

2. Bonaparte's Dispatches and the Press

Introduction

Soldiers, you are naked, unfed; the government owes you much but has given you nothing. The patience and courage that you have shown among these rocks are admirable; but it brings you no glory—not a glimmer falls upon you. I will lead you into the most fertile plains in the world. Rich provinces, great cities will be in your power; there you will find honor, glory and riches. Soldiers of Italy, do you lack for courage or endurance? 1

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So began the future emperor's perhaps most famous proclamation to the Army of Italy, delivered in March 1796. It displayed a level of confidence and audacity quite remarkable for a general only 26 years old enjoying the initial days of his first true military command. It is also entirely fictitious—there is no contemporary evidence that such a proclamation was ever issued on 27 March 1796. It was composed years later, in exile on Saint Helena, and dictated to an aide writing the former emperor's memoirs. 2 It was written as part of Bonaparte's last and most successful campaign: the campaign to create for posterity the myth of Napoleon.

That Napoleon Bonaparte was the greatest eighteenth-century French master of propaganda is beyond dispute. What is most remarkable about Bonaparte's achievement, however, is the sophisticated manipulation of the press that he demonstrated from the very beginning of his public career. During his first Italian campaign, and to some extent during his Egyptian campaign, this expertise was particularly evident in Bonaparte's correspondence with the Executive Directory, in his bulletins, and in his relationship with the press of the Revolutionary era (in which these forms of propaganda regularly appeared).

In many respects, the first of General Bonaparte's official bulletins to actually appear in the contemporary press was as audacious as the imaginary one presented above. It burst on the scene like a lightning bolt, displaying a brilliance and a flair for propaganda that Bonaparte's fellow commanding generals could rarely match. On 25 April 1796, the following lines appeared on the first page of the *Gazette Nationale, ou le Moniteur universel*: "The campaign of Italy has commenced. I am sending you a complete accounting of the battle of Montenotte." 3 In the paragraphs of Bonaparte's dispatch to the Executive Directory that follow, the young general recounted his army's quick first victory, announcing that "the rout of the enemy is complete" and that "[g]enerals, officers, and soldiers have all



upheld on this memorable day the glory of France." ⁴ Immediately following Bonaparte's letter is a dispatch from Antoine-Christophe Salicetti, the military commissioner attached to the Army of Italy, which echoes the accomplishments of the commanding general. ⁵ In all, nearly two-thirds of the front page is dominated by this news. It also displays a boldness of style that differentiates it from the more mundane reports written by the commanders of the various other French armies. And with this dispatch began Bonaparte's campaign to build the favorable public image that would eventually enable him to become First Consul in 1799 and, ultimately, Emperor of the French in 1804.

It was really a conjunction of factors that made this propaganda campaign one of the most successful in history, factors combining both serendipity and purpose. Perhaps the most important of these factors was the phenomenal growth of the popular press during the Revolutionary era that made propaganda (as we know it) possible. A second factor involved the conduct of the war and the successes and failures of the various French armies in the field. Throughout most of 1796 and 1797, for example, only Bonaparte's Army of Italy experienced apparent total success; the other major armies—the Army of the Rhine and Moselle and the Army of the Sambre and Meuse—after enjoying some initial successes, soon found themselves in retreat. These were circumstances over which Bonaparte had no control, but a sign of his genius for propaganda was that he capitalized on these conditions, transforming himself from an obscure general commanding a secondary army into the hero of the day. Reports from the Italian front quickly began to dominate the pages of the French press through the conscious efforts of the commanding general of that army. As I alluded to earlier, these reports also benefited from a writing style that further distinguished them from those of such commanding generals as Jourdan, Moreau, and even Hoche. In the process, Napoleon made himself not only France's most victorious general, but also one indispensable to the government of the Directory. Encouraged by his successes at the beginning of 1797, Bonaparte transformed his propaganda efforts, gradually shifting from purely military to political goals.

Literacy, Newspaper Readership, and Propaganda

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Bonaparte could not have achieved such notoriety, however, had it not been for the existence of a mass medium—the French popular press—that found its origins in the Revolution amid the political furor associated with the calling of the Estates-General and the debacle of the constitutional monarchy. ⁶ According to Jack Richard Censer, during this period Paris had as many as 515 newspapers of varying periodicity, an amazing figure for a city of only 600,000. Of this total, 107 titles only appeared once, and 172 sheets remained in production for less than a month. The remaining 236 publications, however, enjoyed runs of at least a month, with some 28 titles lasting more than two years. ⁷ This is quite a feat when one considers that, during the early 1780s, only 41 newspapers appeared in the French capital

(including 14 foreign papers), and these were prohibited by law from publishing political news. ⁸ In the last year of the ancien régime, the number of papers had risen to 66 (with 29 of these being foreign). ⁹ The Revolution forever changed the French press: politics, once banned from the press, now dominated the newspapers. ¹⁰ In fact, as historian Hugh Gough notes, "the journalist was now a participant in the political process." ¹¹

Literacy in Revolutionary France

What made this explosion of newspapers possible was a rising French literacy rate. Marriage records suggest that in the 1680s, only about 21 percent of the adult population could write their names. By the 1780s, however, this figure had risen nation-wide to at least 37 percent and probably as high as fifty percent for the adult male population. ¹² Unevenly distributed throughout the kingdom, this later literacy rate tended to be higher in the cities than in the country and higher in the North than in the South. According to some estimates, therefore, the northern third of France may have had a literacy rate of nearly two-thirds, with the capital having the highest concentration of readers in the kingdom (because of the great number of artisans living there). Even more impressive is the literacy rate for females, which in late *ancien régime* Paris approached that of males. ¹³ According to an estimate by Hugh Gough, in 1789 the literacy rate for men was nearly ninety percent and for women almost eighty percent. ¹⁴ It should not be surprising, then, that Paris produced more newspapers than anywhere else in France. During the Revolution itself, perhaps some six million people nation-wide might have been able to read a newspaper. ¹⁵ At minimum, it was this population that Bonaparte set out to influence with his propaganda campaign of 1796-98, but the ultimate size of his audience was much larger, perhaps by a factor of ten.

One should not equate literacy with access to newspapers. Literacy and the consumption of the press were two different things. As historians have noted, the price of a newspaper subscription was beyond the means of most people, whether literate or not. Typical subscription rates ran from between 30 to 36 livres at the beginning of the Revolution to over 42 livres in 1798, which breaks down to roughly two sous per issue. ¹⁶ While not a lot of money for the Parisian middle class, according to historian Jeremy Popkin, "at a time when a day laborer wage was normally around three livres, an individual subscription was clearly a luxury that most of the population could not afford." ¹⁷

If not all individuals could gain immediate access to newspapers, however, groups of individuals could. Individuals sometimes pooled their resources and purchased newspaper subscriptions as a group; others joined literary

clubs or reading rooms that subscribed to a whole host of periodicals. The poorer reading audience might take advantage of newsheets put on public display, while still others, literate or not, could have frequented various political clubs and politically active cafés where newspapers were frequently read aloud. ¹⁸ These practices meant, therefore, that the audience for the French Revolutionary press was much larger than a cursory survey of subscription lists might suggest. Popkin argues that through such means perhaps as many as ten Parisians had access to any given single copy of a newspaper during the period of the Directory (though the number drops rapidly for the provinces, where the ratio fell to 4:1). ¹⁹

The Characteristics of Propaganda

What these conditions mean is that gradually over the period of the *ancien régime*, and especially during the Revolution, a growing segment of the French public had become dependent on the free press for information about and an interpretation of the extraordinary events that enveloped them. Jeremy Popkin argues that the great variety of newspapers, appealing to all classes and reaching their audience "every day, at the same time ... in all public places," became "the almost obligatory diet of daily conversation." ²⁰ And it was these very conditions that made the French public ripe for manipulation by a skillful propagandist such as Napoleon Bonaparte. ²² As Jacques Ellul notes, "propaganda can play only on individuals more or less intensely involved in social currents. The isolated mountaineer or forester, having only occasional contact with society at the village market, is hardly sensitive to propaganda." ²² Instead it is the "current-events man" who is "a ready target for propaganda," and the Revolution—with its political debates, its social and economic tensions, and its wars—provided more than enough current events to attract the interest of French society. ²³ It was in this increasingly literate and politically charged environment that Napoleon Bonaparte began his public career as commander of the Army of Italy. And because of this environment, Bonaparte was able to manipulate the French press and its public to create a public image for himself as a revolutionary hero that would eventually enable him to overthrow the Directory in November 1799.

The Rhetorical Style of Napoleon Bonaparte

Active vs. Passive Voice

One of the first characteristics that distinguished Napoleon from his counterparts in the other French armies was his style of writing. The dispatches of his potential rivals were rarely patriotic or active and at best neutral or passive. Bonaparte's dispatches—plain, yet forceful, like Caesar's—were almost always patriotic and positive, written in the active voice. ²⁴ It was a prose style that appealed to and could be easily understood by the contemporary public, gaining much praise from contemporaries and near-contemporaries alike for its economy of language.

Notice, for example, a typical dispatch from General Beurnonville, commanding general of the Army of the Sambre and the Meuse during the late fall and early winter of 1796:

The division formerly known as Marceau and provisionally commanded by Brigadier General Hardy was attacked the day before yesterday by three enemy columns. One of these columns passed from the Seltz to Sieliegen-Loch and was directed against the Wurstat plateau; a second was directed against Nidder-Hulm; and a third against Oberenider. All the enemy have been repulsed: a squadron of the 2nd Regiment of Hussars, the 11th Regiment of Chasseurs and the 6th Cavalry distinguished themselves on the right, making four consecutive charges which forced the enemy to retreat beyond the Seltz. The enemy lost many men, and we have taken sixty prisoners. [25](#)

The first part of this dispatch is written in passive voice ("the division ... *was* attacked" and "all the enemy have been repulsed"), talking more about the Austrian forces than the French who carried the day.

Several weeks later, in late October, General Beurnonville wrote from Mulheim:

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I have the honor to give you an account of an attack that the enemy army made yesterday during the night of 29 and 30 vendémaire, at the bridgehead and isle of Neuwied. He attempted nothing less than to capture the garrison, to raze the defensive works, and finally to disrupt communications between the right and left wings of the army. This affair cost more than 4,000 enemy soldiers. [26](#)

While technically not written in the passive voice, the dispatch does not even mention the French. Again, it is the Austrians who initiate the conflict, and it is the enemy who are the focus of the report, not the French.

A similar lack of patriotic fervor can also be seen in a December dispatch from Moreau, commanding the Army of the Rhine and Moselle:

During the night of 10 and 11 of this month, the enemy attempted to carry out an assault on the bridgehead at Huningue. At about eleven o'clock in the evening, three columns directed against the sides, forming a half-moon, and hurled themselves against us, scaling and so forcing the fortifications that our troops

have been forced to abandon these works and have retreated in a fierce fight. [27](#)

The writing seems to emphasize the Austrian attack, not the French response to that attack. It is not just that the French have suffered a defeat, but that it is the enemy who initiates and controls the action; the French merely react passively to the events.

Use of First Person


Bonaparte's dispatches, on the other hand, glorified the actions of his soldiers and himself as a controller of events. As opposed to their counterparts in Germany, in Italy the commanding general and his soldiers were always masters of the moment. Recall for a moment Napoleon's 14 April 1796 correspondence with the Executive Directory, announcing the opening of the Italian campaign:

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The campaign of Italy has commenced. I am sending you a complete accounting of the battle of Montenotte.

After three days of movement to mislead us, General Beaulieu attacked with a division of 10,000 men the right of the [French] army that was to hold Voltri.

