

The Bayonets of the Republic

Motivation and Tactics in the Army
of Revolutionary France, 1791-94

John A. Lynn



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of Revolutionary France,
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*To Andrea Lynn,
who has had to wait
far too long for
this dedication*



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Acknowledgments

I hope the reader will understand if I take this opportunity to pay my bills in public. In a very real sense *Bayonets of the Republic* has been twenty years in the writing, since I first broached the subject when still an undergraduate at the University of Illinois. Over such a long period I have benefited from the advice, aid, and comfort of many individuals.

Let me express my debt to those who guided my studies and shaped my standards in historical work, Charles Nowell, Richard Schwab, Peter Paret, Andrew Lossky, and the late B. H. Liddell Hart. Among the mentors who have helped me so much I must single out Isser Woloch, now of Columbia University and once of UCLA. He has been both my strongest critic and staunchest supporter for fifteen years.

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And, lastly, thanks upon thanks to my wife Andrea and my sons Daniel and Nathanael, who have had to travel the ups and downs of the path that led to *The Bayonets of the Republic*.

Preface to the 1996 Edition

Picking up *The Bayonets of the Republic* again is a bit like returning home after a long absence. It is where I started but not where I have been for the last decade or more; since *Bayonets* appeared, my primary efforts have been devoted to the study of the French army of the *grand siècle*. Even so, absence has not dulled my enthusiasm for the topics covered, and, in fact, I believe I understand them better now for having gone in other directions. Maybe you can't truly go home again, but in my case I come back with bags full and am glad to visit old haunts, at least for awhile.

Being given a second chance to present *Bayonets* to readers allows me not only to correct the text and update my discussion of related works but to clarify the reason I wrote the book back then. Of course, *Bayonets* sought to increase our understanding of the Revolution and its army, but the volume also provided a case study of how the "new military history" and more traditional approaches could augment each other when combined. For the past two decades, the "new military history" has tended to avoid the hard business of warfare and has all too often dwelt on peripheral subjects acceptable to modern sensibilities. In contrast, my purpose was to demonstrate how the subject matter and the methodology of social history can tell us a great deal more about the way armies fight. I self-consciously tried to provide a model synthesis that would answer John Keegan's challenge to pursue military history in different and illuminating ways that continue to focus on battle, but which eschew the "battle piece."

My homecoming must take note of several important works on the revolutionary armies that have appeared since 1984. In a great service to English-speaking readers, R. R. Palmer translated Jean-Paul Bertaud's classic study, *La Révolution armée*, as *The Army of the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). It remains the unsurpassed study of the army as a political force during the Revolution. Alan Forrest has contributed two volumes to the literature: his *Conscripts and Desert-*

ers: *The Army and French Society During the Revolution and the Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) is a valuable study on desertion; his more general *Soldiers of the Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989) is a summary that does not go beyond Bertaud. Isser Woloch has completed his magnum opus, *The New Regime: Transformations of the French Civic Order, 1789–1820s* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), that, while dealing with much more than the military, has important things to say about conscription. In French, the long-awaited *Histoire militaire de France*, in four volumes, edited by André Corvisier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), devotes much of volume two, edited by Jean Delmas, to the Revolution.

Perhaps the most interesting study to appear recently concerns not the army but the navy: *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy, 1789–1794* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), by William S. Cormack. As a subject and extension of central authority, the navy often sailed on a collision course with local independence. In contrast to the army, which spread across the frontier, the navy harbored in a handful of port towns, most notably Brest, Rochefort, and Toulon, where, as a constant presence and a major employer of civilian dockyard workers, it could not escape becoming enmeshed in municipal politics. When port towns contested the authority of Paris, the navy was bound to be buffeted about. Cormack's naval study makes a very good companion and contrast to Bertaud's work on the army.

Not too long after *Bayonets* appeared, I supplemented it in two short publications: "En avant! The Origins of the Revolutionary Attack," contained in my collection *Tools of War: Ideas, Instruments, and Institutions of Warfare, 1445–1871* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), explored at greater length the origins of the infantry assault tactics employed by French infantry; "Towards an Army of Honor: The Moral Evolution of the French Army 1789–1815," *French Historical Studies*, 16, no. 1 (Spring 1989), addressed the way in which the elements of military motivation shifted after 1794.

While the above pieces touch on some of the subject matter dealt with in the first edition of *Bayonets*, they do not require that it be recast. In fact, I have decided to leave the text as originally presented except for correcting certain factual and typographical errors.

In closing, let me repeat my thanks to those who got me here in the first place: most notably my wife, Andrea, and to Westview Press and my friend and editor Peter Kracht for giving me the chance to say it all again.

John A. Lynn
Champaign, Illinois

SECTION ONE

Victory in the North



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Chapter 1

The Armée du Nord on Campaign

FEW READERS can be expected to know the history of the Armée du Nord. For most, its triumphs merge into the broad flow of revolutionary events, and its victories belong not to one army but to France. Commanders of the Nord are more likely to stir memories—the comte de Rochambeau, the marquis de Lafayette, Charles François Dumouriez, and Jean Baptiste Jourdan—yet they too are but seldom associated with the army they led. Since analysis requires context, the following narrative history of the Nord introduces the names and events discussed throughout this volume. It joins together in proper sequence elements that will later be dissected for detailed study. It also suggests that the explanation of French victory in the North lies in the citizen-soldiers who made up the Armée du Nord.

Prelude to War

By 1791 the French feared armed intervention by the monarchs of Europe, and after Louis XVI attempted to flee the country in June of that year, war seemed all but inevitable. Yet, in fact, Austria, Prussia, and Russia were far from agreeing on any joint course of action toward revolutionary France. Mutual distrust and the lingering question of Poland's fate precluded them from forming a common front. Despite the lack of a real threat, the French edged toward war, since the most powerful factions in Paris saw war as a servant of their own political aims. But had the French politicians truly understood the weakness of their armed forces, they might not have so lustily voted to declare war against the Hapsburgs on 20 April 1792.

