, for which those Jomini supplies are close enough. If Clausewitz had taken the trouble to do so, he could have reconstructed this campaign quite adequately, and could have avoided some of the factual errors he commits.” Colin’s criticism of Clausewitz for these reasons is somewhat harsh, given the fact that Napoleon’s *Memoirs* are not entirely reliable. Colin is referring to *Correspondance inédite, officielle et confidentielle, de Napoléon Bonaparte avec les cours étrangères, les princes, les ministres et les généraux français et étrangers en Italie, en Allemagne et en Égypte,* 14 vols. (Paris: C. L. F. Panckouke, 1819–1820).
to his questions; the first question is to General Ménard, asking of him, under whose orders he served at Montenotte, and so it goes on.

In the circumstances, in the following overview of this notable campaign, very often all that is possible is to talk in more general terms rather than with the great detail it demands, and to guess at the true historical motivations.

1 FRENCH STRENGTHS AND DISPOSITIONS

The events of the 1795 campaign had left the French in possession of the Genoese Riviera, as well as of the crests of the Apennines [Ligurian Alps] that shape it.

At the end of March, the strengths and dispositions of the French forces in the field were:

6. Montholon, Mémoires pour servir à l’Histoire de France sous Napoléon, 4:372. This is General Philippe Ménard, who served as a brigade commander under (later) Marshal André Masséna (who went on to become one of Napoleon’s best generals) at the battle of Montenotte in 1796. One would expect Napoleon to know this; hence Clausewitz’s criticism. However, Napoleon had just taken over command of the French army in Italy, which was in a poorly organized state, and it is understandable that he might not know who was doing what, and at what time. Thus Clausewitz’s comments are unduly harsh.

7. Colin, 2, notes: “These questions were not asked by Napoleon, but by Montholon himself, undoubtedly after his return from St. Helena. Their tone alone indicates that they do not come from a superior. How could Clausewitz have made this mistake?” Even if this is a mistake on Clausewitz’s part, his position on the matter is reasonable, given the times, distances, and means of communications involved, as well as the other problems mentioned in note 6 above.

8. Clausewitz notes that there is another volume on this conflict, but he dismisses its value: “The most recent history of this campaign to appear, that by Major von Decker, is even more useless than all the others and deserves no serious mention.” This is almost certainly Karl von Decker, Der Feldzug in Italien in den Jahren 1796 und 1797 (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler, 1825). Decker was a prolific writer on a variety of military topics, from the technical to the historic. Clausewitz’s comments are interesting, as Peter Paret points out that Clausewitz had previously respected Decker’s work. Paret, Clausewitz and the State, 314.

9. It is important to go through the rather arcane recitation of armies, places, strengths, and so forth to better understand the analysis Clausewitz provides.
6  Napoleon’s 1796 Italian Campaign

A. Army of Italy

This comprised these divisions:10

La Harpe 8,000 men
Masséna 9,000
Augereau 8,000
Sérurier 7,000
Macquard 3,700
Garnier 3,200
Cavalry 4,000

In total, 43,000 men with no more than 60 cannon.11

At the beginning of April the first three divisions were on the Riviera from Savona to Loano. La Harpe had pushed forward a brigade under General Cer-

10. It is worth noting the ages of the French commanders at the beginning of the campaign in 1796: Napoleon was 26; La Harpe, 41; Andre Masséna, 37; Augereau, 38; Sérurier, 53; Macquard, 57; and Garnier, 39. Division general Amédée La Harpe was accidentally killed by his own men in May 1796; Charles Pierre François Augereau went on to become a marshal of France, as did Jean-Mathieu-Philibert Sérurier; François Macquard and Pierre Philippe Garnier both went on to division command. There are two main sources for biographical data. For the Austrians, see Dr. Constant von Wurzbach, Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich, 60 vols. (Vienna: Universitäts Buchruderei von L. E. Zamarski, 1856–1891), accessed 5 September 2017, http://www .literature.at/mdsearch.alo?orderby=author&sortorder=a&quicksearch=true&allfields=Biographisches+Lexikon+des+Kaisertums+Österreich. For the French, see Georges Six, Dictionnaire Biographique des Generaux & Amiraux de la Revolution et de L’Empire (1792–1814), 2 vols. (Paris: Libraire Historique et Nobiliaire, 1934), accessed 5 September 2017, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k33369055/f11.image.