General Cervoni, who commanded the 70th and 99th demi-brigades there, endured the attack with the intrepidity characteristic of soldiers of liberty. I was not surprised by the true intentions of the enemy. The instant that I received information of the attack on the right, I ordered General Cervoni to wait out the night and to retreat by forced march, screening his movements from the enemy, to my center. [28](#)

Already several differences between Bonaparte's style and those of other commanding generals become apparent. Even though Napoleon shows the Austrians initiating the battle, [29](#) it is Bonaparte himself, with the ever-present "I," who is master of the moment and who takes decisive action: "I was not surprised..." and "I ordered General Cervoni..." This technique is used time and again in Bonaparte's correspondence with the Directory. Like Caesar in his *Commentaries*, Bonaparte garners the laurels of his army's successes for himself. In a 3 June 1796 letter to the Directors, Napoleon writes of his arrival at Verona: "I have arrived at this city, Citizen Directors, and will leave in the morning. It is very large and very beautiful. I am leaving a good garrison to hold the three bridges which cross the Adige  [Battle of Arcole](#) here." [30](#) Such use of the first person creates the impression that Bonaparte is everywhere and that he is the one primarily responsible for the victories of his army, an image reinforced in a his 19 November 1796 dispatch: "I am so harassed with fatigue, Citizen Directors, that I have been unable to report to you all the

military movements which preceded the Battle of Arcole." ³¹ Later in this same letter, the commanding general rushes to the front of a skirmish to rally his faltering soldiers: "I asked the soldiers if they were still the conquerors of Lodi; my presence produced on the troops the action which allowed me to take the passage [over the Adige]." ³² Here is a man, Napoleon seems to say of himself, who selflessly pushes himself to the limits of his abilities and whose presence at the right place and the right time are alone enough to achieve victory for France.

Use of Positive Imagery

Returning to his 14 April 1796 dispatch, one also discovers that Bonaparte's talent for dramatic and descriptive writing lay in emphasizing the decisive nature of his victories:

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During the night, General Laharpe, with all the troops of the right, took up position behind our last redoubt at Monte-Legino. One hour after midnight, I left with generals Berthier and Masséna, commissioner Salicetti, and troops from the center and the left and advanced on the flank and rear of the enemy.

At dawn on the twenty-second, Beaulieu, who had been reinforced, and Laharpe attacked each other with vigor and differing success, when General Masséna appeared and sowed death and destruction on the [enemy's] flank and rear, which was commanded by General Argenteau. The rout of the enemy was complete. Two of its generals, Roccavina and Argenteau, have been gravely wounded.

The losses of the enemy were between three and four thousand men, among the more than 2,500 prisoners were a colonel, eight or ten superior officers and several flags. Our losses came to 400 men. ³³

The differences between the style of Bonaparte and that of his counterparts should be obvious. While such phrases as "General Masséna appeared and sowed death and destruction" might be considered a literary flourish, it conveys what the dispatches from other armies failed to convey—namely the decisive nature of the French victory. Bonaparte's style was simple, it was forceful, it was dramatic, and it gained the attention of the French public.

Even on those occasions when a skirmish proved less than successful or when the campaigning had stalled, as at Mantua, Bonaparte managed to focus on something positive. Such was the case with his dispatch of 8 June

1796. Having driven the Austrians into the fortress of Mantua, Bonaparte attempted to seize the moment and take the fortress-city by sudden assault only to be stopped by a sudden barrage of Austrian cannon-fire:

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On the 16th at five o'clock in the morning, General Dallemagne and Colonel Lannes approached the faubourg Saint-Georges with 600 grenadiers. I myself went to La Favorite ... a half a league from the fortress. I sent forward a demi-brigade under General Sérurier to aid General Dallemagne who, perceiving the enemy in the trenches of Saint-Georges, attacked them, capturing the bridgehead and occupying the faubourg. Despite the canister-shot from the fortress, the grenadiers advanced in order on the causeway; they even formed a column to storm Mantua; and when someone pointed out the enemy batteries on the ramparts, they said: "At Lodi, there had been many more." But the circumstances were not the same; I had them withdraw. It was an extremely interesting day for us, and the advance guard performed well. The enemy lost a hundred men, more killed than taken prisoners; we lost two hundred men. [34](#)

Clearly Bonaparte and his army had suffered a setback, not unlike General Moreau's at the bridgehead of Huningue, but his dispatch focused on the bravery of the French soldiers and placed the reporting of a temporary check in the context of a larger success. Napoleon also cleverly drew attention away from his failure to capture this bridge leading into Mantua by refocusing the reader's attention on one of his more dramatic victories, in this case the Battle of Lodi. Even when reporting less than spectacular events, Bonaparte portrayed himself and his army as being in control of the situation, a trend that did not escape the editor of the *Messenger du Soir*, who noted that, "The Army of Italy always seems to be in the most favorable of situations." [35](#)

Another example of Bonaparte's ability to find something positive to report in trying circumstances can be found in his dispatches during the siege of Mantua. This fortress-city was the key to the conquest of Northern Italy, and after Bonaparte's stunning victories in early 1796, the Austrians under the command of Würmser made that fortress a continual source of frustration for Napoleon. [36](#) As long as the Austrians held that city, the range of Bonaparte's offensive was limited, and the peace the French so desperately wanted could not be achieved. [37](#) Between September 1796 and February 1797, with Mantua in Austrian hands, Napoleon was hamstrung as he conducted a monotonous siege. His dispatches to the Directory, however, did not reflect that tedium. Many frequently detailed small operations and skirmishes occurring in the vicinity of Mantua; others briefly described the general situation, and then went into greater detail regarding a specific event. An example of this latter type can be found in Napoleon's 28

December 1796 letter to the Directors:

The army of General Alvinzi is on the Brenta River and in the Tyrol; the army of the Republic is along the Adige River, and occupying a line from Monte-Baldo, La Corona, and Rivoli. Our advance guard is before Verona and a league before Porto-Legnago.

Mantua is surrounded with the utmost care. On the second of this month, General Dumas surprised a spy who entered the city [of Mantua]; he is an Austrian cadet who had been dispatched from Trent by Alvinzi. After much interrogation, he confessed that he was dispatch-carrier, and, effectively, he returned, twenty-four hours after (going to the privy) with a small cylinder that contained the attached letter from the Emperor. If this method of swallowing dispatches is not well known, I am sending you details to relay to our generals because the Austrians often use this method. Usually spies keep these cylinders in their bodies for several days, and if they have an upset stomach, they take care to recover the small cylinder, soak it in an elixir and reuse it. This cylinder was soaked in Spanish wax diluted in vinegar. [38](#)

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No doubt the members of the Executive Directory and French readers enjoyed reading about the lengths to which the Austrians were forced to resort to in order to get information in and out of a besieged Mantua. While such anecdotes are rare in Bonaparte's dispatches, he did usually try to make his official letters to the Directory informative, and, because of this, interesting. This was also important because Bonaparte realized that many of these dispatches would be released to the press, and in fact he intended many for public consumption. [39](#)

Use of Hyperbole

On occasion Napoleon would augment the achievements of his army in his reports. This is not to say that he falsified his reports; to have done so would have jeopardized the effectiveness of his propaganda campaign. For propaganda to be effective, as Jacques Ellul reminds us, it must always be based on fact. [40](#) Napoleon, however, always seemed to present the facts underlying his reports in the most positive way. Such is the case with the introductory paragraph of Bonaparte's dispatch announcing his victory at the Battle of Lodi: "I think that the passage of the Po will be the most audacious operation of the campaign; as with the battle of Millesimo, the action was most lively; but I must give you an account of the battle of Lodi." [41](#)

What follows in this lengthy letter is a matter-of-fact description of Austrian general Beaulieu's stubborn defense of the bridge over the Adda, ending with the statement that, "although, since the opening of the campaign, we have been in very hot actions in which it has been necessary for the army of the Republic to display boldness, none, however, approaches the terrible passage of the bridge at Lodi." ⁴² The excitement and vivacity of such dispatches, according to historian Guglielmo Ferrero, made it impossible for the Directory to suspect "that Montenotte, Dego, Ceva, Mondovi, and Cherasco were not 'brilliant victories,' and [see] Italy as already conquered." ⁴³ Rather than risk leaving it to the Directory or to the public to assess the importance of the battle, Napoleon, through his dispatches, consciously helped to create the myth of Bonaparte and of the invincibility of his army. ⁴⁴ According to the François Furet, "he [Bonaparte] left no one else the task of publicizing him: his dispatches, his proclamations, his correspondence with the Directory all reveal an extraordinary talent for getting himself noticed. At twenty-six, this man possessed military genius combined with taste and an intuitive understanding of public opinion." ⁴⁵ Before the end of 1796, the French public was calling Napoleon "the immortal Bonaparte," "the great man," "the new Hannibal," "the young Republican hero," "the conqueror of Italy," "the invincible," "*héros Italique*," and "the fortunate Bonaparte," in addition to comparing him with heroes of the classical past. ⁴⁶

Frequently Bonaparte was even seen as superior to the heroes of antiquity. The author of *Bonapartiana*, for example, later noted that:

People have compared Bonaparte to Caesar. However striking this comparison may be at first glance, it nevertheless suffers from several important exceptions. The vanquisher of Italy has over the conqueror of Gaul an austerity of manners and a love of public welfare that characterizes true heroism. Caesar worked for his own aggrandizement; Bonaparte works for the posterity of the French people. The goal of the former was what was useful for himself; the goal of the former is what is useful for all. ⁴⁷

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Still another author compared the triumphs of Bonaparte to those of both Hannibal and the Romans: "Neither proud Hannibal nor the Romans themselves caused such a fracas as the indefatigable Buonaparte." ⁴⁸

This phase of Bonaparte's propaganda campaign was working; his celebrity was growing, dispatch by dispatch and day by day. Already one can see the germ of the Napoleonic legend. Even in England, Bonaparte proved to be one of the most popular figures of the day, having captured the imagination of the age. ⁴⁹

Contemporary Opinions of Bonaparte's Style

The eloquence of Bonaparte's style in a 13 February 1797 letter to Cardinal Mattei proposing a treaty with the Pope was noticed and praised by the editor of the *Nouvelles Politiques*: [50](#)

While Buonaparte [sic.] has the reputation of publishing the prodigies of his genius and courage, he also presents himself as a man of great sensibility, whose continual triumphs have not gone to his head, and as a man whose continual feats on the battlefield have not hardened his heart.

He also distinguishes himself by his use of sentimental conveniences [such as the formal *vous*], which the absurd doctrine of equality has entirely extinguished among us.

Bonaparte's military correspondence echoes the brilliance of his valor; whether it has as its object peaceful or administrative dispositions, it is remarkable for the wisdom of its principles. If Bonaparte treats with cardinals, he shows them benevolence, decency toward their chief, and respect for religion. This is not a victor who dictates terms [lois]; he is a conciliator who pledges moderation to those who have not been able to resist force. [51](#)

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The editor of the *Gazette Française* expresses a similar praise in an editorial responding to a 31 March 1797 letter to Archduke Charles proposing peace: [52](#)

One asks in public, if Bonaparte, in writing to Prince Charles, would conquer this prince [by his wording] or the esteem of his compatriots, or perhaps a little of both.... This letter has dignity without ostentation and with a tone of sensibility which is pleasing in a conqueror. After having been a man of victories, he is on his way to becoming a man of peace. [53](#)

Already, by the close of the first Italian campaign, Bonaparte's style had attracted the attention and praise of men who made their livings by the pen. In an 1801 pamphlet, *Bonapartiana*, the author noted that "in all the letters of Bonaparte, one notes a franchise of style characteristic of military heroism, ... he speaks in every day language to make himself understood whether addressing his officers or inspiring his soldiers." [54](#) Later in the same pamphlet, the author noted that, "all the proclamations of Bonaparte are strong in things and in ideas."