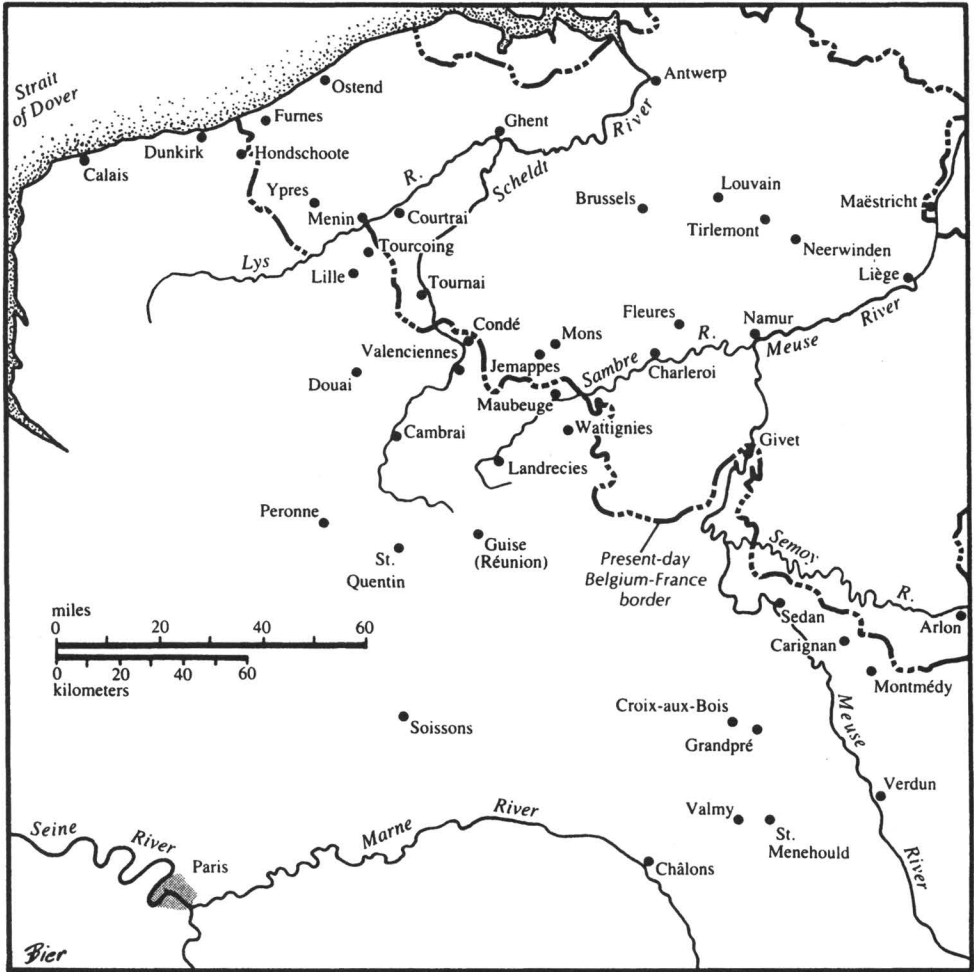
The first two years of the Revolution had greatly weakened the French army. Egalitarian ideas corroded discipline, while the turbulent confusion of the times resulted in a high rate of desertion. A rapid turnover in com-

mand, occasioned by the emigration of nearly 60 percent of all officers, struck the army still harder. On 1 January 1791 the National Assembly authorized a peacetime army of 157,000 men, yet the real strength of French forces did not exceed 130,000. After much debate the Assembly voted to shore up the defenses of France by calling up National Guard volunteers. The old regular, or line, army of the ancien régime did not enjoy the full confidence of the legislators. The new volunteer battalions seemed more politically reliable. At first these volunteer battalions constituted only a kind of inactive reserve force, but in the heated session of 21 June 1791, when the Legislative Assembly learned of Louis's flight, they were mobilized to stand alongside the understrength regular army. Volunteers and regulars alike were in need of discipline and training.

Troops moved up to the frontiers during the summer of 1791, but only in December did the government set up three major armies along France's eastern boarder. Entrusted with the frontier from Landau to Huningue, the Armée du Rhin numbered about 49,000 troops under the command of Marshal Nicolas, baron Luckner. From Montmedy to Bitche stood the Armée du Centre with about 30,000 men under the marquis de Lafayette. And from the Meuse to the sea the Armée du Nord stretched its nearly 53,000 soldiers commanded by Marshal Jean-Baptiste de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau, possibly the ablest officer in the French high command. As the war expanded, enveloping ever more of the French frontier and claiming ever more manpower, the French Republic by mid-1794 would be defended by eleven armies totaling roughly 750,000 men. Throughout the period 1792–94, however, the Nord remained the largest single assemblage of French fighting men.

Early Trials and Setbacks

As soon as war was declared, the government in Paris, pressed by its foreign minister Charles François Dumouriez, ordered Rochambeau to send his ill-trained and inexperienced battalions against a numerically smaller Austrian force in the Austrian Netherlands. The Marshal wisely objected to this unreasonable demand on the basis that even his line units needed more training before they could face the excellent Hapsburg troops, but his objections were overruled. On 28 April General Théobald Dillon led a column of some 2,300 troops from Lille toward Tournai. Meeting a small force of Austrians just across the border, he decided to withdraw the next day, but an orderly retreat proved too much for his soldiers, and they panicked. On 29 April 1792 General Dillon met his death at the hands of his own troops who shouted, "We are betrayed!" and "Every man for himself!" as they fled in utter rout. The same day saw Armand-Louis de Gontaut, duc de Biron, depart Valenciennes with some 15,000 men in an



MAP I. *The Campaigns of the Armée du Nord, 1792-94.*

attempt to take the fortress of Mons. His command never reached Mons but instead turned back before it got as far as Jemappes. Panic seized Biron's retreating troops just as it had gripped Dillon's, but, fortunately, Biron escaped with his life. These defeats stimulated the Assembly to call for a new levy of volunteers, the Volunteers of 1792. Circumstances confirmed Rochambeau's judgment, but, since the government was reluctant to let him exercise command as he saw fit, he submitted his resignation.

Dumouriez, who virtually ran the Ministry of War as well as foreign affairs, now chose Marshal Luckner, commander of the Armée du Rhin, to replace Rochambeau. The interim command of the Rhin went to General Alexis Magallon, comte de La Morlière. Luckner for some inexplicable reason enjoyed considerable favor with the revolutionaries at this time. The marvelous "Chant de guerre pour l'Armée du Rhin," known later simply as "La Marseillaise," was even composed in his honor. Yet the fact remained that he possessed only the most mediocre of skills. His military reputation rested on his feats as a daring leader of Hanoverian light cavalry against the French in the Seven Years' War. He arrived at Valenciennes on 15 May, and after less than a month with the Nord, this bumbling septuagenarian led 20,000 troops of his army from the Camp de Famars near Valenciennes on a futile invasion of Flanders. Marching first to Lille, he finally took both Menin and Courtrai on 19 June. But Luckner's timidity in command of an army exceeded his temerity in command of a squadron, and without good reason he withdrew from both towns on 30 June and returned to Lille.

