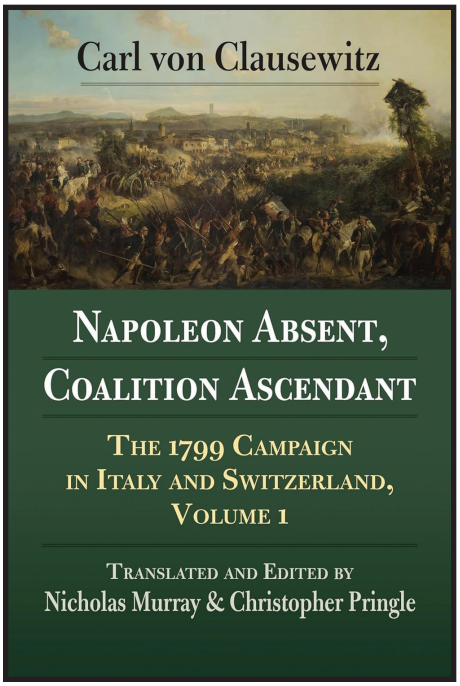

NAPOLEON ABSENT, COALITION ASCENDANT: THE 1799 CAMPAIGN IN ITALY AND SWITZERLAND, VOLUME 1

By Carl von Clausewitz
Translated and Edited
by Nicholas Murray
and Christopher Pringle

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Review by Tom Vance

This is a translation of volume one of the two-volume *The 1799 Campaign in Italy and Switzerland* by Prussian General Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831). It is more than just a translation, however. Once you begin reading, it becomes clear why it has its own title (aside from the obvious marketing advantages of Napoleon's name). During this campaign, General Bonaparte commanded the French expedition of 45,000 troops in Egypt (1798–1799). However, his shadow is present as France faces off against Austria and Russia of the Second Coalition (1799–1802). With 509 footnotes accompanying Clausewitz's original 39 notes, Murray and Pringle have created an engaging book within this translation.

Clausewitz's fame comes from his magnum opus *On War*, published posthumously by his wife Marie and longtime friend Maj. Franz August O'Etzel, but he also had a distinguished active-duty career.[1] Clausewitz received his commission at age 12 and his baptism of fire a year later during the war of the First Coalition (1791–1797) against revolutionary France. After graduating at the top of his class from the Prussian War College, he served in staff assignments during the Napoleonic Wars at Jena-Auerstedt (becoming a prisoner of war, 1806–1808); Borodino (1812), Leipzig (1813), and finally in the Waterloo campaign (1815), serving as a corps chief of staff. Clausewitz directed the War College and served as chief of staff to Prussia's commanding general. He died of cholera at age 51 while organizing army resources to control an outbreak in Germany.[2]

Clausewitz's text and Murray and Pringle's commentary and analysis are so seamless that it is easy to forget whose voice you are reading (especially as Clausewitz wrote with the editorial *we*). Nicholas Murray teaches strategy and policy at the U.S. Naval War College, whereas Christopher Pringle, formerly with the British Territorial Army, is an academic publishing executive. They are also the translators and editors of volume two of the series, *The Coalition Crumbles, Napoleon Returns: The 1799 Campaign in Italy and Switzerland* (2021) and *Napoleon's 1796 Italian Campaign* (2018), also published by the University Press of Kansas.

Murray and Pringle's motivation for translating Clausewitz is simple. They want to share Clausewitz's campaign histories with "a broader audience so that they too might benefit from his historical analysis and the testing of his theoretical models against the campaigns themselves" (2). They believe this would increase understanding of Clausewitz's *On War* (3). This work serves as a primer (or refresher) for *On War*, with our translator's footnotes cross-referencing Clausewitz's principles of war.[3] Murray and Pringle also compare nuances of the campaign accounts by two of Clausewitz's contemporaries: the formidable general Charles Louis, Archduke of Austria, and Clausewitz's rival as a military theorist, General Baron Antoine-Henri de Jomini.[4]

Bonaparte appears nineteen times in Clausewitz's text, and Murray and Pringle refer to the absent general in nine footnotes. Most references are to Bonaparte's successful 1796 Italian campaign—Clausewitz calls it "glorious" (394)—and Bonaparte's abilities as a commander.[5] In one instance, while describing the options of the commanding generals, Clausewitz wrote, "Bonaparte's method in 1796 was disregarded" (341), along with related phrases scattered throughout like "A Bonaparte might have . . ." or "If one side had had a Bonaparte in charge. . . ." Bonaparte's absence did indeed contribute to French reverses during the campaign, as did political instability in France.[6] There are several ironies to note: the Egyptian campaign was a trigger for the Second Coalition against France (14); the early French defeats eliminated the gains from Bonaparte's 1796 campaign and hastened Bonaparte's return from Egypt, creating the opportunity for his seizing control of the nation and then turning the tide of the war in France's favor—hence the title of volume two, *The Coalition Crumbles, Napoleon Returns*.