Supplementing contemporary praise for his stylistic achievements, Bonaparte's near-contemporaries similarly lauded the future emperor's writing ability. Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve echoed the sentiments found in the *Bonapartiana*, calling Napoleon's style "simplicity itself." ⁵⁶ René Chateaubriand concluded that Bonaparte's literary style "gives the word of order to the universe. His bulletins have the eloquence of victory." ⁵⁷ Désiré Nisard, an eminent professor of literature, continued the praise, concluding that, "I would not be telling anyone anything [new] that in these beautiful dispatches from the Italian campaign, General Bonaparte was already a great writer. It is a trait he had in common with the great captains." ⁵⁸ Other critics found a ready comparison between Bonaparte's writing style and Caesar's in its brevity and impact. Armand Carrel, a nineteenth-century journalist and an associate of Adolphe Thiers noted, for example, that:

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After nearly two thousand years, the *Commentaries of Caesar* have met a man whose life has been even more active than Caesar's, whose destiny was even more extraordinary than Caesar's, and whose concise writing style is a distillation of Caesar's, making it more dramatic, more instructive, and more clear.

To write well, to know how to write briskly, clearly, logically what one has done with vigor, style, reason, and spirit came so naturally to Napoleon that he did not worry an instant about the comparison one might be tempted to make between his style and that of Caesar. ⁵⁹


Napoleon's Literary Education

It is easy to understand why Carrel made such comparisons, especially considering Napoleon's educational background. Latin classics were standard reading in French schools at the time, and Caesar was a popular figure for most of Bonaparte's generation. At Brienne, in particular, Caesar's *Commentaries* were required reading for the older students, as was the *Mort de César* from Voltaire's *Essai sur la Poésie épique*, and, of course, excerpts from Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. ⁶⁰ Yet while biographer Arthur Chuquet warns in his *La Jeunesse de Napoleon* against overestimating the depth of Napoleon's education in classical literature, Bonaparte's fascination with Plutarch, at least, is quite evident. ⁶¹ According to one anecdote, Pascal Paoli, the Corsican patriot and one-time idol of young Bonaparte, said to his young admirer: "You have nothing of the modern [about you]! You belong entirely to Plutarch!" ⁶² On another occasion, Napoleon took a trunk of books with him on leave to Corsica in 1787. Among the books included were works by Plato, Cicero, Livy, Tacitus,


and Plutarch. ⁶³ Years later, as his popularity in the French press grew following his victories in Italy, Bonaparte welcomed and consciously fostered comparisons between himself and Alexander, Caesar, and Hannibal (among other classical heroes), not only in the French press at large, but also in his own newspapers, in his patronage of the arts, and in his use of medals as propaganda devices. Evidently, Napoleon had learned his classical literature and history better than Chuquet believed.

The Nature of Bonaparte's Dispatches

Bonaparte's Domination of Press Coverage

Adding to the impact of Napoleon's propagandistic prose style was the cumulative effect of his reports as opposed to the reports from the other French armies. In February and March of 1796, the Army of Italy was just another French army, and a minor one at that. Most military news in *Le Moniteur* was dominated by Hoche's Army of the Coasts and the fighting in the Vendée; the Army of the Sambre and Meuse was also mentioned, but only generally, with no specific dispatches from the front. It was not until 31 March, with Jourdan's capture of Bonn and Düsseldorf, that the first major reports from the German front reached the Paris newspapers. It was not until over two weeks later that any news from Italy reached the Parisian press, and that was only a general report from Milan, announcing the mobilization of 90,000 Austrian and Piedmontese soldiers. ⁶⁴ This distribution of military coverage, however, changed after 25 April 1796, with Bonaparte's announcement that "the campaign of Italy has commenced." ⁶⁵ From this date on, news and dispatches from the Army of Italy came to dominate military and foreign news in the French press. Not only did Bonaparte's army appear in French papers more than any other army, but its appearance was also increasingly associated with victory. Between 22 September 1796 and 19 March 1797, for example, the right-wing *Nouvelles Politiques* mentioned news from four French armies: the Army of the Sambre and Meuse, the Army of the Rhine and Moselle, the Army of the  Army Comparison Alps, and Bonaparte's Army of Italy. Of the 152 issues in which these armies are mentioned, Bonaparte's army appeared 66 times, or over 43 percent—more than any other army. ⁶⁶ In 31 of these issues, Bonaparte announced some sort of victory. Another 15 times, the Army of Italy was shown to be active, marching toward the enemy or mopping up resistance. The balance comprises "passive" news of the army, where the army is inactive, encamped, or mentioned without details. Dispatches from the Army of the Sambre and Meuse reported only three victories and as many retreats in 47 appearances. ⁶⁷ The Army of the Rhine and Moselle reported eleven retreats or setbacks and only four victories in 36 appearances. ⁶⁸ News about Kellerman's Army of the Alps appeared in print only twice in this period, both times in passing. ⁶⁹ So much had Bonaparte and the Army of Italy been associated with military success that, by the summer of 1796, even other generals invoked images of Bonaparte's success to describe their own.

In a 7 July 1796 letter to the Directory, for example, General Moreau writes: "One could ... compare our march to that of the Army of Italy." [70](#)

Even more impressive was the coverage of  [Egyptian campaign](#) Napoleon's Egyptian campaign in the neo-Jacobin newspaper *Journal des Hommes Libres*. Between 19 April and 28 November 1798, Bonaparte's name was mentioned in some 54 issues (out of 217 days of coverage), or at least once every four days. [71](#) What makes this frequency so remarkable is that, during this period, Bonaparte was at sea and out of contact with France for weeks at a time. Such coverage was to a certain degree understandable by 1798, because Bonaparte's name had become a household word; he was the hero of Italy and the bringer of peace with the Treaty of Campo Formio and the Congress of Rastadt. There can be little doubt that this popularity was largely a product of the propaganda strategies discussed above.

The Birth of Bonaparte's Political Ambitions

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Through his dispatches and his proclamations to the Army of Italy, one can also witness, quite early in the Italian campaign, the awakening of Napoleon Bonaparte's political ambition. While attributing the origin of his ultimate political aspirations to the period immediately following the battles of Lodi or Arcole may be premature, certainly by the spring of 1797, as the first Italian campaign drew to a close, Bonaparte's political ambitions were evident. [72](#)

He was no longer content with being a general of the Republic, but had higher aspirations. At Mombello, Bonaparte's headquarters outside Milan, for example, the general made no attempt to conceal his ambition or his contempt for the Directory of 1797: "What I have done so far is nothing. I am only at the beginning of the career that lies before me. Do you suppose that I have triumphed in Italy for the mere aggrandizement of the Directory lawyers, the Carnots, the Barras of this world? What an idea!" [73](#) By late 1797, with the signing of the Treaty of Campo Formio, in which he redrew the map of Europe without consulting the Directors, Bonaparte hints at his ultimate ambitions in a letter to Miot de Mérito: "The Parisian lawyers who have been put in the Directory understand nothing of government. They are mean-minded men.... I very much doubt that we can remain in agreement much longer. They are jealous of me. I can no longer obey. I have tasted command and I would not know how to give it up." [74](#)

The Politicization of Napoleonic Correspondence

This increasing political ambition can easily be seen, not only in the private comments shown above, but also in the subtle transformation of his dispatches to the Executive Directory. While still primarily dealing with military operations, many were becoming more political in nature. Perhaps the best example of this can be found in his notorious proclamation of 26 *messidor*, an 5 (14 July 1797). This proclamation, while

reassuring in a sense to the Directory (Bonaparte had, after all, pledged the complete support of *his* army to the defense of the government and constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic), [75](#) it was also disconcerting because the government was becoming increasingly reliant upon a politically ambitious general for its continued existence:

Soldiers, today is the anniversary of 14 July. You see before you the names of our companions in arms who have died on the field of honor for the liberty of our country: they are examples for you. You owe yourselves entirely to the Republic; you owe yourselves entirely to the happiness of thirty million French; you owe yourselves entirely to the glory of the name that has received new brilliance by your victories.

Soldiers, I know that you are profoundly affected by the evils threatening France; but the country is not in any real danger. The same men are there who made it triumph over the European coalition. Mountains separate us from France; but if it were necessary, to maintain the constitution, to defend liberty, to protect the government and republicans, you would surmount them with the rapidity of eagles.

Soldiers, the government watches over the law that is entrusted to it. If royalists show themselves, they will be killed in a moment. Have no fear, and swear in the shadow of heroes who have died by our sides for liberty, let us swear on our new flags: War implacable on the enemies of the Republic and of the Constitution of the Year III. [76](#)

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The furor created by this proclamation when it appeared in the press can be readily imagined. The controversy surrounding this speech raged in Parisian newspapers for almost a week after it appeared. Royalists denounced the implications of this blatantly political speech, while government and republican newspapers hailed Bonaparte's gesture. The editor of the right-wing *Messenger du Soir* responded with an unfavorable comparison between Bonaparte and Caesar: "Will the *Corps Législatif* restrain itself from the accusations that the triumvirs have made against it? Is the Rubicon already crossed? Can one avoid putting the Republic at the feet of the dictator?" [77](#) An article in *Le Miroir* made a similar comparison between Bonaparte and Caesar, noting that one could no doubt find a Brutus at Tivoli. [78](#) The ultra-royalist *Invariable* responded even more vehemently, setting the record straight:

This vain scarecrow will not intimidate anybody. Buonaparte will

cross no mountain. His army is not up to it. [Its marching] is not up to the triumvirate; it is up to the nation. The army will not march on Paris without the consent of the *Corps Législatif*; it will not enter rebellion for the beautiful eyes or hump of Réveillére. The government is not threatened at all [by the royalists]; it is some of those who govern that threaten the *Corps Législatif*, but Buonaparte says nothing of this. It is not a question of royalists, but of Jacobins who want to resume their assassinations all over France. ... The constitution of 1795 has no need of his support. [97](#)

Thirteen days later the editor of the *Invariable* again cautioned his readers of Buonaparte's ambitions, this time warning of his plans to be made dictator of the Italian Republic. [80](#)

Meanwhile, the pro-government newspaper, the *Ami des Lois* denounced such attacks on the "Hero of Italy" by the "Conspirators of Clichy": "O posterity! You will avenge Buonaparte and the Army of Italy of the unjust passions, the base crimes, and the vengeful desires [of the Clichyens]. You will cancel the iniquitous sentence of these infamous royalists." [81](#)

Concluding his nearly page and a half article, the editor wrote:

O posterity! You reverse senseless judgments; you repair the outrages of villainy; you drag through the mire those who would destroy reputations, and you restore the memory of great men, momentarily besmirched by wickedness and hatred! We confide in you the glory of Buonaparte; we give to your severe and equitable court this dear and sacred deposit. Just as the love of justice and truth dictate to us today, your unchanging wisdom will doubtless approve of this hero's conduct, which preserved the liberty of his country. Posterity will unleash its furies on his enemies. [82](#)

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Far from threatening his country, according to Poultier, Buonaparte was its savior and would be vindicated by history. A week later and for two consecutive days, the quasi-official *Moniteur* printed a series of oaths sworn by various units of the Army of Italy, denouncing royalist threats and expressing loyalty to the government and to the Constitution. [83](#)

Yet the notorious speech of 14 July was not the first such profession of or exhortation to loyalty to the government; a similar statement appeared even earlier, without such fanfare. Toward the end of his 28 December 1796 report to the Directors, Buonaparte wrote:

I hear with true satisfaction that there is nothing more desired by the army than the preservation of the sacred constitution, which is

alone the refuge of liberty and the French people. Here one hates [what is going on at home], and one is ready to fight the new [royalist] revolutionaries whatever their purpose. [84](#)

Such themes echo throughout Bonaparte's political messages—support of the constitution, support of the government, and a readiness to fight the royalist factions in France to preserve the Revolution—and this is especially true in Bonaparte's own newspapers, as shall be seen later. With each victory, especially after Arcole, Bonaparte increased his influence within the Directory. He had all the right qualities: He appeared to be intensely republican; he owed his appointment to Barras; he knew how to win battles; and those victories did much to finance the government of the Directory. [85](#)

Here was a general whose achievements the unstable government could exploit. And after the *coup d'état* of 18 *fructidor* (3-4 September 1797), when Bonaparte's lieutenant, General Augereau, helped purge the government of royalists, the "*héros Italique*" became a political force to be reckoned with. [86](#)

These dispatches, which brought increasing fame to the Army of Italy and political clout to its commanding general, served other purposes as well—one obvious, the other more subtle. In a time before the telegraph and radio, these dispatches, carried by couriers on horseback, kept the government abreast of military developments on a variety of fronts. Dispatches from the Directors, in turn, carried orders to its generals, enabling the French government to conduct its war against the coalition powers. All commanding generals sent and received these reports and orders, but Napoleon used these dispatches for other purposes. One of these, as has been seen, was self-serving, to enhance his reputation; the others were military in nature.

