

## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Crowdy, Terry E. *Marengo: the Victory that Placed the Crown of France on Napoleon's Head*. Barnsley (UK): Pen & Sword, 2018. 318 pages. ISBN: 978147389205 £25 / \$43



Of all his military victories, Napoleon considered the battle of Marengo against the Austrian on 14 June 1800 as one of his greatest, second only to Austerlitz in 1805. It has been said he had lost the battle by 4 p.m. but by 6 p.m. won it and the war. With the victory, he silenced his critics and military rivals in France and within 54 months would go from co-leader of France to its emperor. In the past twenty years there have been five books in English on some aspect of the battle, including James Arnold's *Marengo and Hohenlinden*, Olivier Lapray's *The Battle of Marengo*, and four books on the battle by Dave Hollins. There were also Andrew's Uffindell's [Napoleon's Chicken Marengo: Creating the Myth of the Emperor's Favorite Dish](#) and Jill Hamilton's [Marengo: The Myth of Napoleon's Horse](#). So why buy a new book on a topic that appears to be well-covered? There are several reasons. The first is because in *Marengo*, Terry Crowdy provides a detailed look at all aspects of the campaign and its pivotal battle, from the political situation that was the reason for the campaign in the first place, to the strategic maneuvering that brought the two armies to the plains around Marengo, to over 100 pages on the battle itself!

When I started reading the book one of the first things that caught my interest was how both sides gathered intelligence on the other and how it influenced their battle plans. This in itself may not be that unusual, however Mr. Crowdy provides much information not just on how they did it but who did it for them. In many cases the operations were planned based on the information provided by one man, who was acting as a double agent for the Austrians, yet at the same time was providing key information to the French.

Another reason to buy it is the author's use of primary sources to tell their story. He does not just use French accounts, but also numerous Austrian ones. And the sources for both sides are from all levels, from privates to NCOs to junior officers, field grade officers, and the senior leadership! There are accounts by infantrymen, cavalry officers, Consular Guardsmen, company, regimental, and division commanders, as well as officers on the staff. These different viewpoints put the reader in the thick of the action and into the minds of those doing the fighting!

Another thing I always look for in any military book is the number of maps it contains. How many? Are they relevant? Are they appropriately placed? Are they easy to read? *Marengo* has 17 maps, 11 of which are tactical! They are all placed close to the narrative that they depict and they are easy to read. That being said I do have two criticisms. The first is that

although the maps show the movements and actions of the various forces, they are fairly simple and do not show much of the terrain. The second is the use of standard military map symbols to show each force. . . which is great in itself, however the cartographer sometimes uses the wrong force size on the symbol, which can cause confusion. For example on Map 15, page 210, he shows Kellermann's and Champeaux's brigades as companies. However these minor errors are vastly outweighed by the large number of maps.

Writing a comprehensive study of a battle is difficult to do. So much was going on, what does the author include and what gets left out because of page limits? Fortunately for the reader he does not exclude much. There are chapters on

- Napoleon's Crossing of the Alps
- The maneuvering and concentration of the two armies
- The morning attacks by the Austrians
- The attack on the town of Marengo
- The attack and sacrifice of the Consular Guard
- The retreat of the French
- The arrival and counter-attack of Desaix's Corps and Kellermann's Cavalry.

*Marengo's* final chapter is about the political impact on both sides. It also includes the text of the Treaty of the Convention of Alessandria, which gives northern Italy to the French and allows the Austrians to withdraw back to Austria. The book closes with a comprehensive order-of-battle for both armies.

In addition to the numerous maps, the book is illustrated with 18 black and white images, 17 colored contemporary uniform plates (many of which I have never seen before) and six color photos of the battlefield today.

*Marengo* is well written. Its exciting descriptions of the battle at all levels will appeal to those with just a passing interest in the topic, yet it has enough new information to hook the specialist. Highly recommended.

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: June 2019