

# on Morale

by Kevin Zucker



If discovering the intricacies of supply in the Napoleonic Wars was difficult, that is still nothing compared to researching the morale of various units. Although you can single out certain units that lacked adequate cadre, or were comprised of foreign mercenaries who had no investment in the cause, there is no data about the morale of a given unit anywhere.

Morale is a slippery concept and it can change from day to day or hour to hour. All we can see are the effects of morale, such as units which bolt from the battle (when they are completely broken), or losses from attrition (which are heavily impacted by morale).

Army-level morale is easier to track, as it depends largely upon the overall military and administrative situation. That is why we track administration and do not try to track individual corps- level morale.

For armies at this period, the best tonic for Morale was to bring up the back pay, provide food and firewood. And of course winning didn't hurt.

The way bad morale spreads from one unit to another is very contagious, if units

are within hailing distance of each other. Within an hour it can spread through the ranks across the battlefield. So we tend to just assume that a morale event will affect the whole army.

You need to make a distinction between Unit Quality and Morale. Is the unit basically sound, does it have good officers and adequate veteran cadre, and have the conscripts been trained. A sound unit may have a bad day now and then but it will spring back.

Morale on the other hand is a psychological phenomenon which is unpredictable, fleeting and nuanced. A badly-timed rumor can ruin morale, but sometimes even the most desperate situation will not. Morale is based upon the troops' own assessment of the military situation, which is generally realistic but always changeable. Morale of a battalion or a regiment can oscillate at a higher frequency and amplitude than a whole division. It takes a bigger shock to affect a larger force. "Army Morale" would be an aggregate; but we usually term it "Vienna Morale" or "Paris Morale" to indicate that the attitude on the home front also plays into the equation.