The Strategic Use of Dispatches

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When evaluating the Italian campaign, one must always keep in mind the precariousness of Bonaparte's situation: his army was usually outnumbered and faced the possibility of attack by several armies at once. He was leading a relatively small army into a foreign land with little logistical or financial support from France. This latter fact meant that the Army of Italy had to supply itself in a conquered and potentially hostile land. Such necessities tended to anger local populations, weaken traditional sources of authority, and increase the likelihood of revolt, compounding Bonaparte's difficulties. [87](#)

Perhaps Guglielmo Ferrero sums up the situation best:

After his victory over Würmser [at Arcole], Bonaparte began to feel that he and his army were in a void. He could not stand by with folded arms while brigandage, anarchy, and hatred of the Revolution flourished, without compromising the security of his

little army. On the other hand, he could not, with only 60,000 men, besiege the first Austrian army in Mantua, thrust back the second that was preparing to invade the valley of the Po, intimidate the Italian governments and take their place in maintaining order in northern and central Italy. [88](#)

This anxiety can be seen plainly as early as his 2 October 1796 dispatch to the Directors:

The Republic of Venice is frightened; it plots with the King of Naples and the Pope. ... They are all armed and there are districts where the inhabitants are very courageous.... The King of Naples has 60,000 men out.... It is possible that, in concert with Austria and Rome, he may send a corps to Rome and afterwards to Bologna and Leghorn; this corps could be 15,000 strong and would greatly harass the French army. ... The King of Piedmont encourages the revolt of the barbets.... I did not expect that after having destroyed two armies of the Emperor in one campaign, he would send out another, stronger one. [89](#)

In a later dispatch to the Executive Directory, Bonaparte paints an even more somber picture of his situation: many of his best soldiers were wounded ("the heroes of Lodi, Millesimo, Castiglione, and Bassano have either died for their country or are in the hospital"); the army was again outnumbered by the Austrians; and Bonaparte feared the imminent loss of Italy. [90](#) By December, with Mantua still resisting siege and an Austrian army still threatening, one of the things Bonaparte feared most occurred: popular revolts against the French. [91](#)



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Aside from the few reinforcements reaching him from France, his scouring of the countryside for arms, munitions, and money, and his cracking down on pillaging (to remove an excuse for popular uprisings), [92](#) Bonaparte had at least one other weapon he could turn to—propaganda, directed both at his potential enemies and at his own soldiers. Here was a weapon that, if handled correctly, could have a multiplying effect on his army's meager resources. Bonaparte's army seemed to perform miracles, and the magnitude of its accomplishments baffled the mind, then as now. From the opening of the campaign, the King of Piedmont had been forced into submission in only fifteen days; in less than a month the Po valley had been invaded and Milan had been occupied.

Use of Dispatches for Morale-Building

Accordingly, Napoleon issued proclamations to the Army of Italy to remind them of their achievements and to encourage them to even greater feats. "Soldiers," he wrote on 26 April 1796, "you have, in fifteen days, won six victories, captured 21 flags, 55 pieces of artillery, many fortified places, conquered the richest part of Piedmont; you have captured 15,000 prisoners and killed or wounded more than 10,000 men." ⁹³ To their enemies, according to Ferrero, "the invader's army must have appeared almost supernatural." ⁹⁴ Bonaparte saw the maintenance of this illusion as part of his responsibility. It would give his enemies pause, and it would spur on his own soldiers by causing them to believe in their "miraculous" conquest of Italy and their own invincibility. In his order of the day of 13 May 1796, Bonaparte reminded his soldiers of the kind of performance expected of them. He used the attack on a small town near Mantua as an example: "The square of Pizzighettone, having been surrounded [by our troops], was attacked with the ordinary impetuosity of Republicans. The entire Austrian garrison was captured." ⁹⁵ The implication was that the enemy could not withstand even routine assaults from the Army of Italy. In his report to the Executive Directory following the Battle of Lodi, Bonaparte wrote:

I cannot give you a list of the men who have distinguished themselves by acts of valor because it would be necessary to name all the grenadiers and the carabineers of the vanguard. They play with and laugh at death. ... Nothing can equal their bravery, except the cheerfulness with which they carry out even the most forced marches. ⁹⁶

Following the Battle of Rivoli, with Mantua on the verge of surrender, Bonaparte urged his troops on to one last, great effort:

When the drums of combat have beaten, it is necessary to march straight at the enemy, your bayonets at the ready.... Soldiers! strive to be deserving of yourselves. I will say only two words to you, they will suffice for Frenchmen: Italy! Mantua! The peace of Europe, the happiness of your parents will be the result of your courage. Do once more what we have done so often before, and Europe will not contest our title of the bravest and most powerful nation in the world. ⁹⁷

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According to Ferrero, dispatches such as these had the desired effect: "The young soldiers in Italy ... believed in the appearances that were so flattering to their self-esteem and in the bombastic proclamations of their general to the effect that they achieved so rapid a victory because they were all heroes." ⁹⁸ Soon it was not just Bonaparte's soldiers who came to believe in their heroism. The French press began to assign to the Army of Italy such sobriquets as the "heroes of Italy," "the invincibles," and the "*brave Armée*

d'Italie." [99](#)

One side effect of this type of propaganda was the near fanatical loyalty of Bonaparte's troops to their commanding general. While the encouragement of such loyalty was not a new idea, before Napoleon (with the possible exception of Caesar), according to historian Jean Tulard, it "had never been put so systematically into practice." [100](#) Such fidelity would have important political ramifications in November 1799 when Napoleon launched his *coup d'état* against the Directory.

The Timing of Dispatches

Yet it was not only the content and the style of Napoleon's proclamations and dispatches that helped create his fame; he also benefited from well-timed press coverage. While sometimes the result of serendipity (such as in the days preceding his return from Egypt in 1799), his strategies were quite intentional. One of the most effective methods that Bonaparte used to manipulate the French press was to consciously prolong attention on his victories. [101](#) First, his dispatches called attention to his achievements, then Bonaparte skillfully extended their effect by sending trophies from his battles to Paris a few at a time, accompanied by key officers who sometimes spoke on behalf of the Army of Italy and its commanding general. In this way Bonaparte's name appeared before the public as frequently as possible, and it was almost always associated with triumph, creating an air of invincibility. [102](#)

The typical pattern for this strategy was to send a dispatch to the Directors, announcing a victory or series of victories, complete with details of the fighting. In the beginning months of the campaign, a letter describing the conduct of the Army of Italy, written by the military commissioner, Salicetti, typically accompanied Bonaparte's dispatches. [103](#) A day or so later, the report of chief-of-staff Berthier would arrive. These letters would then be followed by the arrival of selected generals to present captured flags and other trophies to the government and perhaps to give a public speech on the progress of the campaign in Italy, noting the bravery of individual soldiers. Following this, another officer might arrive in Paris with even more flags and trophies from the same victory. In this manner, Napoleon generated several weeks' worth of press coverage for one event and reinforced the illusion of his being perpetually victorious.

Such a pattern was not practiced in other armies, however. Many dispatches were signed by the chief-of-staff or even by divisional commanders. The important effect of this difference was that, more than with any other army, the achievements of the Army of Italy came to be associated with its commanding general, especially in the early phases of the campaign.

These strategies can perhaps be best seen in the weeks and months following the Battle of Rivoli. This key battle, the last Austrian attempt to raise the siege of Mantua, took place on 14-15 January 1797. Bonaparte, however, did not send his dispatch to the Directory until two days later. [104](#) His second dispatch, describing the fighting around Rivoli and the skirmish at La Favorite, was sent to Paris on 18 January. [105](#) The first report appeared in the Paris newspapers on 27 January. [106](#) The second dispatch appeared in the *Moniteur* on 30 January; the following day, a series of reports from Berthier, Napoleon's chief-of-staff, arrived and dominated the news for the next two days. [107](#) At this point, reports from Bonaparte and Army of Italy had dominated the news for almost a week (27 January to 1 February 1797), but Napoleon expanded his coverage with the timely arrival of flags and trophies from the battle.

On 7 February, Jean Baptiste Bessières, the commander of the Guides who had distinguished himself at Arcole, arrived in Paris to present eleven captured flags to the Directory. [108](#) Over the next two days, additional letters to the Executive Directory and to Carnot appeared in the papers, announcing new victories. [109](#) Next, Bonaparte experienced a public relations windfall—news of the surrenders of Padua and Mantua reached Paris and kept attention focused on the Army of Italy. [110](#) On 18 February, a month after the first dispatch was written, the Directory itself helped to keep attention squarely on Bonaparte by publicly honoring several of his generals, and two days later an extract from the *procès-verbal* of Bessières's presentation appeared in *Clef du Cabinet*. [111](#) Near the end of February, Bonaparte sent General Augereau to Paris with sixty additional flags from the capture of Mantua. The Executive Directory gladly accepted these trophies, noting the achievement of the Army of Italy: in just eleven months, it had won 64 combats and 27 battles. [112](#) So many flags and trophies from Italy now filled the halls of the Luxembourg Palace that the government caused them to be removed to the former *Eglise Saint-Sulpice*, appropriately renamed *Temple du Victoire*, so that they could be more accessible to the public. [113](#) The following day, yet more flags and trophies arrived, with more promised by Napoleon in a letter to the Directors. [114](#) Thus, in the month of February alone, Bonaparte so monopolized the French press that news of the Army of Italy appeared in newspapers for 15 out of 28 days. And while news from Italy slowed after March, it did not stop.