In his introduction, Clausewitz describes the campaigns in Italy and Switzerland as "among the most significant and richest in lessons of any campaigns in the history of warfare" (7). He classifies the four key leaders of the campaign as commanders of "great repute" (7): Aleksandr Suvorov and Archduke Charles leading the Allies; Jean Victor Marie Moreau and André Masséna for the French. Clausewitz's text, written in the present tense, is arranged into five chapters: (1) General Situation; Opening the Campaign in Germany; (2) Opening the Campaign in Italy; (3) Continuation of the Campaign in Switzerland; (4) Continuation of the Campaign in Italy; and (5) The Allies Take Mantua and Alessandria. The five chapters have fifty-six sections in total, each with subheads, which provides easier reading (especially as there is no chronology). He describes seven major battles and twenty-nine actions or encounters. The final battle is at Novi, where Russian general Suvorov defeated General Barthélemy-Catherine Joubert (who was killed in action). Of Suvorov, Clausewitz says, "Something out of the ordinary could always be expected" (25). We learn about the fog of war, the interference of government instructions to field commanders, local uprisings in Italy against French forces, and alliance issues between the Austrians and Russians.

Murray and Pringle include translators' and editors' notes, and a note on the utility of war-gaming in understanding Clausewitz (Murray conducts these at the Naval Academy and Pringle wrote a book on wargaming). Eleven maps, a bibliography, and an index complete the book. Their footnotes are conversational and include fifty-five mini-bios of Austrian, Russian, and French leaders, including many of Napoleon's future marshals. We learn that Clausewitz and Jomini "exhibited a severe enmity for each other's works" (29n45) and of Clausewitz's

"hatred of the French Republic" (66n91). General Suvorov was "an intellectual and dynamic soldier right up to his death in 1800, in contrast to many of his contemporaries from Russia and Austria, who seem to have been almost universally slow moving and slow witted" (15n13). They also point out the French advantage of having younger generals than the allies (75n109).

Although I do not have the credentials to criticize Clausewitz, his chapter on the general situation, filling one-third of the book, is a bit long. I smiled when he admitted that he wrote some of it "at the risk [of being] too vague to see the wood for the trees" (127). I hope Murray and Pringle will not mind my saying that their book requires studying, not just reading. However, the effort is worth it. Their commentary is easy to follow, and the cross-referencing creates an engaging and interactive experience (especially if you were to follow along with a copy of *On War*, which I did not). When you are finished, however, you feel like you have earned several professional military education credits.

Tom Vance is a retired Army Reserve lieutenant colonel with bachelor's and master's degrees in history from Western Michigan University, where he received his Army ROTC commission branched Adjutant General Corps. After ten years of active duty, he served as a part-time ROTC instructor at his alma mater and in public affairs assignments in Washington, D.C. His article "Napoleon's Son: Commissioning and Professional Development" was a ***Military Review*** Online Exclusive in December 2022.

NOTES

1. Clausewitz's works, published between 1832–1834, include three campaign histories (1796, 1799, and 1812) and his *On War*. Also see Vanya Eftimova Bellinger, *Marie von Clausewitz: The Woman Behind the Making of On War* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

2. Michael Howard, *Clausewitz: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 5–11.

3. Murray and Pringle use Michael Howard and Peter Paret's translation of *On War* (Princeton University Press, 1989).

4. Jomini (1779–1869) was a Swiss army officer and historian before joining Marshal Michel Ney's staff. In addition to being theorists, Jomini and Clausewitz have two things in common. Their wartime experience came from staff, not command, assignments, and each of them served in Russian uniform: Clausewitz during 1812–1813 and Jomini beginning with the armistice in 1813. Theodore Ayrault Dodge says Jomini "left the French army and took service with the Russians" (*Napoleon*, vol. 4, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1907, 113–14), whereas Albert Sidney Britt III calls it "desertion" (*The Wars of Napoleon*, West Point Military History Series, Garden City, NY: Square One Publishers, 2003, 132).

5. For accounts of the 1796 campaign by U.S. Army officers, see 1st Lt. Herbert H. Sargent, *Napoleon Bonaparte's First Campaign, With Comments* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1895) and Col. G. J. Fiebeger, *The Campaigns of Napoleon Bonaparte of 1796–1797* (West Point, NY: United States Military Academy Printing Office, 1911).

6. According to Murray and Pringle, France's "three most distinguished commanders" were absent. In addition to Bonaparte: General Jean-Charles Pichegru was in exile and General Jean Victor Moreau was in exile at the start of the campaign but was then reinstated (20).