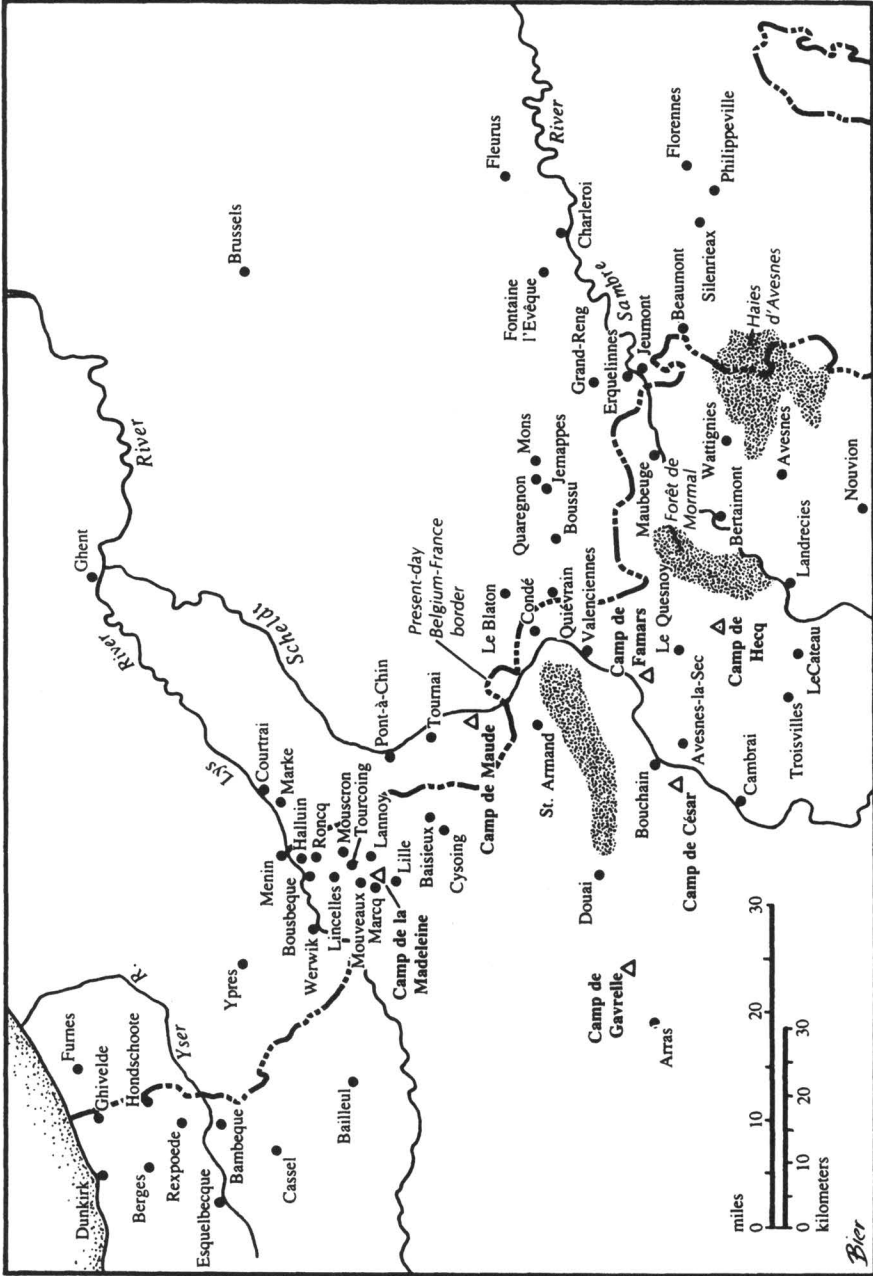
Now occurred a most strange maneuver, the *chassé-croisé*. Lafayette, first and always a political general, desired to play a greater role in the affairs of government. He reasoned that if his troops were closer to Paris he might rise to become the arbiter of French politics. Consequently, he conspired to switch commands with Luckner, since Luckner's Nord lay closer to Paris than did Lafayette's Centre. Yet while he wished to exchange commands, Lafayette was unwilling to part with the battalions serving under him, because he believed they bore him special loyalty. Consequently, Lafayette proposed that not only the commanders trade places but also that their entire armies switch names and positions. Incredible as it may seem, this insane maneuver received the ministry's approval. The government forced Lafayette to accept only one alteration in his plans. The fallen Dumouriez, who had joined the Armée du Nord on 1 July, used what influence he still had in Paris to win the right to remain with the troops he commanded on the northeast frontier. In charge of the entrenched Camp de Maude, he would cover the frontier while the two armies changed places. In mid-July the actual exchange took place without serious incident.

The turn of events now intervened to give the Nord still another commander-in-chief and to provide revolutionary France with a new hero. The threatened Prussian invasion under Karl-Wilhelm-Ferdinand, duke of Brunswick, charged the Parisian air with fear and determination. On 11 July 1792 the Legislative Assembly proclaimed, "Citoyens, la Patrie est en danger." Then on 1 August Paris heard of Brunswick's ill-considered and ill-timed manifesto threatening to destroy Paris should any harm befall Louis XVI. The revolutionary crowd answered this challenge to its bravery and integrity with the revolution of 10 August 1792. Lafayette, a man of the Revolution perhaps, but always a royalist as well, now labored to invest the political capital he had acquired in the *chassé-croisé*. On 13 August he tried to get his troops at Sedan to take an oath to the king, but he no longer commanded their loyalty. With his army unwilling to march on Paris to restore the king, Lafayette on 19 August crossed the frontier and surrendered himself to the Allies, who imprisoned him for the next five years. Two days before he fled, the Assembly had voted the command of the Nord to Dumouriez.

Dumouriez's Fall Campaigns

Dumouriez could not have been more pleased; he had long advocated an invasion of the Austrian Netherlands, which he could now undertake. He proposed that the best way to stop the Prussian advance would be by an offensive in the north, but the wary Paris government ordered him to bring his army south to defend the capital. This he reluctantly agreed to do, and on 1 September Dumouriez led the majority of the Nord south from Sedan. At this point begins a rather confusing problem with names. Dumouriez chose to christen the battalions now moving south toward the Argonne the Armée des Ardennes, though in actuality they were only part of the Armée du Nord and not a separate army. The Ardennes was to the Nord as a task force is to a fleet. From September 1792 until June 1794 the Ardennes existed as a separate unit, but it would always be subordinate to the Nord's commander. So closely connected were the two that historians often refer to the Armée du Nord et des Ardennes. The coming months witnessed the creation of two other task force armies, the Armée de la Belgique and the Armée de la Hollande; like the Ardennes they constituted mere subdivisions of the Nord, although unlike the Ardennes they were both defunct by mid-1793.

Dumouriez threw the Armée des Ardennes into the wooded hills of the Argonne in an attempt to bar the Prussian advance on Paris. The Armée des Ardennes displayed unexpected determination and ability for several days, which bought valuable time for the French. But owing to a nearly



MAP 2. The Main Battleground of the Armée du Nord.

Bier

fatal instance of confusion, the pass at Croix-aux-bois was left unguarded, and Brunswick's troops were able to seize it on 12 July. The Armée des Ardennes then withdrew toward St. Menhould and a rendezvous with the Armée de Centre, now under the command of General François-Etienne Kellermann. Units of the Ardennes did the best they could, marching and fighting their way south. Combats took place at Grand-Pré on the 15th, at Clermont on the 17th, and elsewhere until Kellermann and Dumouriez finally joined forces on 19 September 1792. The next day Kellermann's troops faced Brunswick's army; Dumouriez's harried and tired battalions stood in reserve. More cannonade than battle, the battle of Valmy stopped the Prussian advance, and, although Brunswick's army was not destroyed, Kellermann gave the Republic a complete strategic victory that day. After more than a week of inactivity, Brunswick began his retreat on 30 September. Dumouriez and the Ardennes had greatly aided in the task so well completed by the Centre. Now he could turn his attention once more to the Low Countries.