11. Colin, 3–4, notes: “On 10 April, the Army of Italy comprised: Advance guard under Masséna (divisions Laharpe and Meynier) 18,000 men; Division Augereau (less brigade Rusca, detached to division Sérurier) 7,300; Division Sérurier (including brigade Rusca) 12,000; 1st cavalry division (Loano) 3,000; Artillery, etc. 1,700; Division Macquard 3,700; Division Garnier 3,100; 2nd cavalry division (Oneille) 1,800. Total field army: 50,600. Coastal divisions 10,400. Grand total: 61,000 men.” Colin’s numbers are too high, as are Clausewitz’s. Frederick Schneid gives the strength as 30,266, based on his research in the French archives. See Frederick C. Schneid, “The Campaign against Piedmont-Sardinia, April 1796,” in Napoleon and the Operational Art of War Essays in Honor of Donald D. Horward, ed. Michael V. Leggiere (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2016), 105 (n49).
vonî¹² as far as Voltri, where its threatening proximity would support the Di-
rectory’s¹³ current request to the government of Genoa for supplies.¹⁴ This
brigade was therefore not part of the main French positions. Apart from this,
these three divisions had occupied the crests of the Apennine mountains be-
tween the sources of the Bormida¹⁵ with small outposts,¹⁶ entrenched in places.
One discovers this only through the course of events, so we remain ignorant
of the nature of these outposts, their supports, etc., and therefore also of the
significance that these mountain defensive positions might have had.¹⁷

Sérurier’s division was by the sources of the Tanaro, i.e., in the upper end
of its valley.

¹². This is Jean-Baptise Cervoni, who went on to command a division. He was 30
at the beginning of the campaign.
¹³. The French government’s ruling body.
¹⁴. Genoa was officially neutral but favored the allies, especially while the Royal
Navy maintained a presence in the city. The French routinely requested supplies, cash,
and other contributions (such as artwork) from states they could pressure.
¹⁵. The Bormida River has two main sources in the Apennine mountains. They lie
to the northwest of the coastal road.
¹⁶. It is reasonable to assume that these outposts were in place to warn against any
Piedmontese or Austrian movement to cut off the French from their line of supply
along the coast from Savona to Loano. Even small posts in the mountains could have
delayed even a serious move to cut off the French lines of communications along the
coast. Given the Royal Navy’s control of the sea off the French coast, it was vital to
protect French land communications to Italy.
¹⁷. Colin, 4, notes: “It is hard to understand this remark of Clausewitz’s when
we know that he had in his hands the Correspondance inédite de Napoléon Bonaparte,
which includes 12 letters from Masséna, 2 from Marmont, and 9 from Rusca and Sérû-
rier relating to the outposts. In particular, Masséna’s letter of 30 March (page 26) enu-
merates the positions held by his two divisions, and his other letters (pages 23, 26, 30,
31, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 50, 51) show how he was constantly busy with reconnaissances
and improvements, as well as the changes made each day in response to enemy move-
ments. Note that Bonaparte had not organised an outpost line in the true sense of the
word: each of the posts held in the mountains (Stella, Monte-Legino, etc.) was held by
several battalions (1,500 to 4,000 men), and there was only a third of the advance guard
in the second line from Savona to Loano: Augereau had 7,000 men on the coast, but
Rusca and Sérurier had their 12,000 men in the first line. The army was deployed, not
concentrated behind an outpost line. Its front was 50 miles.” See also Correspondance
inédite de Napoléon Bonaparte, 1:23–51. In fairness, Colin’s points are correct, in that
a more detailed description of the outposts and their purpose is given in the letters
identified by him. See in particular Marmont’s letter of 30 March 1796, ibid., 23–25.
The cavalry were encamped on the Riviera in rear of the infantry.