In April, it was the turn of General Kellerman to present 24 more flags. [115](#) This pattern of sending key officers bearing the trophies of his victories did not escape the attention of the journalists either. One pointed out that, perhaps, Bonaparte was reaping more glory than he deserved:


Bonaparte sends generals of the Army of Italy carrying captured flags to Paris, each one having his turn. Today is the turn of General Sérurier; he brings 22 captured flags of the Austrians and Venetians to the Directory. As one has taken the territory of Venice only to give it to the [Holy Roman] Emperor, one should perhaps give the Venetian flags to the Emperor in place of the ones taken from him, because these flags cannot really be considered—in good conscience—trophies of victory. [116](#)

It was not until 21 August, with Napoleon negotiating the Treaty of Campo Formio and with public attention focused elsewhere, that the last of the flags from the Battle of Rivoli were delivered to Paris, these by General Bernadotte. [117](#) The battle, one should remember, had occurred some seven months earlier.

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While strategies such as spacing out the delivery of captured flags and other trophies increased both Bonaparte's prestige and his political influence within the Directory, he also benefited from the accidental coincidence in the timing of his dispatches and actions with other events beyond his control. One of the first occasions of this serendipity came early during the Italian campaign. On the same day that Napoleon's dispatch about the crossing of the bridge at Lodi arrived in Paris, the Directors ordered a series of celebrations to commemorate the victories of all the French armies (the advance along the Rhine had not yet stalled, and the Vendée had only recently been pacified by Hoche). [118](#) This had the effect of reinforcing the importance of Bonaparte's most recent victory message. To a degree, it seemed as if the planned celebration was for the triumph of the Army of Italy alone. But such serendipity pales in comparison to the last series of dispatches arriving from the East prior to Bonaparte's return from Egypt.

Press Coverage of Bonaparte in Egypt

When evaluated in purely military terms,  [Egyptian campaign](#) Bonaparte's Egyptian campaign was an abject failure. Yet it served its commanding general well in several areas. First, it removed Bonaparte from immediate contact with a government noted for its corruption and from the series of military setbacks that followed the breakdown of the Treaty of Campo Formio. [119](#) Napoleon's reputation thus remained untarnished. Second, it heightened the legend of Bonaparte, by magnifying his achievements, both real and illusionary. [120](#) It also helped to foster the image of Bonaparte as an intellectual. Finally, the last dispatches from Egypt helped to solidify in the minds of the French the illusion of Bonaparte's invincibility, which paved the way for the *coup d'état* that swept away the less than invincible government of the Directory. In short, then, Bonaparte's Egyptian campaign was, by purpose and chance, a public

relations boon.

While in Egypt and more than at any other time in his career, Napoleon lacked control of his public relations. Too many factors over which he had no power interfered with his regular correspondence with the government, and thus with the publication of those dispatches in the French press. This was especially true after Horatio Nelson's victory at the Battle of the Nile, which virtually cut off the Army of the Orient from European contact. News to and from the army reached France too irregularly for Napoleon to continue the propaganda campaign he had begun in Italy.

Yet it is a testament to the efficiency of his Italian campaign that the public developed a seemingly insatiable desire to follow Bonaparte's activities and to know everything about him—so much so that rumors could meet that demand in the absence of reports. And it is further testament to the effectiveness of that earlier propaganda campaign that the rumors that did develop were generally those of triumph, not disaster. Such rumors began almost before Bonaparte's expedition was out of French waters.

Rumors of Bonaparte's Destination

Among the first subjects for these rumors was the goal of the expedition. What was Bonaparte's target? [121](#) In the absence of verifiable facts, the French press attempted to answer these questions with pure speculation. As of 27 April 1798, most journalists believed Napoleon's destination was the Indies, but other places were still held up as possible targets, including the Nile, the Tigris and Euphrates, or even the Ganges River, with the editor of *Clef du Cabinet* writing that "the Tricolor may soon be floating over these rivers as it floats over the Rhine, the Meuse, and the Adige." [122](#)

By mid-June, the press was certain of Napoleon's destination: it was Gibraltar. On 12 June, the left-wing *Journal des Hommes Libres* cautiously announced that a Toulouse newspaper had reported that Bonaparte had captured Gibraltar in a surprise attack. [123](#) Other newspapers, however, correctly placed the Army of the Orient in Maltese waters, and on 3 July, the first confirmed reports arrived, detailing Napoleon's capture of the island of Malta. [124](#)




This news and subsequent reports occupied the French press for five days and continued Bonaparte's unbroken string of victories.

Naval Disaster and Bonaparte's Success

The next news of the Egyptian campaign was of Bonaparte's landing at Alexandria and of Nelson's great victory at Aboukir Bay, but even with this crushing defeat, Napoleon's reputation emerged unscathed. As with the question of his destination, the rumors of the French naval disaster

permeated the French press well before Bonaparte's official reports could present his version of the story. By early August, unconfirmed reports placed the Army of the Orient at Alexandria, with official reports following several weeks later. [125](#)

News of Nelson's victory proved more disturbing, especially with the number of detailed reports coming from English sources. Initially, the myth of Bonaparte managed to influence the circulation of rumors. On 16 August, for example, the editors of *Journal des Hommes Libres* cautiously reported that the French were victorious, but by the following day, the magnitude of the French disaster could not be denied as unconfirmed details trickled and then flowed in. [126](#) By the time official reports of the battle reached France, they were moderated by additional reports of a series of French land victories. To a great degree, the combining of battle reports was a conscious strategy employed by Bonaparte to lessen the impact of negative news, and he would use it effectively throughout his career. [127](#) The first dispatches from Bonaparte (written in July) appeared in mid-October and dominated the news for the next week. They focused on his landings and battles and his relationships with the Egyptians, always portraying Bonaparte as a benevolent conqueror and, as with his dispatches from Italy, as being always in control of the situation. [128](#) When it came to  [Battle of the Nile](#) describing the Battle of the Nile, however, Bonaparte added at the end of a letter that the defeat was the result of orders not followed, and he blamed the French loss on the shortcomings of Vice Admiral François Brueys. [129](#) By its proximity within the dispatch, this disaster was contrasted with Napoleon's triumphs at Alexandria, Cairo, and the Battle of the Pyramids. [130](#) It was almost as if the destruction of the French fleet had no effect on the conduct of the campaign.

Speculation about Bonaparte's Activities

After the Battle of the Nile and as a result of the British blockade, reports to France from Egypt were few. Without regular news, the French press again turned to rumor to satisfy the desire for news about Bonaparte, and once again, Bonaparte's mystique of invincibility ensured that most of these rumors were positive. [131](#) On 5 November, newspaper articles claimed that, "Bonaparte has been impeded at Jerusalem [and] at Saint-Jean d'Arc, ... but has begun the conquest of all Syria. Our troops, having defeated consecutively the forces of the Pasha, are entering into Damascus ... and are heading for the Euphrates to take Basra and then to Pakistan. This news has plunged the Neapolitan court into consternation." [132](#) Others claimed that news from Bonaparte showed that "all is well," that the French army was being reinforced by a "great number of Arabs and Jews," and that "we have entirely disarmed the Mamelukes." [133](#) Yet another article reported that Bonaparte was only 85 leagues from Constantinople, "at the head of 200,000 troops of Greeks, Arabs, Armenians, Jews, and Egyptian soldiers—

not counting the French." [134](#) In the absence of regular, confirmed reports, these fantastical stories greatly overshadowed the occasional reports indicating that the campaign was less than a success. In fact, pessimistic news about Bonaparte's failed siege at Saint-Jean d'Arc was discounted by the editors of the *Clef du Cabinet*. On 23 July 1799, for example, the editors cautioned its readers to be skeptical of news produced by "France's enemies" about Bonaparte in Egypt, including the latest reports that he had been defeated, wounded, and that he had lost eight generals during the siege. Similar warnings were issued in later issues. [135](#) That Bonaparte could be anything but victorious had become inconceivable for the French public.

Bonaparte's Return from Egypt

These illusions were confirmed in October 1799, when a series of unofficial reports announced Bonaparte's stunning victory against the Turks at Aboukir Bay on 25 July. On 3 October, the *Ami des Lois* published a report from an "officer of the Army of Egypt" that Bonaparte had lifted the siege of Saint-Jean d'Arc to meet a 40,000-man Turkish army. The resulting battle was a complete French victory, with much booty captured, and two days later similar news (via Constantinople) was reported in *Clef du Cabinet*. [136](#)

On 6 October, as the first of Bonaparte's dispatches was made public, the *Journal des Hommes Libres* called attention to a recent session of the Council of Five Hundred, which, upon hearing that Bonaparte had captured 200 flags, proclaimed that "Army of the Orient, ... France expresses its immortal gratitude to you." [137](#) For the next week, dispatches and other documents from Napoleon again dominated the pages of the French press. Many, such as his 28 *floréal* Proclamation to the Army of the Orient, even managed to transform the failed siege at Saint-Jean d'Arc and retreat from Syria into the greatest of victories, claiming that, "You found there a new occasion for glory." [138](#) This was quickly followed on 11-12 October by the first of many installments of Berthier's "Relations de l'Expédition de Syrie," which chronicled the Egyptian campaign and glorified its commanding general, and by official reports describing Napoleon's victory at the Battle of Aboukir Bay. [139](#)

What makes this avalanche of good news from Egypt important is not only the reports of victory, but also the timing of their arrival in France and of their public release. For just over a week, these reports reinforced the Napoleonic legend in the minds of the French, and they did so at a time when domestic and military events had generated great uncertainty. [140](#) It was at this moment that Bonaparte made his triumphal return from Egypt. News of his arrival at Fréjus thrilled the French on 14 October:

Bonaparte, the hero who began this series of triumphs and who has been made so glorious, returns victorious from the Orient; he is at Toulon, and the Directory has just received news of his

arrival. Victory, who has never abandoned this hero, seems to have wanted him to return to his country victorious. [141](#)

On the following day, the editors of the *Ami des Lois* wrote that Napoleon's return will "redouble the ardor of our warriors and invigorates the French people." [142](#) To say that Bonaparte enjoyed a hero's welcome is an understatement—every village along his route to Paris turned out to greet and cheer him. [143](#) And while "accidental," the timing of Napoleon's return and of his reports of victory could not have been better if they had been planned. They are again further evidence of the effectiveness of his propaganda campaigns. [144](#) By October 1799, all France seemed to view Bonaparte as its savior and could deny him nothing. [145](#) On 9-10 November, France tacitly accepted a new government with Napoleon Bonaparte as its head, a *coup d'état* largely made possible by a campaign to manipulate the French press and public opinion begun over two and a half years earlier by the newly appointed commanding general of the Army of Italy.

Bonaparte's Lack of Control Over Press Releases

For all the sophistication and success of this propaganda campaign, what is remarkable is the fact that, ultimately, Bonaparte never had absolute control over which, if any, of his dispatches would appear in the newspapers. He was dependent upon the Directory's *Bureau Politique* for determining which dispatches would be released to the press and when they would be released; [146](#) and, to a lesser extent, he was also dependent on the editors of the various newspapers for including those releases in their coverage.

When one reflects upon the larger history of France at this time, however, it is not surprising that Bonaparte and the Directory developed their symbiotic relationship. As Ferrero succinctly states, "The Directory, a spurious government lacking a principle of right, had to seek its support in the illusions of the masses, and was only too ready to believe in the romantic vision that was forming [in Italy] and to set an example by believing in it." [147](#) The Directory needed Napoleon as much as Napoleon needed the Directory, and each party exploited the other until Bonaparte had become so popular that he could end the partnership and do away with the Directory itself. Perhaps the best example of this symbiosis can be found in the release of Bonaparte's 14 July 1797 Proclamation to the Army of Italy and the political intrigues of the Directory associated with that period. What the public did not know in late July 1797 was that the Executive Directory was planning a *coup d'état* against itself to purge the government of the royalists who had benefited the most from the springtime elections. [148](#) Bonaparte's was a speech that could be exploited in the months before the purge to build public support for the government. [149](#)

In ways such as this, any of Napoleon's dispatches and achievements could be exploited for purposes other than for the sole benefit of their author. And while this mutually beneficial relationship also aided Bonaparte, he did not have the control over the press that he would have liked. The same cannot be said, however, about the six newspapers founded or directly influenced by Bonaparte. As will be seen, these publications would prove to be the autonomous instruments with which Napoleon could express and develop his political ideas without their being usurped by others for different purposes.