Dumouriez confided the command of the Armée des Ardennes to General Jean-Baptiste de Timbrune, comte de Valence, and it began its march back to the north. Dumouriez detoured to Paris in order to win support for his plans. He was authorized to attack the Austrian Netherlands, which the French already called Belgium, with the 88–95,000 troops grouped together in his command. To oppose this invasion the Austrians could muster only perhaps half that number. No longer the inexperienced and panicky troops of April, these French soldiers who massed along the border displayed a new confidence gained through training and on the battlefield. The men suffered the matériel shortages that would plague the Nord for years, but they were eager to fight. On 3 November Dumouriez set his troops in motion from Valenciennes toward Mons, while he ordered the rest of his command in Lille, Maubeuge, and elsewhere to carry out diversions to occupy Austrian attention. After preliminary skirmishes at Boussu on the 3rd and Quaregnon on the 5th, on the 6th Dumouriez's main body of 30,000 joined by 10,000 Volunteers of 1792 under the command of General Louis-Auguste des Ursins, comte d'Harville, formed in order of battle below the town of Jemappes, situated a short distance from Mons. At noon Dumouriez launched his main assault against the 14,000 Austrians holding the heights. In tightly packed columns his battalions marched directly at the enemy. The outcome could not long be in doubt; by two o'clock the Austrians were in retreat, although they had put up an admirable fight. That same day, to the north, other French forces defeated an Austrian detachment at Le Blaton, and on the 7th still other units of the Nord clashed with the Austrians at Halluin. Further victories, however, were unnecessary to establish French control of Belgium—the battle of Jemappes decided the issue.

The Hard Winter and Bitter Spring

French troops now poured into Belgium. Dumouriez himself led what he called the *Armée de la Belgique*; he delegated the command of the *Armée des Ardennes* to Valence and the small *Armée du Nord* first to Anne-François, comte de La Bourdonnaye, and later to Francisco de Miranda. By the end of December the French held Brussels and Liege. But this success had in fact seriously weakened French forces in the Low Countries. Men who had flocked to the tricolor in support of "la Patrie en danger" reasoned that victory, delivering the Republic from its foes, gave them the right to return to their homes. For those who remained with their battalions there was no time for rest, reorganization, and reequipping. Training proved impossible, since the soldiers dispersed into small groups to survive the worst of the winter months as best they could. Had the home government more faithfully and efficiently supplied its victorious troops, perhaps they could have been assembled in large camps where training exercises could have been conducted. For this tired and disorganized army, the worst trials were yet to come. On 1 February 1793 the Convention declared war on England and on the Dutch Netherlands. Dumouriez then received orders to invade Holland. To undertake this ill-considered attack he assembled a force of some 23,000, new recruits in the main. This army, christened the *Armée de la Hollande*, advanced toward Antwerp on 16 February. Meanwhile its sister armies were engaged in the siege of Maestricht. All told, the various armies under Dumouriez boasted a paper strength of over 122,000, but in reality this total must be discounted.

On 24 February 1793, the representatives sitting in the National Convention in Paris declared the levy of 300,000 men, but these new recruits would not be assembled and trained in time to help stay the tide of Austrian victories that would soon sweep the French out of Belgium. While the republican troops busied themselves with the siege of Maestricht and the invasion of Holland, the prince of Coburg gathered together an Austrian army of 40,000. On 1 March 1793 this formidable array crossed the Roer River, catching the French by surprise. Dumouriez rushed south, leaving the *Armée de la Hollande* under General Louis-Charles de La Motte-Ango, marquis de Flers. The French abandoned Maestricht and recoiled back on Louvain. With about 40,000 infantry and 4,500 cavalry Dumouriez resolved to attack Coburg's 30,000 infantry and 9,000 cavalry. On 18 March, at Neerwinden, occurred the great battle Dumouriez desired. Considering the poor condition of the French troops, they performed well. On the center and right they fought the Austrians to a bloody standstill, but the troops under General Miranda on the French left broke and retreated on Tirlemont. After the defeat of Neerwinden, Dumouriez at-

tempted to stand again at Louvain on the 22nd, but by then it was hopeless. To spare the fruitless loss of additional lives and to insure the retreat of his widely scattered forces, Dumouriez negotiated a convention with the enemy. By not contesting the Austrian advance his troops would themselves be unmolested in their withdrawal to the French border. Dumouriez's negotiations, however, had a treasonable goal, since he proposed using his army to reestablish the monarchy in Paris. Unhappy with the defeat Dumouriez had just suffered and fearful of his secret negotiations, the Convention wisely dispatched commissioners to arrest him. On 1 April these commissioners found him at his headquarters, but he turned the tables on them and had them arrested. Later they were handed over to Coburg. In only four more days, however, Dumouriez found his situation untenable, and like Lafayette he went over to the Austrians. The treason of Dumouriez filled the Convention with an excessive fear of its own generals. From then on the shadow of the guillotine followed the footsteps of even the most successful officers.

The next commander of the Armée du Nord et des Ardennes, General Auguste Picot, marquis de Dampierre, seemed dwarfed by the tasks set before him. The disheartened and disorganized battalions under his command had been eroded by desertion during the long retreat, and Dampierre could only bring them back to strength by rapidly incorporating raw levies into their ranks. From an objective military standpoint, this was the Revolution's darkest hour; all that stood between Paris and the fine Austrian troops in Coburg's army were defeated battalions and a few poorly defended fortresses. In addition to the crisis in the north, the comte de Custine's Armée du Rhin was in retreat, and rebellion shook the Vendée. Luckily, the Allies forswore a major invasion of France in 1793. The Paris government mirrored the seriousness of this situation by passing a great deal of revolutionary legislation. Committees of Surveillance were to be established in every commune. A new revolutionary Tribunal was created in Paris. The famous and feared Representatives on Mission received almost unlimited power to perform their civil and military tasks. And to direct the entire war effort, the Committee of Public Safety, created in April 1793, rose to heights of executive power that even Louis XIV could not have rivaled.

Coburg decided to besiege Valenciennes, gateway on the road to Paris. Near that fortress, in the Camp de Famars, Dampierre mustered what force he could to keep the Austrians from realizing their goal. Mercifully for the tormented Dampierre, his trials were not to last long, for on 8 May 1793 he received a mortal wound in battle outside the Camp de Famars. That attempt to meet the Austrians in battle ended only in one more French defeat. To General François Joseph Drouet, known as General Lamarche, fell the unenviable task of carrying on the defense of Valenciennes as in-

terim commander of the Armée du Nord. On 23 May the Austrians attacked again, this time assisted by English troops under the duke of York. Bottled up in the Camp de Famars, the main body of Lamarche's command awaited the onslaught, and it was defeated by the Austrian and English forces. That night, Lamarche left General Jean-Henri-Becays Ferrand to defend the fortress of Valenciennes itself and withdrew the main force to the Camp de César, some fifteen miles to the southwest of Valenciennes. Valenciennes and Condé were both besieged by the end of the month.