Both Macquard’s and Garnier’s divisions were in the valleys running from the Col de Tende and the Col de Cerise; they were considered a detached corps, maintaining communications between the Army of Italy and the Army of the Alps.

The Army of the Alps under Kellermann was some 20,000 strong and was holding the approaches to the Dauphiné and Savona.

Apart from these, the French had two reserve divisions, 20,000 strong, in the county of Nice and Provence. They served as depots and as garrisons for the coastal cities threatened by the English, as well as maintaining internal security.

Bonaparte was put in charge of the Army of Italy, while Kellermann and the reserve divisions operated independently of him.

The French army suffered from serious shortages of weapons and equipment. In the hands of a highly enterprising 28-year-old general, however, this force was sufficient for the vigorous offensive with which the campaign began.

2 THE ALLIES

The Austrian main army under Beaulieu’s personal command: 32,000 men

18. Marshal François Kellermann led his army guarding the mountain passes during the campaign in Italy. Kellermann’s forces were screened by the Duke of Aosta, who had between 10,000 and 20,000 men on the frontier. It is not exactly clear what these forces consisted of, but it seems reasonable to suggest that they consisted of garrison troops, militia, and possibly some regulars. Elijah Adlow describes the size and dispositions of the Piedmontese army but provides no references. Elijah Adlow, *Napoleon in Italy 1796–1797* (Boston: William J. Rochefort, 1948), 16.

19. Colin, 5, notes: “The coastal divisions, of which there were not two but three, had been reduced to 10,400 men by Bonaparte, including one demi-brigade (the 16th) en route to join the field army. These divisions were part of the Army of Italy and did not constitute an independent army like that in the Alps. The movement of troops from the rear to the front carried out between 4 and 10 April, under cover of confusion and by means of discreet operations, is one of the most remarkable aspects of the maneuver.”

20. Clausewitz was incorrect about Napoleon’s age. He was 26 at the time, having been born on 15 August 1769.

21. General Johann Beaulieu was in his 70s when he faced Napoleon in Italy. He was replaced after a string of failures in the spring of 1796.
In addition, there were Neapolitan cavalry: 1,500 men.
The Austrian auxiliary\textsuperscript{22} corps\textsuperscript{23} under General Colli:\textsuperscript{24} 5,000 men.
Sardinian [Piedmont] troops likewise under Colli: 20,000 men.
In total under Beaulieu’s overall command: 57,000 men with 148 guns.

The Austrian main army was divided into right and left wings.
The right wing under Argenteau\textsuperscript{25} comprised these brigades:

- Liptay: 4 battalions
- Ruccavino: 4 battalions
- Pittoni: 7 battalions
- Sullich: 5 battalions and 2 squadrons
- Total: 20 battalions, 2 squadrons

The left wing under Sebottendorf comprised these brigades:

- Kerpen: 5 battalions
- Nicoletti: 6 battalions
- Rosselmino: 4 battalions
- Schubirts: 18 squadrons
- Neapolitans: 15 squadrons
- Total: 15 battalions, 33 squadrons\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{22} This Hilfskorps comprised Austrian troops operating under Sardinian command.

\textsuperscript{23} It should be noted that although these units are referred to as corps, the organizational structure is different from that of the organizations the French and later the Austrians created between 1803 and 1809. Here, it simply refers to a body of soldiers rather than a balanced combined-arms force.

\textsuperscript{24} General Michelangelo Colli-Marchi was the commander in chief of the Sardinian (Piedmont) army. Like many of the senior leaders on the Austrian side, he was in his 50s (or older) in 1796 and had a long record of service.

\textsuperscript{25} Generals Eugène-Guillaume Argenteau and Karl Philipp Sebottendorf were also in their 50s at the start of the 1796 campaign.

