



Christy Pichichero. *The Military Enlightenment: War and Culture in the French Empire from Louis XIV to Napoleon.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018. 318 pp. \$49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5017-0929-6.

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In *The Military Enlightenment: War and Culture in the French Empire from Louis XIV to Napoleon*, Christy Pichichero “aims to bring war and military thought to their proper place in our understanding of the Enlightenment.... Far from being incompatible, war, military thought, and policy were central theaters in which the Enlightenment unfolded” (p. 24). In a sweeping narrative, underpinned by broad and deep primary sources ranging from well-known works by Voltaire to obscure details of how French military lodges were organized and adorned, Pichichero traces the fervent debates in French society about how best to wage war during the eighteenth century. She more than succeeds in her goal, illustrating in five well-structured chapters how important military thought was to the French Enlightenment writ large.

To her credit, Pichichero avoids any linear timeline of the period in the first four chapters, but also grounds her arguments at the beginning of the French Revolution in her last chapter. In doing so, she examines the broad themes debated in French society in great detail: how best to train and equip armies, how French military members viewed themselves, how to conduct war in a humane manner, and how the Enlightenment helped infuse the French nation with a warrior ethos. Most fascinating are her descriptions of

military lodges, which were social clubs attached to military units in France. With deep ties to Freemasonry, these lodges provided a sense of community for current and former unit members; raised money for those injured in conflict; and more important, according to Pichichero, formed the forums for larger debates about how best to raise, pay for, and lead French armies.

With such a broad swath of ideas in her first four chapters, Pichichero anchors herself and the reader in her last chapter, “The Dialectic of Military Enlightenment: The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Eras.” It would have been tempting in this work to stay in the realm of ideas and theories, and this last chapter helps focus the work on her conclusion. Pichichero avers that the debates about war during the fervent period of the Enlightenment in France had an impact on larger discourses in French culture that would “generate an image of France as a nation of patriotic warriors” well before Napoleon’s call for *levee en masse* (p. 191). In modern parlance, Pichichero definitively illustrates that culture eats strategy for breakfast.

In looking from the French Revolution forward, Pichichero shows how the revolutionaries co-opted notions of limited war and proper treatment of common soldiers and then perverted them, ultimately “expand[ing] the parameters of

early modern limited war” promulgated during the military Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Notably, the growing sense that individual common soldiers were the key element of the French Army grew from the utopian ideal of the National Guard in which “the people should guard the people” in 1789 to the Napoleonic Army which would march to the sound of the drum, feed off the land, and conquer most of Europe in the name of France (p. 202).

To end her work, Pichichero brings forward French Enlightenment thinking from Napoleon to the present. Far from being dis-concordant with military Romanticism and the Counter-Enlightenment that would follow it, Pichichero illustrates how Enlightenment thinking formed the basis of future thinking by Carl von Clausewitz, Antoine-Henri Jomini, and famous French theorist Ardant Du Picq—specifically the concept that “social bonds between servicemen were the key buttresses to soldiers in combat” (p. 232). Pichichero is to be commended for showing this linkage, which goes against the grain of most of the scholarship of the eighteenth century. For many modern historians, Napoleon ushered in a new way of war, Clausewitz recorded its essence, and the Industrial Revolution swept away the Enlightenment. Using the author’s conclusion about the long-lived concept of the military “band of brothers,” it would be fascinating to see how that idea eventually died at Verdun in 1916 and during the Neville offensives in 1917, the fraternity of the French Army crushed asunder by the weight of German artillery. Hopefully the author is planning a second volume to carry this idea forward into the twentieth century.

This work is on par with Christopher Clark’s magisterial *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (2006), which illustrates how much more modern and enlightened the state of Prussia was from the Peace of Westphalia until the Second World War. *The Military Enlightenment* is a tour de force and deserves a broad

readership. For military historians in particular, Pichichero offers new sources and new methods with which to judge the relationship between militaries, states, and citizens in the eighteenth century. Her aforementioned premise that “far from being incompatible, war, military thought, and policy were central theaters in which the Enlightenment unfolded” is not new (Russell Weigley, Geoffrey Parker, and Dennis Showalter have all touched on this theme) but her approach is. Pichichero’s depth of sources, specific focus on France, and differing tools of analysis—from standard printed works, to art, poetry, and gender relationships—offers a truly unique perspective.

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