The Regeneration of the Nord

On 27 May 1793 General Adam Philippe, comte de Custine, arrived at Cambrai to take permanent command of the Armée du Nord. Although the victim of serious defeats earlier in the spring, Custine still enjoyed a considerable reputation. Throughout the months of June and July, while the Austrians and English busied themselves with sieges, Custine labored to reorganize and train the troops of the Nord. At Cambrai he set up a training camp for men picked from every battalion in the Nord and Ardennes for the purpose of giving them a crash course in infantry drill and then sending them back to their battalions to teach what they had just learned. A strict disciplinarian, Custine possessed an autocratic and independent character, which brought him into controversy with the Ministry of War. He was still popular with his men, since they apparently thought him able to turn the Nord into a more creditable fighting force. Custine fought no battles with the Nord; rather, he devoted the two months to better pursuits; but unfortunately he suffered defeats without risking battles. On 12 July 1793 Condé fell to the Austrians. Four days later Custine obeyed a summons from the Committee of Public Safety and journeyed to Paris. He was arrested on 22 July, and his fate was sealed by the fall of Valenciennes on the 28th.

General Charles-Edouard Jennings de Kilmaine, of Irish ancestry, then became the interim commander of the Nord. His only military act of any significance while in command of the Nord took place when he ordered his troops to abandon the Camp de César in the face of an imminent attack by Coburg. When the attack came on 8 August, it fell on empty space. The Nord had moved to the Camp de Gavrelle. Kilmaine shortly thereafter handed over command to General Jean-Nicolas Houchard, who possessed only one advantage over Kilmaine—he was French. The Armée du Nord and the Armée des Ardennes now in Houchard's hands mustered a total strength of over 175,000 men. Houchard seemed hardly the man to command such a force. Significantly, he was the first permanent commander of the Nord who had no claim to nobility. He was the *sans-culotte*

general demanded by the radicals. Yet he could boast only the mediocre talents of a dragoon with scant intelligence or force of character. Luckily for the brave but dull Houchard, although the road to Paris now lay open to the Allies, they refused to march down it. The rules of eighteenth-century warfare forbade Coburg to leave his lines of communication exposed to an enemy army. The duke of York also determined that the English must have Dunkirk to serve as a base for further operations. While the English marched north to besiege Dunkirk, Coburg besieged Le Quesnoy. During the English march, there were some minor brushes with the French. At Linselles on 18 August, for example, a small force of English under Colonel Lake routed a larger force of French troops under Generals Jean-Baptiste Jourdan and Antoine Lecourt de Béru.

At the insistence of the Committee of Public Safety, Houchard and the Representatives on Mission with the Armée du Nord resolved to thwart the English siege as best they could; they had little choice. In late August Houchard marshaled his forces for an attack on the Hanoverian and English troops covering the siege. On the 24th General Théodore-François Leclair drove the Allies out of Esquelbecque, only to see them retake it. On the 27th the French won the towns of Roncq, Lannoy, and Tourcoing, thus clearing the way for an advance against the Hanoverian army covering the siege of Dunkirk. After suffering a mild setback at Rexpoede on the night of 6–7 September, Houchard and 22,000 French troops confronted General Johan Ludwig von Walmoden's 14,600 Hanoverians across the marshes and hedges of Hondshoote on the 8th. Advocates of mass shock action, Houchard and his chief of staff General Etienne-Ambroise Berthélemy disapproved of this particular battlefield, since it hampered confrontation with the bayonet. Early in the battle the French dispersed into small bands, finding cover where they could and firing into the Hanoverian defenses. Only with great effort and some threat was Houchard able to rally his soldiers for a final onslaught, which carried the day for the French. Complete victory eluded the Republicans, however, since Walmoden withdrew his troops with little difficulty. There was no pursuit, a failure that was to cost Houchard his life. The English did give up the siege, but instead of crushing the enemy, Houchard had only caused them to draw back. Few permanent gains flowed from this victory. Le Quesnoy surrendered to the Austrians on 11 September, and, although the French had success in some serious engagements on the 12th at Werwik and Avesnes-le-sec and on the 13th at Menin, by 15 September Menin was again in Allied hands. The Committee of Public Safety then relieved Houchard of his command on 22 September, the first day of the momentous Year II in the new revolutionary calendar. The day after he lost his command he was arrested. On 16 November he became the third commander of the Nord

to lose his head; Luckner and Custine had preceded him to the guillotine. Mercifully, he also was the last of the Nord's commanding generals to suffer this fate.

The next man to take over the Nord kept his head and gained a great reputation. General Jourdan, a future Napoleonic marshal, received the responsibilities of the Nord after only a little more than a week as the subordinate commander of the Armée des Ardennes. He chose General Jean-Augustin, baron Ernouf, for his chief of staff, and they did not have to wait long to test their skills. After the fall of Le Quesnoy, Coburg concentrated his attention on Maubeuge. The timidity of the Allies may seem astounding; with a gap in the frontier defenses made by the Austrian occupation of Valenciennes, Condé, and Le Quesnoy, the Allies still refused to strike at Paris. Still, it was late in the year, and, encumbered by necessary supply lines, Coburg could hardly leave 175,000 armed Frenchmen in his rear. Maubeuge and the adjoining camp contained 20,000 men of the Armée des Ardennes. Seizure of the town and the destruction of its garrison would bode well for the next campaign. Jourdan sought to strike the covering force at Wattignies and by destroying it end the siege. Lazare Carnot, the Organizer of Victory, joined the Armée du Nord in the field as a Representative on Mission.

The battle of Wattignies lasted for two days, 15 and 16 October 1793. Although the Austrian General Charles de Croix, count von Clairfayt, had 37,000 men, during the battle he could resist Jourdan's 45,000 with only 21,000. Still Coburg, in supreme command, remained so confident of victory that he promised to become a *sans-culotte* should the French win. The events of the 15th almost proved Coburg right. The splendid Austrian battalions beat back wave after wave of the numerically superior French forces. Meanwhile, a small contingent of Allied troops stopped and later scattered an attempted flanking maneuver by General Jacob-Job Elie and 3,500 troops from Philippeville. Elie's battalions broke and fled at Beaumont on the 16th. The night of 15–16 October saw Carnot and Jourdan change their basic plan. On the 15th the French had attacked all along the Austrian line; on the 16th the great bulk of Jourdan's army would concentrate against the Austrian left wing. Though massively outnumbered, the Austrian left fought well and hard, but after two unsuccessful attacks the third carried away the Austrian defenders. As at Hondschoote, pursuit was out of the question, and the Austrian and Dutch forces around Maubeuge retreated without serious challenge. Shortly after the battle of Wattignies, General Jean-Baptiste Davaine launched an attack on the Allies in Flanders, but this tardy effort came to nothing. Combats at Cysoing on 20 October, Tilleul on 23 October, and elsewhere led to no real alteration of the frontier. Menin once again fell to the French only to be evacuated as before on 27 October. General-in-Chief Jourdan himself received orders to pursue

the enemy down the Sambre, but, at the risk of his life, he refused. On 6 January 1794 the Minister of War ordered the reluctant Jourdan and his chief of staff to come to Paris, where both men were relieved of command.