\textsuperscript{26} The ages of the Austrian commanders at the beginning of the campaign were as follows: Anton Liptay was 50; Ruccavino is almost certainly Mathias Rukavina von Boynograd, who was 59; Philipp Freiherr Pittoni von Dannenfeld was in his 70s; Wilhelm Lothar Maria Freiherr von Kerpen was 54; Gerhard Ritter von Rosselmino [Rosselmini] was in his 50s; and Anton Freiherr von Schubirts [Schubirtz] was 47. As for Sullich and Nicoletti, we were unable to establish with certainty who they were.
Since the combined total of 35 battalions and 35 squadrons is given as coming to 27,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry, we may reckon a battalion to have 700–800 men, from which it follows that Argenteau had 15,000–16,000 men and Sebottendorf 16,000–17,000.

However, these were not their effective strengths, since at the end of March the Austrian army had about 7,000 sick, more than a fifth of the total, so we may reckon Colli’s corps at no more than 20,000, the right wing of the Austrian main army at no more than 12,000, the left wing at no more than 14,000, and the entire allied force 46,000 at most.

In attempting to say anything clear and detailed about the Austrian positions, in respect of the tactical level we soon find ourselves at a loss, and even more so concerning their intentions and character. We are thus obliged to be satisfied with only the most general outlines.

At first, General Colli had served as a kind of advance guard on the northern foothills of the Apennines, while the Austrian troops camped in their winter quarters along the Po River and up as far as the Adda River valley. This was still the situation at the end of March.

At the beginning of April, Argenteau, who was in the vicinity of Aqui [Ac-
The Context of the Campaign

qui Terme] with two brigades, was pushed further forward into the mountain valleys, and Colli moved to his right to link up.

The latter took up position at Ceva with the core of his force, i.e., eight battalions, posted Provera with four battalions at Millesimo to maintain communications with Argenteau, two battalions at Muriato, outposts toward Geressio, and a couple of flank guards, one at Mondovi, the other on the left at Podagera.

Argenteau adopted a line about 10 leagues [35 miles] from Ovada in the Orba valley to Cairo [Cairo Montenotte], which, taking into account detours, could be considered 50 miles across. But at first he had fewer than half his troops, and by the start of the campaign, still not many more than half, just eleven battalions and two squadrons, the rest apparently remaining on the Po. Consequently, on the ground he had just a kind of chain of outposts, since when 6,000 or 7,000 men are deployed in mountainous terrain on a 50-mile front that cuts across all the valleys and ridges, and all these valleys and ridges need to be occupied with something, one can imagine how everything has to be split up into individual battalions and companies. Argenteau himself was at the main position at Sassello with three battalions.

From the Austrian left wing, which was drawn up around Pozzolo Formigaro, four battalions were pushed forward to the Bocchetta Pass and two to Campo Freddo. A large part of this wing was still on the march from its winter quarters around Milan.

In order to get a clear picture of the situation of the allied armies in the first eight days of April in relation to the ground, one must think of them in the following way.

During the winter, the French remained masters of the crests of the Apennines, which, in this harsh season, they occupied only with weak outposts, but enough that they could consider it theirs; without this crestline, they could not have remained in the narrow strip of land along the coast. The allies,

28. The Germans did not standardize distances until 1872, after German unification. Prior to that, each region had its own weights and measures. A league was typically between 2 and 3.5 miles long (in standardized miles), and a Prussian mile was 4.7 miles. For purposes of this book, and given the lack of clarity, we treat a league as being 3.5 miles, and 1 mile in the original as 4.5 miles here. All distances have been converted to modern miles for the reader’s convenience, with some rounding where appropriate. For more on German historical measures, see “Projekt zur Erschliessung historisch wertvoller Altkartenbestände,” accessed 2 February 2017, http://ikar.sbb.spk-berlin.de/werkzeugkasten/sonderregeln/4_3.htm.
for their part, recognized the very constricted French position as a significant advantage for their forthcoming offensive and therefore believed they needed to remain on the northern slopes of the mountains, so as to prevent the French from expanding the area they occupied, thereby increasing their means of support and facilitating their breakout into the Piedmontese plain. Thus, while they occupied winter quarters on the Lombard plains, they left Colli’s corps in the mountains, with General Argenteau and half of his corps in support at Aqui. As spring approached, Beaulieu also pushed General Argenteau into the mountains to prepare for his forthcoming offensive and to serve as a reinforced outpost line to cover the rest of the army as it gathered around Aqui and Novi. Thus, one half of the allied army found itself in a very extended position right in front of the French, while the other half was still mustering several days’ march to the rear.

