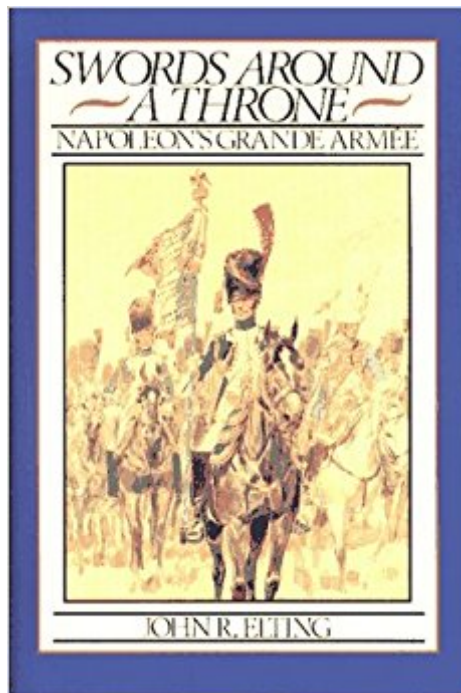




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# Swords Around A Throne: Napoleon's Grand Armee



## Synopsis

Military professional and historian John R. Elting paints an exciting, detailed picture of the magnificent human fighting force, Napoleon's Grande Armee. Colorfully details every facet of life in Napoleon's army including rations, pay, mud and disease, mobile hospitals, loot, camp followers, and more. Two 8-page inserts.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This authoritative and enthralling book describes and analyzes Napoleon's most powerful weapon-the Grande Armee, which at its peak numbered over a million soldiers, and without which his military genius would have accomplished little. Elting examines every facet of this incredibly complex human machine: its organization, command system, logistics, weapons, tactics, discipline, recreation, mobile hospitals, camp followers, and more --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Colonel John R. Elting has edited and written numerous books on military history, including *Amateurs, to Arms!: A Military History of the War of 1812* and *A Military History and Atlas of the Napoleonic Wars*. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

This is the most in depth, descriptive and informative books on Napoleon's Grand Army. Everything you can think of is covered in this book. The book is divided by chapter into different types of positions in the army, usually from the highest level (Napoleon, Marshal Berthier and the immediate staff) down to cooks and even washerwomen. The book does not cover any of the campaigns

fought by the Imperial army, but instead incorporates them into the writings. Different examples of how the army operated on different fronts is considered and described. In addition to Napoleon's men, his contingents, vassal states, allies, and even enemies are considered although on a smaller scale. A large section of the book is also devoted to matters such as logistics, tactics, strategy and looting. How Napoleon was able to move armies the size that he possessed across those great distances with the primitive technology that was available at the time is attempted to be answered by Elting. Overall the Grand Army is portrayed as a rough, tough, hard hitting army.

If I could recommend one book as the starting point to what has been called the 'abyss of Napoleonic history', this would be it. This is my favorite book on the subject. The author covers it all. From the army at the time of the revolution, what it ate, how it was supplied, how it was cared for... as well as (of course) how it fought. It's all there. Plus it has the added benefit of reading lively and is very immersive. Although it mainly covers the French experience during what was later called the "Napoleonic Era" the other nations get a chapter as well. All in all a very entertaining read.

*Swords Around A Throne* is undoubtedly the best book yet published on the organizational history of the Grande Armée. Written by a recognized authority on the subject, who taught at West Point for 11 years of a 40 year Army career, it gives the reader, in concise, authoritative, and witty prose, the story of Napoleon's Grande Armée from its inception to its destruction and after. Col Elting covers the Grande Armée from muzzle to buttplate. Every possible subject is covered, from its commanders, all the combat arms and supporting services, strategy, tactics, and logistics, to such seldom covered topics as marches, bivouacs, awards, horses, discipline, law and order, military intelligence, and the Imperial General Staff. Based on thirty years of research, most of it from primary sources, some not used before in English, it puts the end to many myths and misconceptions (such as the Waterloo myths about the Imperial Guard), and enlightens the reader as to what made up that terrible instrument of war, the Grande Armée. A companion volume to the author's *A Military History and Atlas of the Napoleonic Wars*, it also stands alone as a work of immense depth, accuracy, and profound insight. Background material is also provided in the early chapters on the Royal Army of the Ancien Regime and the armies of the French Revolution. Additionally, allies, foreign troops in French service, and the Grande Armée's enemies are also given separate chapters. The book is also highly anecdotal, being peppered with stories of personages great and not so great. Keen insight into the character of the soldiers talked about is thorough and uncanny. Generals, captains, and the man in the ranks are all quoted and talked

about throughout this engrossing study. As an added bonus, the final three chapters talk about the return, hasty departure, and final return of the hated Bourbons 'in the allies' baggage wagons', and what happened to the Grande Armée and its commanders after Napoleon's final exile. If the book has a weakness, it is that it leaves the reader with a hunger for more information. Another 300 pages would have been welcome. As it is, *Sword Around A Throne* is an immense achievement, seldom equalled and never surpassed. It is a must for anyone interested in the Napoleonic and Revolutionary Wars in general and the Grande Armée in particular. Epic in scope, painstakingly accurate, and romantic in its sweep and understanding of the times, it at times reads like a novel, and it is amazing to realize that these people lived, and performed the deeds told inside this the covers of this volume.

The best book I have read discussing the nuts and bolts of Napoleon's armies; food, clothing, organization, tactics, weapons and the characteristics of the several branches of his forces. Elting is a gifted and witty writer. Moreover, he grasps the psychology of the men and the spirit of the times and conveys it brilliantly to the lay reader. He has a great gift for the pithy epigram when summing up the personalities of the men and officers. If you were merely a novice reader before this volume, you won't be afterwards. Elting will make you eager to get deep into the period.

One of those books you can't put down, which, with its 769 pages, can become a problem. The narrative is extremely readable, often you feel like you are chatting with a veteran of Napoleon's wars. My only problem with the book was that almost every sentence implied deep author's knowledge of background events. When I finished the first thing I did was search for what I expected to be Elting's long list of books on Napoleonic topics. Ended up more than slightly disappointed. Still, one great book is better than none, and it gave me one of those experiences a reader treasures and remembers.

*Swords Around a Throne* is not your typical Napoleon book. Elting concentrates on topics which MAY rate a sentence or paragraph in other biographies. Elting concentrates on the different divisions of the Grand Armée including uniforms, in-depth looks at his marshals and the navy instead of regurgitating the different battles he fought. *Swords Around a Throne* is a good change of pace to the other biographies of Napoleon as it provides a different aspect to the Napoleonic Wars and his empire. Well worth the time to read.

This book could stand on its own as a work of literature. This is an exhaustive study of the minutiae of Napoleon's Grand Armee, and might easily have become a plodding reference work. The wit, irony, and, above all, the author's sheer love of his subject matter make "Swords" good reading, fascinating even to people with no knowledge of Napoleonic-era warfare. Wish there were works this good on warfare in other periods.

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