The Nord in Triumph

Upon Jourdan's departure, the interim command of the Nord devolved upon Ferrand, a veteran soldier of France. Then, on 8 February 1794, General Jean Charles Pichegru arrived to take charge of the Nord for the rest of its combat career. Previously a commander of the Armée du Rhin, he was a man of experience. The army, or rather armies, he now led numbered about 207,000 for the Nord and 36,000 for the Ardennes. Although this strength could only be achieved through incorporating large numbers of new recruits, the Nord would not take the field in 1794 as undisciplined and unmaneuverable units. Commanders used the time purchased by Jourdan to train their men. Since the majority of the battalions were grouped together in major camps instead of dispersed over the countryside, the possibility existed for serious mass drill. The Armée du Nord that took the field in the spring of 1794 would be a superior force to that of either 1792 or 1793.

The crucial campaign of 1794 revolved around two river axes, the Sambre to the south and the Scheldt and Lys to the north. Pichegru possessed an uncanny ability to be absent whenever any major battle occurred on either front. The spring combat began when Pichegru ordered the divisions of Generals Antoine Balland, Jacques-Gilles Goguet, and Jacques-Pierre Fromentin along the Sambre axis to attack Cateau-Cambrésis on 29 March 1794. This attack ended in failure, French casualties numbering over 1,000. The republicans would not again take up the offensive for about a month. The initiative passed to the Austrians who began a siege of Landrecies in mid-April. An attempt by the troops of Goguet's and Balland's divisions to relieve Landrecies on 21 April resulted only in another defeat.

Pichegru attempted to rectify a nearly impossible command situation by conferring the command of the entire right wing of the Nord on Ferrand. The Nord had always been too large for one man to control, and, although the Ardennes had always had a separate chief, this still left the man in charge of the Nord with too great a responsibility. Technically now, Pichegru would directly supervise the troops between the Scheldt and the Lys, while Ferrand would take charge, under Pichegru, of all troops along the Sambre. In reality, the command structure still left much to be desired. Ferrand, his subordinate commanders, and the Representatives on Mission vied for authority. Only the arrival of Jourdan with troops from the Armée de la Moselle in June would truly give the French right wing the

unity and independence it required. (Jourdan received command of the Moselle after a short retirement.)

Ferrand resolved upon a new attempt to relieve Landrecies, and to this end he planned a massive advance by several divisions along a broad front. The beginning of the advance on 24 April was attended by some brushes with the enemy as at Silenrieux, but the real confrontation took place on the 26th. Balland's division from Maubeuge was routed; Chapuis's ill-fated division was crushed at Troisvilles. Some limited success came to troops led by General Jean-Baptiste, baron Cacault, at Boussu, but the defeat of other parts of the advance eventually made his position untenable. Once again the Allies failed to exploit their victory, and the only fruit they harvested for all their labor was the fall of Landrecies on 30 April 1794. The French at least took the opportunity to dismiss some incompetent division commanders. General Jacques-Philippe Bonnaud took over the division of General René-Bernard Chapuis, who had fallen prisoner during the disaster of the Troisvilles. His own troops assassinated General Goguet; his division went to General Paul-Alexis Dubois, recently brought up from the Armée de la Moselle. The excellent General Jean-Baptiste Kléber replaced General Balland.

To aid in the relief of Landrecies, Pichegru decided to launch an attack in the north, where he chose to exercise personal command. To this end he marshaled the divisions of Generals Joseph Souham, Jean-Victor Moreau, and Pierre-Antoine Michaud. Numbered among the brigade commanders of these northern divisions were two generals destined to become distinguished Napoleonic military figures, Etienne-Jacques MacDonald and Dominique-Joseph Vandamme. Pichegru, after having set up an advance in West Flanders, went off to attend to other duties; he left General Souham in charge of the entire operation. Souham aimed at the seizure of Menin and Courtrai, which promised to be soft targets, since the Allies had concentrated further south. On 27 April all went well as the French took Werwik and crossed into Austrian territory. The next day, however, Clairfayt brought up an Austrian and Hanoverian force to strike the French right at Mouscron. Clairfayt drove the French out of Mouscron, but Souham refused to let even a day pass before turning in greater numbers on Clairfayt himself. The day of 28 April was not to bring any of the tragedy brought by the 26th. Souham himself led the attack that afternoon, using the brigades of Generals MacDonald, Henry-Antoine Jardon, Nicolas Bertin, and Hermann-Wilhelm, comte Daendels. Souham turned Mouscron into a considerable French victory, boding well for the subsequent campaign. Meanwhile other troops in his command had surrounded and besieged Menin. Much of the garrison escaped on the morning of 29 April, but the remainder surrendered later that day. Courtrai also soon fell into French hands.

With the capitulation of Landrecies, the main body of the Allied army now marched north to concentrate against the French occupying Menin and Courtrai. Action flamed high during the second week of May. On the 10th, Bonnaud's division met defeat at the hands of the English near Baisieux. The same day Souham struck west from Courtrai, but when the town had been weakened by his withdrawal Clairfayt attacked it. Only quick action and hard fighting by the brigades of Vandamme and Daendels drove off the Austrians. The stage was now set for a great French victory. With the Allied troops gathering in the neighborhood of Courtrai, Coburg and the duke of York adopted a plan by the much-vaunted General Karl Leiberich, baron Mack, for a gigantic envelopment of the entire force under Souham's command. By employing six widely separated columns, Mack hoped to cut off and annihilate the invading French. This plan, however, required a high degree of coordination and timing, while at the same time it allowed the French to concentrate their resistance on isolated elements of the Allied army.

As the Allied net tightened around the divisions of Souham and Moreau, an objective observer might have given the French very little chance of success. Seventy-three thousand Allied troops menaced a force of only 60,000 French. In the past the French had required a significant numerical advantage even to fight the Allies to a draw; what chance had they now? But Souham rose to the occasion. Out of the doomsday reports coming in to his headquarters at Courtrai, he learned that in reality only three of the six columns posed a serious immediate threat and that by throwing Moreau's division against one of the three threatening columns he could concentrate his own division and that of Bonnaud at Lille against the other two. With a cool head, Souham thus massed 40,000 French against only 20,000 Allies. The several resultant engagements fought on 18 May within the triangle, Courtrai-Lannoy-Werwik, are all covered by the same title, the battle of Tourcoing.

On the morning of the 18th Vandamme's brigade of Moreau's division suffered heavily at the hands of Clairfayt's large force of nearly 20,000. But these French troops possessed a new confidence and ability; Vandamme rallied them, and in an admirable feat his brigade alone stopped Clairfayt's advance and threw his troops out of Linselles and Bousbecque. At Lannoy and Mouveaux the combined forces of Souham and Bonnaud caught the columns led by the duke of York and General Rudolph Otto off guard and unsupported. In the fighting to the south of Tourcoing the Allies lost over 5,500 men, killed, wounded, or captured. The French did not pursue the defeated Allies. After the battle of Tourcoing, Souham began an advance north toward Ypres and east toward the Scheldt. On 22 May 1794 the roughly equal forces of 50,000 clashed at Tournai. The drawn battle halted the French advance, but only temporarily. The Austrians concentrated

around Tournai, drawing troops away from Ypres, which the French then besieged.