Beaulieu himself arrived in Alessandria on 27 March to take over command, from which it may be assumed that this is when the muster [of the allied forces] was completed.

In these conditions, which, as we can see, arose quite naturally, there would have been no reason for any major misfortune if a position further back had been chosen for the concentration of the main body, and if the forward units had been allowed to fall back on this position in the event of a serious enemy attack.

Beaulieu’s failure to prepare such a defensive position in case the enemy attacked him is, however, a serious error.

In fact, there was no mention of establishing an extended defensive position in the mountains. But this army, addicted to cordons, involuntarily crystallized in its provisional positions, with part of its force on every mountain and rise, to form a sort of cordon; as one can see, this tells its own story of how the importance of every topographical detail was grasped and taken into account by both the higher- and the lower-level general staff. In the absence of any other plan for the defense, everything seems to have been based on local defense and on the feeble and tardy assistance that each outpost could afford to its neighbor.

Both armies found themselves in this same situation, since, as we shall see, both sides intended to open the campaign with an offensive, and their opposing plans must be assessed in the light of this mutual position.

Because of the results of the previous year’s campaign, the French found themselves in a difficult strategic position that they could not maintain for
long. In a theater of operations 12 to 15 miles wide, hemmed in by mountains and the sea, with their backs to a coast harassed by the Royal Navy, with a single line of communications on their extreme left flank, they had no hope of holding out for an entire campaign. Any successful attack on their left wing could lead to dangerous disaster.

The allies’ situation had become dangerous through their own mistakes. Half the army in a 50- to 70-mile-long chain of outposts stretched right across the ridges and valleys of the Apennines, with very poor roads connecting them, could not be expected to successfully resist an energetic attack; rather, one could foresee the likely loss of many individual posts, adding up to entire battalions.

### 3 Comparison of the Two Armies and Their Leaders

While the French army lacked a thousand necessities, the Austrians were richly provided for, and given their numerous artillery and the wealthy theater of operations with its administrative system, one may readily conclude that they lacked no essentials, even if some reports speak of all manner of shortages of materiel that supposedly delayed the start of the campaign. But this abundance, which the French writers attribute to the allies to emphasize the contrast with their own army’s misery, should by no means be taken to have had an advantageous influence on the morale of the troops or the efficiency of the forces. On the allied side, at that time, it was still customary to keep their soldiers systemically starved of supplies in the manner peculiar to eighteenth-century armies. The abundance consisted of a thousand more or less dispensable items of baggage and provisions with which unimaginative force of habit encumbered the armies of the time but which had nothing to do with the soldiers’ welfare. While on duty on the high ridges and in the harsh valleys of the Apennines, the soldiers suffered much more from privation, exhaustion, and resentment, as eyewitness reports show, and this situation, to-

29. In November 1795 the French army had won a victory at Loano, which provided a foothold, albeit a vulnerable one, into the southern Ligurian Alps.

30. Based on his reading of Briefe aus Italien, ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Charakteristik der österreichischen Armee in Italien, in den Feldzügen von 1794, 95, 96 und 97, Clausewitz noted: “While a general judgement cannot be made on the basis of the claims of such jeremiads as this book, written from a fairly junior point of view,
Napoleon’s 1796 Italian Campaign

goinger with the unfortunate defeats of the previous campaign, induced a quite miserable mood among the Austrian soldiery. The Sardinians were probably no better, since in their case, all manner of subversive political factors came into play as well.\(^{31}\)

Thus, if one assesses the situation and the resulting morale and combat power\(^{32}\) of both armies with common sense, it is clear that more might be expected from a hungry, ragged, passionately excited mob greedy for the fleshpots of Italy—as one may characterize the French army—than from downtrodden, unthinking, unaware Austrian mercenaries with no interest in the past, present, or future. We say this not to express praise or blame, still less to impugn national character, but rather to seek the causes of events in the naked facts of the situation.\(^{33}\)