Notes:

Note 1: Napoleon Bonaparte, *Correspondence de Napoléon Ier*, Vol.1 (Paris: Henri Plon, 1858), 118, [number 91](#). Hereafter abbreviated *Corr.* followed by the volume number, page number, and by the appropriate document number. [Back.](#)

Note 2: *Corr.* I: 118, [no. 91](#). See also David G. Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1966), 53; J. M. Thompson, *Napoleon Bonaparte* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952); and Jean Tulard, *Napoleon: The Myth of the Savior*, trans. Teresa Waugh (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), 57. While this proclamation is questionable at best (and fictitious at worst), Jean Tulard does argue that, while this particular proclamation was never issued to the entire *Armée d'Italie*, something similar might well have been said to the various regiments and demi-brigades individually addressed by the new commanding general. [Back.](#)

Note 3: *Gazette nationale, ou le Moniteur universel* (Paris), 6 floréal, an 4 (25 April 1796); cf. *Corr.* I: 161, [no. 148](#); and *Messenger du Soir* (Paris), 5 floréal, an 4 (24 April 1796). [Back.](#)

Note 4: *Le Moniteur*, 6 floréal, an 4 (25 April 1796); cf. *Corr.* I: 163, [no. 148](#). 14 April 1796 on the Gregorian calendar translates to 25 *germinal*, an 4 on the revolutionary calendar. [Back.](#)

Note 5: Antoine-Christophe Salicetti, a fellow Corsican and former member of the Convention, was to greatly aid the early career of Napoleon Bonaparte. Among other things, it was Salicetti who first recommended young Captain Buonaparte [the original spelling is intentional] to Augustin Robespierre, the younger brother of Maximilien, to serve as the chief artillery officer for the army besieging Toulon in 1793. That event, of course, resulted in Buonaparte's promotion to brigadier general and marked the beginning of his public career. [Back.](#)

Note 6: J. Gilchrist and W. J. Murry, eds., *The Press in the French Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), 1. [Back.](#)

Note 7: Jack Richard Censer, *Prelude to Power: The Parisian Radical Press*,

1789-1791 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 8-9. Censer also notes that French libraries house more than 1,400 titles for the entire Revolutionary decade (1789-1799). By comparison, London, a city of over 1,000,000 and having a long history of free press, had only 22 newspapers in 1790 (10-11). See also Hugh Gough, *The Newspaper Press in the French Revolution* (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1988), 44. [Back.](#)

Note 8: Gough, *Newspaper Press*, 5 and 35-36; Censer, *Prelude to Power*, 5, 8-11; and Jeremy D. Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France, 1789-1799* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 19-21. Because of the ban on political reporting, many Parisians turned to the foreign newspapers, such as the *Gazette de Leyde*, for their domestic political news; Gilchrist and Murry, 4. See also Jean-Paul Bertaud, "Histoire de la Presse et Révolution," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 285 (July-September 1991): 287-88. Of the 515 newspapers examined by Jack Censer, the most important 138 appeared daily; another 80 appeared weekly; a further 100 appeared several times per week, and 89 appeared either bi-weekly or monthly (Censer, *Prelude to Power*, 8-9). [Back.](#)

Note 9: Gough, *Newspaper Press*, 5. See also Jeremy D. Popkin, *The Right-Wing Press in France, 1792-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 3. [Back.](#)

Note 10: Gough, *Newspaper Press*, 45; Popkin, *Right-Wing Press*, 3--4; and Gilchrist and Murry, *Press in the French Revolution*, 1. [Back.](#)

Note 11: Gough, *Newspaper Press*, 36. As François Furet, Keith Baker, Lynn Hunt and others have argued, the French Revolution ushered in the birth of our modern political culture, of which the press is an integral part. See, for example, the important series of conference proceedings published by Pergamon Press between 1986 and 1989 under the collective title *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*. [Back.](#)

Note 12: Gough, *Newspaper Press*, 4; and Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, 24. [Back.](#)

Note 13: Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, 80; and Gough, *Newspaper Press*, 195. [Back.](#)

Note 14: Gough, *Newspaper Press*, 195. [Back.](#)

Note 15: Gough, *Newspaper Press*, 195. [Back.](#)

Note 16: Gilchrist and Murry, *Press in the French Revolution*, 10; and Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, 81. [Back.](#)

Note 17: Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, 81. Popkin found that even newspapers designed for a poorer audience, such as the weekly *Feuille villageoise*, were beyond the range of most individual laborers. [Back.](#)

Note 18: Gough, *Newspaper Press*, 197-98; and Popkin, *Revolutionary News*,

80-81 and 84-92. [Back.](#)

Note 19: Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, 84. On at least one occasion, newspapers even exceeded this 10:1 reader-to-copy ratio. According Gilchrist and Murry, the *Feuille villageoise* had "an estimated reading public of 200,000 to 300,00," yet had only about 16,000 subscribers (40). This converts to a ratio of between 12:1 and almost 19:1. [Back.](#)

Note 20: Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, 3. [Back.](#)

Note 21: See, in particular, Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965). In many respects this is the definitive work on propaganda, dealing particularly well with the effects of propaganda in the twentieth century, but giving a historical summary of the social phenomenon as well. Though brief, Konrad Kellen's introduction is especially good. [Back.](#)

Note 22: Ellul, *Propaganda*, 49. [Back.](#)

Note 23: Ellul, *Propaganda*, 47. [Back.](#)

Note 24: In his definitive study of the military press prior to and during the French Revolution, Marc Martin likewise hints at the stylistic differences between Bonaparte's dispatches and those of his potential rivals. See Marc Martin, *Les Origines de la Press Militaire en France (1770-1799)* (Vincennes: Ministère de la Défense, 1975), 296. [Back.](#)

Note 25: *Gazette Française*, 18 vendémiaire, an 5 (9 October 1796). The *Gazette Française* was a right-wing royalist newspaper, with a circulation of about 1,700, that was published from 1792-97 (Popkin, *Right-Wing Press*, 178 and 212). It should be noted that when Jourdan commanded this army, his dispatches tended to be written in an "active" voice. [Back.](#)

Note 26: *Le Moniteur*, 12 brumaire, an 5 (2 November 1796). *Gazette Nationale ou le Moniteur Universal*, a moderate, informational newspaper with over 8,000 subscribers in 1792, was founded in 1789 and ran through the entire period, achieving the status of newspaper of record (Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, 33 and Gough, 211). [Back.](#)

Note 27: *Le Moniteur*, 19 frimaire, an 5 (9 December 1796). The French recaptured the bridge in February 1797. See *Le Moniteur*, 24 pluviôse, an 5 (12 February 1797). [Back.](#)

Note 28: *Le Moniteur*, 6 floréal, an 4 (25 April 1796); and *Messenger du Soir*, 5 floréal, an 4 (24 April 1796); cf. *Corr.* I: 161-62, [no. 148.](#) [Back.](#)

Note 29: See Guglielmo Ferrero, *The Gamble: Bonaparte in Italy*, trans. Bertha Pritchard and Lily C. Freeman (New York: Walker and Company, 1961). In re-evaluating Bonaparte's campaign, Ferrero stresses that the battle was not a French offensive action. [Back.](#)

Note 30: *Le Moniteur*, 29 prairial, an 4 (17 June 1796); cf. *Corr.* I: 440, [no. 559](#). [Back](#).

Note 31: *Le Moniteur*, 12 frimaire, an 5 (2 December 1796); cf. *Corr.* II: 147, [no. 1196](#). [Back](#).

Note 32: *Le Moniteur*, 12 frimaire, an 5 (2 December 1796); cf. *Corr.* II: 116, [no. 1196](#). [Back](#).

Note 33: *Le Moniteur*, 6 floréal, an 4 (25 April 1796); cf. *Corr.* I: 143, [no. 148](#); and *Messenger du Soir*, 5 floréal, an 4 (24 April 1796). [Back](#).

Note 34: *Le Moniteur*, 29 prairial, an 4 (17 June 1796); cf. *Corr.* I: 461-62, [no. 587](#). [Back](#).

Note 35: *Messenger du Soir*, 15 brumaire, an 5 (5 November 1796). [Back](#).

Note 36: Thompson, *Napoleon Bonaparte*, 86. [Back](#).

Note 37: For a summary of this phase of the Italian campaign, see Chandler, *Campaigns*, 88-113. [Back](#).

Note 38: *Le Moniteur*, 17 nivôse, an 5 (16 January 1797); cf. *Corr.* II: 259, . [Back](#).

Note 39: *Gazette Française*, 6 fructidor, an 4 (23 August 1796). Introducing a dispatch from Bonaparte, the editor writes: "General Bonaparte addressed to the Directory the following, destined for the journalists" [*italics mine*]. [Back](#).

Note 40: Ellul, *Propaganda*, 52-57. [Back](#).

Note 41: *Ami des Lois*, 30 floréal, an 4 (19 May 1796); *Gazette Française*, 30 floréal, an 4 (19 May 1796); and *Le Moniteur*, 1 prairial, an 4 (20 May 1796); cf. *Corr.* I: 312, [no. 382](#). [Back](#).

Note 42: *Le Moniteur*, 1 prairial, an 4 (20 May 1796); cf. *Corr.* I: 314, [no. 382](#). For an interesting take on this "terrible" crossing, see Ferrero, where one of his major points in a revisionist thesis of Bonaparte's Italian campaign is that the first phase of the campaign had less to do with Napoleon's brilliance than with an exhausted Piedmont, which was looking for an excuse to withdraw from the war. As a result, with the exception of Bonaparte's first battle, at Montenotte, most of the battles before Arcole were only minor affairs or strategic maneuverings (59). [Back](#).

