

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

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Summary:

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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 Mass na, 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 fifth and concluding volume of the series takes the careers of the Marshalate up to the coup d' tat of Brumaire shortly after which Napoleon took charge as first amongst equals as "Premier Consul." However during the period 1797 to 1799, there was still much fighting between the French Republic and their many enemies. Napoleon left the Arm e d'Italie victorious in 1797 to embark on a campaign in Egypt, longing to fulfil his destiny as a conqueror, the campaign was not crowned with total success and his first check experienced before he returned to France without his army but with a coterie of officers. Back on the borders of France things were even worse, beset by Austrian and Russians, many of the future marshals would remember the bitter fighting in Northern Italy and the disastrous battle of Novi. Meanwhile Mass na, with Ney, Soult both prominent, led a brilliant and largely over-looked campaign in Switzerland, beating back a tide of Russians. In Holland Brune fought hard and well, and in Western Germany Jourdan played cat and mouse with Archduke Charles. A fantastic final volume in a much read and quoted series. 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, or in the case of the A3 maps, pages.

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