After Tourcoing the center of attention shifted down to the Sambre. Throughout the month of May and for half of June the French south of the Sambre constantly and unsuccessfully battered against the Austrians facing them just across the river. The confused command structure, the intervention of inept Representatives on Mission, and the poor behavior of the soldiers jeopardized the chances of victory. Small Austrian forces beat back attack after attack by the French. At Grand-Reng on 12 and 13 May and again on the 20th and 21st and at Erquelinnes on the 24th the story was always the same. Even the fine performance of some brigades, such as the light infantry commanded by General Philibert-Guillaume Duhesmes, could not rescue the French from repeated setbacks. However, help arrived early in June. By a difficult march, Jourdan brought about 40,000 troops of his *Armée de la Moselle* north to the banks of the Sambre. This not only doubled the number of men available but also placed all the troops under a single general, since Jourdan received supreme command over the 20,000 men of the Nord and the 21,000 men of the Ardennes fighting on this front. In mid-June the French again crossed the Sambre, this time with the intention of besieging Charleroi. They invested the town, but on 16 June the Austrians again defeated them and drove them back across the river. It would be the last time.

On 18 June Jourdan's troops began the siege of Charleroi again; that very day, to the north, Ypres fell into French hands. The Austrians had now concentrated their forces to the south; as of 23 June Coburg himself commanded the Austrians facing Charleroi. He lost heart after Tourcoing and regarded the large French forces before him with foreboding. Nevertheless obligated to relieve the siege, on 26 June 1794 he attacked the over 70,000 French troops entrenched around Fleurus. The French enjoyed a substantial, but not overwhelming numerical advantage, since Coburg had only about 52,000 soldiers. Coburg fell liable to much the same error he committed at Tourcoing; instead of concentrating his army for one great attack, he split it into five columns in an attempt to envelop the entire French position. Standing on the defensive, Jourdan successfully resisted all Austrian attacks and won a great triumph for the Republic. Austrian, English, and Dutch troops retreated, and the towns of Belgium fell again as they had in 1792. Some hard fighting remained, but victory was inevitable. The Austrian Netherlands was in French hands by the end of the year, and in 1795 Holland fell to the French.

The history of the *Armée du Nord et des Ardennes* came to a close in June 1794. On 29 June the Convention officially reconstituted Jourdan's ad hoc assemblage of divisions from the Nord, Ardennes, and Moselle as a new army, the *Armée de Sambre et Meuse*. With this stroke, the Ardennes

ceased to exist and the Nord remained only as an ever-shrinking portion of its formal self. The main job of dealing with the Austrians fell to the Sambre et Meuse, which grew accordingly, while a victorious but now secondary Nord drove back the Dutch and English.

During its existence, 1791–94, the Armée du Nord et des Ardennes lost many battles but held the frontier largely intact and eventually defeated the armies sent against it. To what can the ultimately victorious career of the Nord be attributed? Certainly not to logistics. The French did not win in the northeast by virtue of a miracle of production and supply. Despite heroic efforts by the Committee of Public Safety, their troops suffered crippling shortages of food, equipment, and arms. The Nord subsisted on a much more meager diet of matériel than would have been considered acceptable by other contemporary forces. It is tempting to ascribe victory to the numerical superiority of the French; however, while this advantage unquestionably contributed to their success, it does not explain it. In the context of the entire theater the Nord outnumbered its opponents by a considerable margin. But examined battle by battle, the numerical differences were less outstanding. Consider in particular the three largest battles of 1794; the French were outnumbered at Tourcoing, equaled their foes at Tournai, and blessed with only a 7:5 edge at Fleurus. Due to the lack of equipment and training, a high percentage of the Nord was not with the field forces. It is also possible to sidestep the whole debate by citing the obvious truth that God does not always favor the biggest battalions and by noting that military history is full of examples in which an artful and determined few have defeated an unskilled or wavering multitude.

Turning to generalship, here again the French could boast of no clear advantage. Of the supreme commanders of the Nord, only Rochambeau, Dumouriez, and Jourdan stand up to scrutiny. The first two met defeat, and, although Jourdan won the battles of Wattignies and Fleurus, neither victory bears witness to any real military genius. Souham, who never commanded the entire Nord during these years, deserves the greatest praise for his leadership at Tourcoing, but this is the only battle of the Nord that demonstrated timing and finesse. If French generalship rarely rose above the mediocre, that of their enemies was not so debased as to account for Allied defeat. Granted, the strategic situation of the Allies was hardly to be envied. Divided command, divergent goals, and only partial commitment to victory in Belgium hampered them. The Austrians, chief among the forces arrayed against the Nord, had Polish affairs very much on their minds. But if Allied leadership may have made great strategic success unlikely, it was not abysmal enough to make French victory inevitable.

The best explanation for triumph along the Belgian frontier lies in the combat effectiveness of French troops. There is reason to argue that by 1794, the Allied troops who faced the Nord had deteriorated to a degree,

but this only highlights the importance of the growing fighting quality of republican battalions. A combination of high motivation plus effective tactics resulted in superior French performance. Troops were committed and spirited, possessed of both endurance and energy. The flexible combinations of infantry formations, ably supported by artillery, allowed them to adjust tactics to terrain and circumstance. As a consequence, an analysis of victory in the north must be an analysis of the combat effectiveness of the Armée du Nord.

Chapter 2

The Elements of Victory: A Theory of Combat Effectiveness

A DISCUSSION of the elements that made the *Armée du Nord* victorious on the battlefield ought to proceed from an informed understanding of combat effectiveness. Far too many histories are founded upon simplistic or vague assumptions concerning troop performance under fire. Rarely do authors even bother to elaborate the underpinnings of their analyses. Distortion and confusion can result from such methodological carelessness. To avoid these pitfalls, this study begins with an attempt to identify the factors that determine the quality of performance in combat and to define the relationships among them.

The theory presented in the succeeding pages grew out of the body of literature on combat effectiveness that has appeared since the mid-1940s. Sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, and military critics have explored the motivational and technical dimensions of effectiveness. Through extensive use of interviews and questionnaires their research has built up an impressive body of data that few historians can match. Their studies of contemporary armies provide insights that aid in understanding past warfare. The benefits promised by such an interdisciplinary approach are great, although it requires a detour from the smooth paths of historical narrative. The model of combat effectiveness proposed here can be reduced to graphic form, as it is in Figure 1. However, the full complexity of the model lacks such aesthetic simplicity, but so does the subject. Some critics might accuse me of using a heavy theoretical sledgehammer to swat a rather puny methodological fly, but the results justify the effort.

The model argues that the soldier's concept of his interest determines the type of motivation and control that will be most effective. Citizen-soldiers of the French Revolution identified their interests with those of the nation; consequently, obedience within the army rested primarily on the soldier's willing agreement rather than on force or material rewards.