Note 43: Ferrero, *The Gamble*, 47. In a long letter dated 18 May 1796 from the Executive Directory to Bonaparte, for example, the Directors laud Bonaparte's victory at Lodi: "You know how to make use of a victory, and these continuous and rapid successes promise France the conquest of almost the whole of Italy and the immense resources which this great and rich peninsula contains." See A. Debidour, comp., *Recueil des Actes du Directoire Exécutif: Procès-verbaux, Arrêtés, Instructions, Lettres, et Actes Divers*, vol. 2 (Paris:

Imprimerie Nationale, 1910-1917), 415-419. [Back.](#)

Note 44: Ferrero, *The Gamble*, 59-60. [Back.](#)

Note 45: François Furet, *Revolutionary France, 1770-1880*, trans. Antonia Nevill (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 187; cf. François Furet, *The French Revolution, 1770-1814*, trans. Antonia Nevill (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 187. [Back.](#)

Note 46: Ferrero, *The Gamble*, 60; cf. *Ami des Lois*, 9 *floréal*, an 4 (28 April 1796); *Clef du Cabinet*, 17 *floréal*, an 4 (6 May 1796); *Clef du Cabinet*, 8 *messidor*, an 4 (26 June 1796); *Ami des Lois*, 2 *fructidor*, an 4 (August 1796); *Clef du Cabinet*, 14 *vendémaire*, an 5 (5 October 1796); *Clef du Cabinet*, 21 *brumaire*, an 5 (11 November 1796); *Clef du Cabinet*, 23 *brumaire*, an 5 (13 November 1796); *Messenger du Soir*, 7 *frimaire*, an 5 (27 November 1796); *Messenger du Soir*, 8 *floréal*, an 5 (28 April 1797); *L'Invariable*, 19 *messidor*, an 5 (7 July 1797). [Back.](#)

Note 47: D'aval, *Bonapartiana, ou recueil des reposes ingénieuses ou sublime, actions héroïques et faits memorable de Bonaparte* (Paris: Ches Pillot, Frères, an 9), 30-31. [Back.](#)

Note 48: Anon., *L'Entrevue du pape Sixte-Quint avec le général en chef Buonaparte*, (Paris: Imprimerie Expédition, n.d.), 2-3; Salle des Imprimés, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. [Back.](#)

Note 49: *Clef du Cabinet*, 18 *vendémaire*, an 5 (9 October 1796); and *Messenger du Soir*, 19 *prairial*, an 5 (7 June 1797). [Back.](#)

Note 50: See *Le Moniteur*, 5 *ventôse*, an 5 (23 February 1797); cf. *Corr.* II: 424-25, [no. 1493](#). In this letter Bonaparte writes: "I know that his Holiness has fallen. I sincerely wish to prove to all Europe the moderation of the Executive Directory of the French Republic, to accord him five days to send a negotiator with full powers, to come to me at Foligno, where I would like to contribute and give particular proof of the consideration I have for the Holy See." [Back.](#)

Note 51: *Nouvelles Politiques* (Paris), 14 *vendémaire*, an 5 (4 March 1797). *Nouvelles Politiques* was a constitutional monarchist paper, but not necessarily royalist (Popkin, *Right-Wing Press*, 15). It possessed a circulation of 5-6,000 according to the *Clef du Cabinet* (Paris), 10 *brumaire*, an 6 (31 October 1797). [Back.](#)

Note 52: See *Le Moniteur*, 28 *germinal*, an 5 (17 April 1797); cf. *Corr.* II: 436-37, [no. 1663](#). Bonaparte begins his letter: "Monsieur le Général-en-chef, brave soldiers make war, but desire peace. Has not this situation endured for six years? Have we not killed enough and caused enough sadness for humanity?" [Back.](#)

Note 53: *Gazette Française*, 29 *germinal*, an 5 (18 April 1797). [Back.](#)

Note 54: D'aval, 21-22. [Back.](#)

Note 55: D'aval, 30. [Back.](#)

Note 56: Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve as quoted in A. Périvier, *Napoléon Journaliste* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Compagnie, 1918), 10. [Back.](#)

Note 57: François René de Chateaubriand as quoted in Périvier, *Napoléon Journaliste*, 15. [Back.](#)

Note 58: Désiré Nisard as quoted in Périvier, *Napoléon Journaliste*, 12. [Back.](#)

Note 59: Armand Carrel as quoted in Périvier, *Napoléon Journaliste*, 8. [Back.](#)

Note 60: F. G. Healy, *The Literary Culture of Napoleon* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1959), 16-17. For a broader view of the influence of classical literature in shaping the revolutionary generation, see Harold T. Parker, *The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolution: A Study in the Development of the Revolutionary Spirit* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965). [Back.](#)

Note 61: Healy, *Literary Culture*, 19-20; and F. Etori, "Pascal Paoli: Modèle de Jeune Bonaparte," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 43 (January-March 1971): 47. [Back.](#)

Note 62: Etori, "Pascal Paoli," 54. [Back.](#)

Note 63: Healy, *Literary Culture*, 39. [Back.](#)

Note 64: *Le Moniteur*, 11 *germinal*, an 4 (31 March 1796). In fact, for most of the month, *Le Moniteur* was dominated by news of the government and the sessions of its various branches' only about one-fourth of the paper's four folio pages are devoted to "other" news. [Back.](#)

Note 65: *Le Moniteur*, 6 *floréal*, an 4 (25 April 1796). [Back.](#)

Note 66: *Nouvelle Politiques*, 22 September 1796 to 19 March 1797. [Back.](#)

Note 67: Future Marshal Jean-Baptiste Jourdan would command the Army of the Sambre and Meuse until late September 1796, when he took ill. He was replaced temporarily by Beurnonville, who in turn was replaced in December by Jean Moreau (who for a brief time commanded both the Army of the Sambre and Meuse and the Army of the Rhine and Moselle). In spring 1797, the conqueror of the Vendée, Lazare Hoche, replaced Moreau, until his death later in September. [Back.](#)

Note 68: During this entire period, Jean Moreau commanded the Army of the Rhine and Moselle. [Back.](#)

Note 69: *Nouvelle Politiques*, 10 *fructidor*, an 5 to 1 *germinal*, an 5 (22 September 1796 to 19 March 1797). The future Marshal François Kellerman commanded the Army of the Alps until it was absorbed by Bonaparte's Army of Italy in late-Spring 1797. [Back.](#)

Note 70: *L'Historien* (Paris) 28 messidor, an 4 (16 July 1796). [Back.](#)

Note 71: *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 27 germinal, an 6 to 16 frimaire, an 7 (19 April 1798 to 28 November 1798). This newspaper had a circulation of 3,500 (Popkin, *Right-Wing Press*, 178). [Back.](#)

Note 72: Tulard, for example, traces the origin of Bonaparte's political ambitions from the battle at Lodi (*Myth*, 62). The Battle of Lodi was fought early in the campaign on 10 May 1796, and the Battle of Arcole, which repulsed the last Austrian attempt to break the siege of Mantua, was fought on 14-15 January 1797. See Chandler, *Campaigns*, for a summary of the entire Italian campaign. [Back.](#)

Note 73: Furet, *Revolutionary France*, 189; cf. Furet, *French Revolution*, 189; Owen Connelly, *The French Revolution/Napoleonic Era* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 200; Owen Connelly, *The Epoch of Napoleon* (Huntington, NY: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1980), 19; and R. Ben Jones, *Napoleon: Man and Myth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1977), 79. [Back.](#)

Note 74: Napoleon Bonaparte, *Pensées politiques et sociales*, ed. by Adrien Dansette (Paris: Flammarion, 1969), 409. [Back.](#)

Note 75: Bonaparte's use of the possessive when referring to the Army of Italy quickly attracted the attention of the right-wing press. An editorial in the 9 thermidor, an 4 (27 July 1796) issue of *Gazette Française*, for example, condemned the political implications of this practice. [Back.](#)

Note 76: *Clef du Cabinet* (Paris), 5 thermidor, an 5 (23 July 1797); *L'Invariable*, 5 thermidor, an 5 (23 July 1797); *Messenger du Soir*, 5 thermidor, an 5 (23 July 1797); and *Le Moniteur*, 5 thermidor, an 5 (23 July 1797); cf. *Corr.* III: 239-40, [no. 2010](#). This proclamation was sent to the Directory as an attachment to Bonaparte's 15 July dispatch. Evidently the *général-en-chef* was pleased with his work, writing to the Directors: "You will find enclosed a proclamation I have made to the army; it has produced the best effect. There is not a single man here who would not rather perish with arms in his hands than be assassinated in a Parisian cul-de-sac" (*Corr.* III: 243, [no. 2014](#)). [Back.](#)

Note 77: *Messenger du Soir*, 5 thermidor, an 5 (23 July 1797). As Jeremy Popkin points out, this newspaper had warned of "Bonaparte's dictatorial ambitions as early as March 1796," in part, because of his key participation in the famous "whiff of grapeshot" incident, when he turned cannon on a Parisian mob and saved the Directory (*Right-Wing Press*, 86). See also *Ami des Lois*, 7 floréal, an 4 (26 April 1796) [Back.](#)

Note 78: *L'Ami des Lois*, par Poulthier, *Représentant du Peuple* (Paris), 17 thermidor, an 5 (4 August 1797). [Back.](#)

Note 79: *L'Invariable, Journal de Politique et de Littérature*, par M. Royou

(Paris), 5 *thermidor*, an 5 (23 July 1797). [Back](#).

Note 80: *L'Invariable*, 18 *thermidor*, an 5 (5 August 1797). [Back](#).

Note 81: *Ami des Lois*, 15 *thermidor*, an 5 (2 August 1797). For a superb article, placing this pro-government, republican newspaper in its historical context, see Jeremy Popkin, "The Directory and the Republican Press: The Case of the *Ami des Lois*," *History of European Ideas* 10 (1989): 429-42. [Back](#).

Note 82: *Ami des Lois*, 15 *thermidor*, an 5 (2 August 1797). [Back](#).

Note 83: *Le Moniteur*, 25 and 26 *thermidor*, an 5 (12 and 13 August 1797), These republican responses, including letters from the Army of Italy, dominated the news, occupying more than three folio pages (out of the normal two-day total of eight). [Back](#).

Note 84: *Le Moniteur*, 17 *nivôse*, an 5 (16 January 1797); cf. *Corr.* II: 204, [no. 1319](#). [Back](#).

Note 85: Martyn Lyons, *France Under the Directory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 54. [Back](#).

Note 86: Tulard, *Myth*, 62-64. When Augereau arrived in Paris, he did so bearing a letter from Bonaparte to Barras in which Bonaparte made known his support of Barras and the government: "If you fear the Royalists, call for the Army of Italy who will swiftly wipe out the Chouans, the Royalists, and the English" (Barras as quoted in Tulard, *Myth*, 63). [Back](#).

Note 87: Ferrero, *The Gamble*, 108 and 111; and Chandler, *Campaigns*, 96-101. [Back](#).

Note 88: Ferrero, *The Gamble*, 111. [Back](#).

Note 89: *Corr.* II: 40-41, [no. 1060](#). [Back](#).

Note 90: *Corr.* II: 139, [no. 1182](#). [Back](#).

Note 91: *Corr.* II: 264-65, [no. 1321](#). For a summary of the military crisis of this phase of the campaign, see Chandler, *Campaigns*, 100-1. [Back](#).

Note 92: *Corr.* I: 266, [no. 308](#); *Corr.* I: 308-9, [no. 376](#); *Corr.* I: 479-80, [no. 615](#). This last order made the penalty for looting execution by firing squad in the presence of troops. [Back](#).

Note 93: *Ami des Lois*, 12 *fructidor*, an 4 (29 August 1796); cf. *Corr.* I: 218, [no. 234](#). [Back](#).

Note 94: Ferrero, *The Gamble*, 107. [Back](#).

Note 95: *Corr.* I: 333, [no. 418](#). [Back](#).