As far as the leaders are concerned, the contrast was just as bad. Bonaparte was 25 years old, Beaulieu 72.\(^{34}\) To the first, a great career had opened up in which with boldness and audacity there was everything to gain and nothing to lose; as for the latter, his career must soon come to a close. Bonaparte had a thorough classical education, and events of global importance had taken place before his very eyes; Beaulieu was the product of 60 years of unremarkable careers. Since they always over-value the individual case, they are nonetheless useful, since it is also necessary to look at the individual.” This work was published in 1798, without an author’s name; accessed 22 February 2017, https://books.google.com/books?id=5LpBAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&q=Briefe+aus+Italien:+Ein+Beitrag+zur+Geschichte&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjxjb-46fA8AhWq54MKHWWLCPYQ6AEIHZAA#v=onepage&q=Briefe%20aus%20Italien%3A%20Ein%20Beitrag%20zur%20Geschichte&f=false.

31. Since the beginning of the French Revolution, French calls for liberty, fraternity, and equality had been used to persuade some people disaffected by monarchical systems to side with France or to undermine their monarchs.

32. Clausewitz uses the word *Brauchbarkeit* (usefulness), but the modern term “combat power” makes more sense in this context.

33. Colin, 12, notes: “This observation seems unfair. The Austrian troops constantly demonstrated irreproachable courage and energy.” This comment misses the point, as Clausewitz does not question the courage or energy of the Austrian troops; he is getting at their motivation, or the lack thereof, which he weighs against that of the revolutionary French. His implication is that despite their poor training, more can be expected of the French because they are filled with revolutionary fervor. Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that Clausewitz focuses most of his ire on the Austrian generals.

34. As mentioned, Napoleon was 26 at the beginning of the campaign, and Beaulieu was 70. Although Clausewitz gets their ages wrong, his central point is still valid.
able, mind-numbing, dutiful box-ticking. 35 Bonaparte could regard the rulers of France as his equals, who had his sword to thank for their survival on 13 Vendemière [sic] (5 October 1795); 36 Beaulieu was the servant of an old imperial dynasty and the tool of a rigid and uncooperative court war council. Bonaparte knew the Apennines like the back of his hand, since during the 1794 campaign he had played a fairly important role there; for Beaulieu, the combination of mountains and the art of war was a completely new experience. All the same, Beaulieu was no ordinary man. He had fought in the Netherlands with distinction, thereby earning the honor of this command; nor did he lack energy, and he stood out as more than a mere career officer. But in such a comparison, that was far from sufficient. Indeed, from the very beginning, it was not enough to win Beaulieu the trust of his own army; on the contrary, his arrival seems to have awakened in the Austrian army a spirit of cabal and opposition. How very different—and this is the last contrast we have to offer—things were with Bonaparte. At his first parade he told his soldiers:

Soldiers, you are naked and starving; the government owes you much, and can give you nothing. The patience and courage you show among these rocks are admirable; but they will win you no glory, no light shines on you. I will lead you into the most fertile plains in the world. Rich provinces and great cities will be in your power; there you will find honor, glory, and riches. Soldiers of Italy! Do you lack courage or steadfastness? 37

Could such a speech to such soldiers possibly fail to have an effect? And that from the mouth of a talented, determined young man. How could he not awaken true enthusiasm and become the idol of his army?

Bonaparte never wrote nor spoke better words than these.

35. Although this criticism is harsh, it is not altogether unwarranted: Beaulieu had largely distinguished himself through his personal bravery and for commanding small forces.


4 THE ITALIAN STATES

Although Genoa was in the theater of operations, the city itself was still in a kind of state of neutrality, which kept its fortifications out of the contest. Although the governments of the other northern Italian states—Parma, Modena, Tuscany, Lucca, and Venice—favored the Austrians, they were afraid to join in the war and thought they could remain neutral, even though it was predictable that the French would not respect their neutrality.

Of the southern Italian states, the Papacy was still at peace with France, albeit there was considerable tension between them, but the king of Naples had a contingent of 1,500 cavalry with Beaulieu’s army.