



The Armies of the First French Republic, and the Rise of the Marshals of Napoleon I. Vol III

Colonel Ramsay Weston Phipps

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Once Napoleon had consolidated his grip on the reins of power of the new-born French Republic, he began to change the nature of the state from a nascent democracy of sorts into an Empire with all the trappings of dynastic royalty. The Senatus Consultum of 18th May 1804 gave the form to the Imperial Court; households of courtiers were established for the Emperor and Empress and the Imperial family, dignitaries of the Empire, ministers of the Empire were appointed; and having previously been abolished in 1793 the dignity of the Marshal of the Empire was recreated. Fourteen active and four honorary Marshals were handed their batons, eight more would be created during the years following; intended to be bulwarks of the regime. However these men were not plucked from obscurity they were men of genuine renown, and in most cases significant military talent, they had fought in numerous battles and campaigns during the tumultuous early days of the Republic. However apart from a handful of individual biographies and collections of anecdotes which mainly dealt with the years of glory under the Empire, few works in English had really investigated the formative careers of the Marshals under the banners of the Republic. In his epic five volume work, published posthumously between 1926-1936, Colonel Phipps looks into the early careers of the Marshals as they pursued La Gloire from their varied beginnings as sons of inn-keepers, coopers, officers of the Royal French Army; some of noble blood, some of the most common. The careers of men such as Masséna, Ney, Soult, Mortier, Murat and Davout are charted in detail, they are compared and contrasted with each other with expert judgement. The Author uses his extensive knowledge of the numerous French first-hand sources of the period along with published histories which have never been translated into English. The third volume concentrates on the lesser known armies, those that fought against Spain in the south of France and against insurrectionary elements of the French population that had not been reconciled to new Republic. This volume sheds light on the careers of the Marshals and their colleagues during the campaigns that were short on supply, invariably brutal and in the case of La Vendée, bitter civil war. The text is whole and complete, there are no missing or indistinct pages; the fold-out maps have been re-aligned to fit into the text spread across two pages.

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