Note 96: *Le Moniteur*, 24 prairial, an 4 (12 June 1796); and *Messenger du Soir*, 24 prairial, an 4 (12 June 1796); cf. *Corr.* I: 423, [no. 537](#). [Back.](#)

Note 97: *Corr.* II: 106-07, [no. 1180s](#). [Back.](#)

Note 98: Ferrero, *The Gamble*, 93. [Back.](#)

Note 99: *Ami des Lois*, 30 floréal, an 4 (19 May 1796); *Ami des Lois*, 7 floréal, an 5 (26 April 1797); *Ami des Lois*, 2 fructidor, an 5 (19 August 1797); *Ami des Lois*, 18 vendémiaire, an 5 (10 October 1797). [Back.](#)

Note 100: Tulard, *Myth*, 60. [Back.](#)

Note 101: As Robert B. Holtman points out in his *Napoleonic Propaganda* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), prolonging his stay in the limelight became a common practice throughout his career (35). [Back.](#)

Note 102: Holtman, *Napoleonic Propaganda*, 2. [Back.](#)

Note 103: After the first few weeks of the Italian campaign, the frequency of Salicetti's dispatches gradually decreased until August, when they virtually disappeared from the pages of *Le Moniteur* and other newspapers. [Back.](#)

Note 104: *Corr.* II: 318-20, [no. 1394](#). [Back.](#)

Note 105: *Corr.* II: 326-31, [no. 1399](#). [Back.](#)

Note 106: *Le Moniteur*, 8 pluviôse, an 5 (27 January 1797); and *Messenger du Soir*, 8 pluviôse, an 5 (27 January 1797). Dispatches generally took twelve or thirteen days to reach Paris. [Back.](#)

Note 107: *Le Moniteur*, 11 pluviôse, an 5 (30 January 1797); *Le Moniteur*, 12 pluviôse, an 5 (31 January 1797); *Clef du Cabinet*, 12 pluviôse, an 5 (31 January 1797); and *Le Moniteur*, 13 pluviôse, an 5 (1 February 1797). [Back.](#)

Note 108: *Messenger du Soir*, 19 pluviôse, an 5 (7 February 1797); *Clef du Cabinet*, 19 pluviôse, an 5 (7 February 1797); and *Le Moniteur*, 19 pluviôse, an 5 (7 February 1797); cf. *Corr.* II: 335, [no. 1403](#); and David G. Chandler, *Napoleon's Marshals* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 62-63. The *Guides* were Bonaparte's mounted guards, and their commander, Berthier, eventually became one of Napoleon's marshals. [Back.](#)

Note 109: *Messenger du Soir*, 20 pluviôse, an 5 (8 February 1797); *Le Moniteur*, 20 pluviôse, an 5 (8 February 1797); and *Le Moniteur*, 21 pluviôse, an 5 (9 February 1797); cf. *Corr.* II: 361-62, [no. 1426](#); and *Corr.* II: 362-64, [no. 1427](#). [Back.](#)

Note 110: *Le Moniteur*, 22 pluviôse, an 5 (10 February 1797); *Gazette Française*, 25 pluviôse, an 5 (13 February 1797); *Messenger du Soir*, 25 pluviôse,

an 5 (13 February 1797); *Le Moniteur*, 25 *pluviôse*, *an 5* (13 February 1797); *Le Moniteur*, 27 *pluviôse*, *an 5* (15 February 1797); *Messenger du Soir*, 4 *ventôse*, *an 5* (22 February 1797); cf. *Corr. II*: 369-70, [no. 1432](#); *Corr. II*: 384-87, [no. 1448](#). [Back.](#)

Note 111: *Le Moniteur*, 30 *pluviôse*, *an 5* (18 February 1797); and *Clef du Cabinet*, 2 *ventôse*, *an 5* (20 February 1797). [Back.](#)

Note 112: *Messenger du Soir*, 10 *ventôse*, *an 5* (28 February 1797); *Clef du Cabinet*, 12 *ventôse*, *an 5* (3 March 1797); *Ami des Lois*, 12 *ventôse*, *an 5* (3 March 1797). [Back.](#)

Note 113: *Clef du Cabinet*, 14 *ventôse*, *an 5* (4 March 1797). [Back.](#)

Note 114: *Message du Soir*, 15 *ventôse*, *an 5* (5 March 1797); and *Le Moniteur*, 15 *ventôse*, *an 5* (5 March 1797); cf. *Corr. II*: 442-44, [no. 1510](#). [Back.](#)

Note 115: *Messenger du Soir*, 21 *germinal*, *an 5* (10 April 1797); and *Ami des Lois*, 2 *floréal*, *an 5* (21 April 1797). This General Kellerman was not the future Napoleonic marshal, but his son. [Back.](#)

Note 116: *Gazette Française*, 24 *prairial*, *an 5* (12 June 1797). Philibert Sérurier eventually became one of the 26 Napoleonic marshals. [Back.](#)

Note 117: *Clef du Cabinet*, 4 *fructidor*, *an 5* (21 August 1797). Bernadotte had previously served in Germany and was to become not only one of the original Napoleonic marshals but also King of Sweden in 1818. [Back.](#)

Note 118: *Le Moniteur*, 1 *prairial*, *an 4* (20 May 1796). [Back.](#)

Note 119: Martyn Lyons, *Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 24. Jean Tulard also points out that the Directory was happy to be rid of Bonaparte, who it began to see as a serious political threat (Myth, 66). [Back.](#)

Note 120: Tulard, *Myth*, 71. [Back.](#)

Note 121: J. M. Thompson points out that the destination of the Armée d'Orient was a well-guarded secret (*Napoleon Bonaparte*, 108); Jones, 81. Even Bonaparte's much publicized and heralded [harangue](#) to his soldiers before their departure carefully omitted any reference to the army's destination (*Corr. IV*: 96, [no. 2570](#)). [Back.](#)

Note 122: *Clef du Cabinet*, 8 *prairial*, *an 6* (27 April 1798); and *Clef du Cabinet*, 10 *prairial*, *an 6* (29 April 1798). See also Ian Germani, "Where is General Bonaparte? Press Reports of Napoleon's Expedition to Egypt," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History: Selected Papers of the Annual Meeting* 24 (1997): 61-70. [Back.](#)

Note 123: *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 24 *prairial*, *an 6* (12 June 1798). The

editor strongly cautioned his readers about this information, noting that Bonaparte had only left Toulon on the fifteenth and that he could not have captured Gibraltar on the sixteenth, the date given by the Toulouse paper; cf. *Le Moniteur*, 26 prairial, an 6 (14 June 1798). [Back](#).

Note 124: *Le Moniteur*, 28 prairial, an 6 (16 June 1798); *Clef du Cabinet*, 30 prairial, an 6 (18 June 1798); *Le Moniteur*, 30 prairial, an 6 (18 June 1798); *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 4 messidor, an 6 (22 June 1798); *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 7 messidor, an 6 (25 June 1798); *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 12 messidor, an 6 (30 June 1798); *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 15 messidor, an 6 (3 July 1798); and *Le Moniteur*, 16 messidor, an 6 (4 July 1798); cf. *Corr. IV*: 190-93, [no. 2641](#). [Back](#).

Note 125: *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 16 thermidor, an 6 (3 August 1798); *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 20 thermidor, an 6 (7 August 1798); *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 28 thermidor, an 6 (15 August 1798); and *Le Moniteur*, 3 fructidor, an 6 (20 August 1798). Bonaparte's ultimate goal was still somewhat a mystery, though. In the 20 thermidor issue of *Journal des Hommes Libres*, for example, the editor speculated that Napoleon planned "to attack the English in India." [Back](#).

Note 126: *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 29 thermidor, an 6 (16 August 1798); *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 30 thermidor, an 6 (17 August 1798); *Le Moniteur*, 7 fructidor, an 6 (25 August 1798); and *Clef du Cabinet*, 9 fructidor, an 6 (26 August 1798). [Back](#).

Note 127: Holtman, *Napoleonic Propaganda*, 21-22. [Back](#).

Note 128: *Le Moniteur*, 28 vendémiaire, an 7 (14 October 1798); *Clef du Cabinet*, 29 vendémiaire, an 7 (15 October 1798); and *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 1 brumaire, an 7 (17 October 1798). [Back](#).

Note 129: *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 3 brumaire, an 7 (19 October 1798); cf. *Corr. IV*: 500-4, [no. 3045](#). Holtman points out that laying blame for a setback on someone or something other than himself was a common strategy of Bonaparte's and one that would be repeated throughout his career (21-22 and 196). See also Thompson, 135; and J. Christopher Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962), 103. [Back](#).

Note 130: *Corr. IV*: 500-4, [no. 3045](#). [Back](#).

Note 131: J. M. Thompson notes that opposition newspapers generally published negative rumors, while pro-government papers published rumors of victory (Napoleon Bonaparte, 148-49). [Back](#).

Note 132: *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 20 brumaire, an 7 (5 November 1798); and *Clef du Cabinet*, 21 brumaire, an 7 (6 November 1798). [Back](#).

Note 133: *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 30 brumaire, an 7 (15 November 1798). [Back](#).

Note 134: *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 7 messidor, an 7 (25 June 1799). Ian Germani similarly notes that, in general, the republican press tended to support such exaggerated claims of Bonaparte's successes. See Germani, 66-67. [Back.](#)

Note 135: *Clef du Cabinet*, 4 thermidor, an 7 (23 July 1799); and *Clef du Cabinet*, 13 thermidor, an 7 (1 August 1799). [Back.](#)

Note 136: *Ami des Lois*, 11 vendémiaire, an 8 (3 October 1799), and *Clef du Cabinet*, 13 vendémiaire, an 8 (5 October 1799). [Back.](#)

Note 137: *Le Moniteur*, 14 vendémiaire, an 8 (6 October 1799); *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 14 vendémiaire, an 8 (6 October 1799); *Clef du Cabinet*, 15 vendémiaire, an 8 (7 October 1799); *Ami des Lois*, 19 vendémiaire, an 8 (11 October 1799). [Back.](#)

Note 138: *Le Moniteur*, 15 vendémiaire, an 8 (7 October 1799); and *Clef du Cabinet*, 15 vendémiaire, an 8 (7 October 1799); cf. *Corr. V*: 554, [no. 4138](#). [Back.](#)

Note 139: *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 20 vendémiaire, an 8 (12 October), and *Le Moniteur*, 19 vendémiaire, an 8 (11 October). [Back.](#)

Note 140: According to the *Ami des Lois*, 28 vendémiaire, an 8 (20 October 1799), a host of newspapers, including the *Rédacteur*, the *Publisiste*, and the *Ami des Lois*, all attributed Bonaparte's return to France to the recent defeats of Jourdan in Germany. Also see Lyons, *Legacy*, 31-35; and Jones, 21-28. [Back.](#)

Note 141: *Clef du Cabinet*, 22 vendémiaire, an 8 (14 October 1799); cf. *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 22 vendémiaire, an 8 (14 October 1799). [Back.](#)

Note 142: *Ami des Lois*, 23 vendémiaire, an 8 (15 October 1799). [Back.](#)

Note 143: *Ami des Lois*, 26 vendémiaire, an 8 (18 October 1799). An example of the enthusiasm for Bonaparte can be seen in one incident in Aix: the entire city turned out to greet the general as he passed through, and someone in the crowd called out, "I don't need anything anymore; Bonaparte is with us!" *Ami des Lois*, 30 vendémiaire, an 8 (22 October 1799). [Back.](#)

Note 144: In his *Napoleonic Propaganda*, Holtman argues that this timing was not accidental, but intentional (187). [Back.](#)

Note 145: *Journal des Hommes Libres*, 26 vendémiaire, an 8 (18 October 1799); *Ami des Lois*, 26 vendémiaire, an 8 (18 October 1799); *Ami des Lois*, 27 vendémiaire, an 8 (19 October 1799). [Back.](#)

Note 146: For an in-depth study of this obscure but important and influential government agency, see Laurence W. Stoll, "The Bureau Politique and the Management of the Popular Press: A Study of the Second Directory's Attempt to Develop a Directorial Ideology and Manipulate the Newspapers" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1975). [Back.](#)

Note 147: Ferrero, *The Gamble*, 60. [Back.](#)

Note 148: Lyons, *Directory*, 49; and Jones, *Man and Myth*, 78-79. [Back.](#)

Note 149: In addition to the proclamation, General Augereau was sent to Paris to "deliver flags and trophies," but he was sent to the capital for another reason as well. Shortly after his arrival, he was made commander of the 17th Division, which played a key role in rounding up royalist sympathizers on the night of 17 *fructidor*, enabling the *coup d'état* to be successful (Lyons, *Directory*, 50). [Back.](#)

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