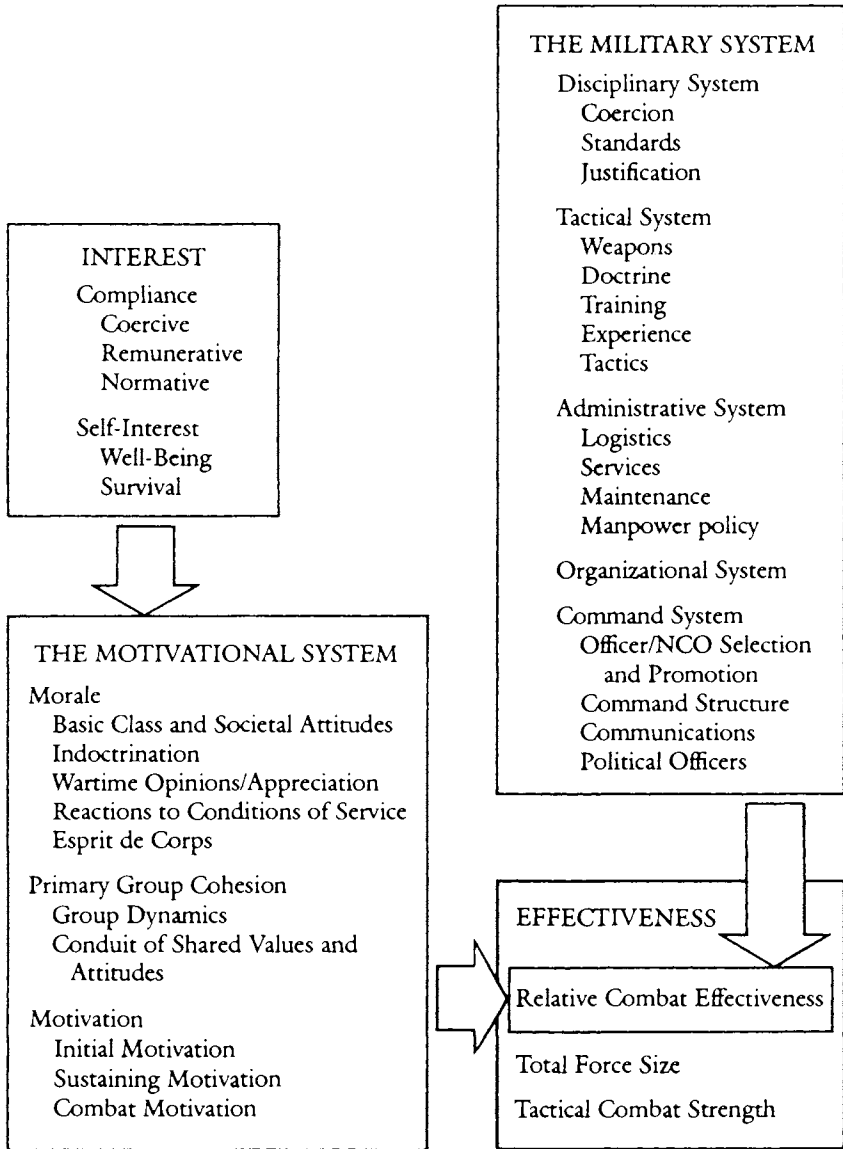


FIGURE 1.
A Model of Combat Effectiveness

Such normative compliance dictated a pattern, or system, of motivation common to armed forces today. Morale, the complex culmination of an army's attitudes and opinions, is a combination of those shared by society as a whole and those common only to the troops. Morale acts upon and through the small group of comrades surrounding the individual. The bonds that unite the members of this primary group have been shown to exert tremendous influence upon the combat soldier. Motivation itself involves different factors when men are under fire than when they are out of combat, and both situations must be understood. Most of this chapter deals with interest and motivation, since they are complicated subjects that have absorbed the greater share of theoretical discussion for decades and since they are of great relevance to the study of the Revolution.

The more technical elements of the military system contribute to motivation, but need to be examined separately. They constitute the mechanisms of the army, not the motive force that drives it. Military justice, administration, organization, tactics, and command all define a particular military system. In turn, these technical aspects of the military system combine with the psychological dimensions of the motivational system to determine combat effectiveness—the quality of performance in combat. Finally, the tactical strength of a unit in the field is a product of both its combat effectiveness and its size. Quantity as well as quality must be placed on the scales.

Interest

This hypothesis must begin with a discussion of the concept of interest, which is central to troop motivation and, therefore, to combat effectiveness. The soldier who follows an order to hold out on the defensive or to strike out on the offensive essentially chooses to obey that order. He may do so to avoid punishment, to gain some reward, to protect himself and his friends, or because he believes that he ought to obey, but in some sense he fights because it is in accord with his sense of his own interests. Interest is a word with several meanings. It can mean a profit or benefit from something, a share or participation in something, or a concern with something. In each of these three senses, it can influence an individual's actions. On the modern battlefield, interest can wear both a "selfless" and a "selfish" face. A soldier is supposed to obey willingly a command that puts his life in jeopardy. At the same time his drive to defend his own life in battle is expected to make him fight all the harder. To understand combat motivation, it is necessary to consider both dimensions of interest.

Compliance Theory

For an army to operate properly, for battles to occur, soldiers must do

what they are told to do, no matter how unpleasant or dangerous the task. Throughout history compliance with orders has been gained from soldiers by applying three kinds of leverage: coercive, remunerative, and normative.¹ Coercion involves the use or threat of direct physical punishment for the disobedient and the hesitant. Remuneration is based upon authority's control of material resources and rewards, such as land, pay, or booty. Normative factors consist of giving or withholding symbolic and psychological rewards and punishments, such as acceptance, commendation, or condemnation. This third type of leverage is more subtle than the first two. For it to be effective, the soldier must have an interest in, that is, he must be psychologically invested in, the community around him enough to value its praise.

Over the centuries European armed forces have relied upon different combinations of these three forms of leverage to gain compliance. The feudal knight fought both to retain his fief, to increase his holdings or obtain booty, and to uphold his honor; he was moved by remunerative and normative rewards. The brutal mercenaries of the sixteenth century fought mostly for material gain, so remunerative leverage was most effective. In the seventeenth and especially in the eighteenth centuries harsh coercive force was regarded as the most effective means to gain the soldier's compliance. It was Frederick the Great who insisted that the soldier "must be more afraid of his officers than of the dangers to which he is exposed."²

The French Revolution fundamentally and permanently altered the pattern of compliance. The prime motivation of volunteers and conscripts was perceived to be their concern for the nation's welfare. Harsh and degrading punishments were not consistent with the soldier's new status as a free and equal citizen. Military punishments remained, but they became more a matter of justice than of compulsion. And although the men certainly needed remuneration, salary was considered as subsistence not as incentive. Normative control became the primary influence over the conduct of the rank and file. Discipline was expected to be mainly self-imposed, and obedience an act of self-will. It would require decades before all European armies operated on these same principles. The dispersal required by modern tactics has also made normative compliance technically necessary, since these tactics rely on the obedience and initiative of soldiers who cannot be closely observed and controlled.

Since the soldier has nothing material to gain from risking his life in battle, to justify following a dangerous order, the soldier must value the interests or the approval of some collectivity beyond himself. The three types of collectivities that evoke loyalty in a modern military environment are the national sociopolitical system, the military unit, and the primary