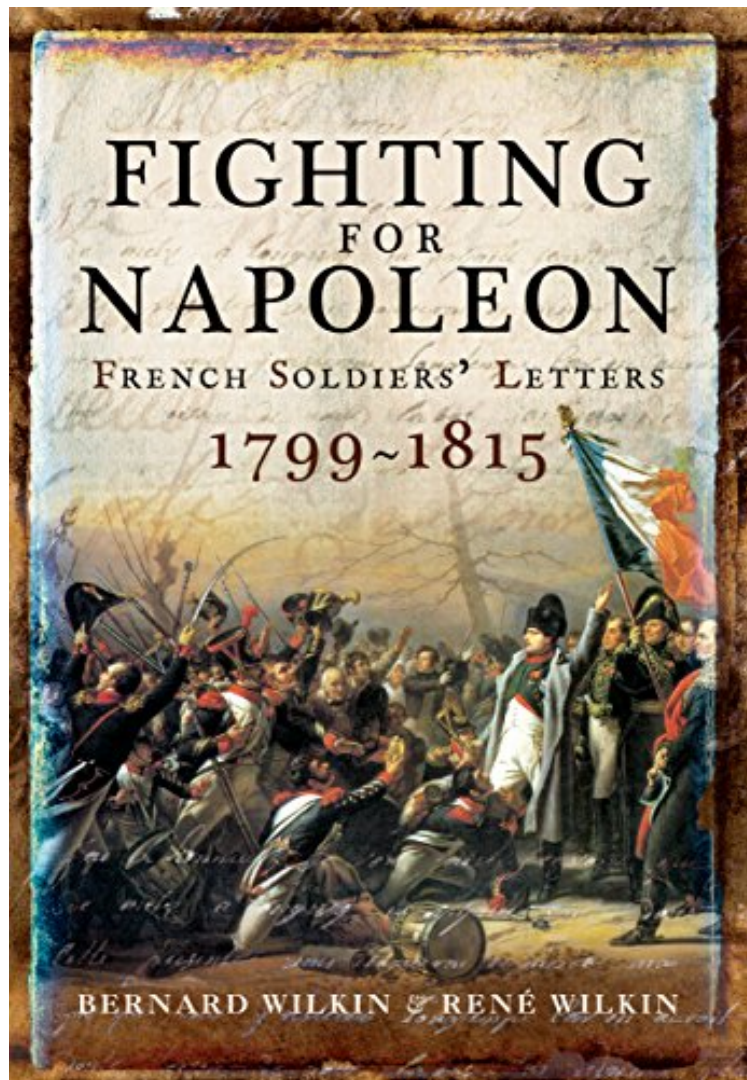


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Fighting for Napoleon: French Soldiers' Letters 1799-1815

Bernard Wilkin, René Wilkin

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Bernard Wilkin, René Wilkin : Fighting for Napoleon: French Soldiers' Letters 1799-1815 before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Fighting for Napoleon: French Soldiers' Letters 1799-1815:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Patrick O'Hara Great look at what the common Napoleonic soldier experienced. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Here are many studies of the Great Army but this one is different. By Customer Dr Wilkin has produced a much needed book on a difficult topic. There are many studies of the Great Army but this one is different. The authors traced hundreds of letters of French soldiers to re-examine the mindset of the military. This book paints a difficult picture of the French army, one where soldiers aren't

paid for years or properly fed and don't hesitate to kill or rape. The author examines successfully several myths and questions traditional representations. Looking at personal letters allows the authors to offer a fresh perspective on one of the most fascinating story of European and World History.² of 2 people found the following review helpful. Very useful
By Albert Joseph
This is the first time I come across a collection of letters written by French soldiers serving for Napoleon. This is a fantastic read and a very useful tool for those who, like me, are interested in the Napoleonic Wars.

The French side of the Napoleonic Wars is often seen from a strategic point of view, or in terms of military organization and battlefield tactics, or through officers' memoirs. It is rarely seen from the perspective of the lowest ranks of the army, and the experience of the ordinary soldiers is less well known and is often misunderstood. That is why this account, based on more than 1,600 letters written by French soldiers of the Napoleonic armies, is of such value. It adds to the existing literature by exploring every aspect of the life of a French soldier during the period 1799-1815. The book will be fascinating and informative reading for military and cultural historians, but it will also appeal to anyone who is interested in the war experience of common soldiers. It offers the English-speaking audience a French view of a conflict which is too often limited to the traditional memoirs of Captain Coignet, Colonel Marbot or Sergeant Bourgogne.

A superb guide to the experience and motivation of military service that is based on a wide trawl of relevant letters. Built around the collection of the Archives de l'Etat à Liège which kept more than 1,500 letters, all written by soldiers from the Ourthe department and the vast majority written by conscripts. The organisation is clear and appropriate. Three of the chapters are chronological, dealing with particular conflicts and the records they left, one deals with conscription and desertion, one life in the army, and one wounds, illness and captivity. The authors show that the conscripts mostly perceived compulsory service as a burden, and a heavy one. They argue that Alan Forrest's citation of a letter from an enthusiastic conscript from Liège pushed an a typical attitude to the fore, as the vast majority of these soldiers did not fight for France or for any abstract reason. This correction of Forrest is most valuable as the subject suffers from too much selective quotation. The personal prestige of Napoleon is presented as a factor, but the high rate of desertion, especially after 1812, is employed as an appropriate comment on this charisma... A first-rate work that is of much wider significance. - Professor Jeremy Black, French History (Oxford University Press)
Based on more than 1,600 letters - most of which have never been published before - this work provides the reader with a good insight into the lives of ordinary French of the Napoleonic Wars. These conflicts are rarely seen from the perspective of the lowly 'other ranks' of an army, so the experience of ordinary soldiers is less well known. Direct accounts of campaigns and battle, recruitment and training, barrack life, the experience of captivity and being wounded are all here, based on letters written most by uneducated men to their immediate family. A few illustrations are included as is a chronology of the Napoleonic Wars, a bibliography and an index. This really is fascinating stuff, and surely a 'must' for students of Napoleonic warfare. - Stuart Asquith, Military Modelling, April 2016
About the Author
Bernard Wilkin is a Belgian historian working at the University of Sheffield, where he specialises in the history of the French army and the French people at war, from Napoleon to the end of the Third Republic. He has published on various subjects such as propaganda in France during the two world wars, morale in the French army and on the home front during the Great War. Rene Wilkin, the father of Bernard, studied and taught history in the city of Liege where he was born. He is now retired but continues to work on Napoleonic history from a French perspective.