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John G. Gallaher, *Napoleon's Infant Terrible: General Dominique Vandamme*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008. 362 pp. Illustrations, maps, bibliography, and index. \$34.95 U. S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-8061-3875-6.

Review by Ralph Ashby, Eastern Illinois University.

John G. Gallaher begins his study of General Vandamme boldly stating that, "Dominique-Joseph-René Vandamme, count of Unsebourg, was the General George Patton of the Napoleonic army" (p. 3). Gallaher's book amply shows that in fact Vandamme was ultimately rather less successful and probably less brilliant than the controversial American general, but that is not the point of the analogy. Other than providing a point of reference for a portion of the reading audience, Gallaher sets up Vandamme's personality: rebellious, ambitious, egotistical, and difficult.

Gallaher's interest in Vandamme originally began with a study of the 1813 campaign in Germany and the French defeat at Kulm in that campaign (p. xii). Readers should well note from the start that Gallaher is not a biographer. He is a military historian of the Napoleonic period, and a very accomplished one at that. Gallaher has used the approach of military biography before, most notably with his excellent study of Louis-Nicolas Davout some thirty years ago. Gallaher's approach to Vandamme's life is essentially a very straightforward military study. Gallaher explores the general's personality to the extent it impacted Vandamme's military career, while personal biographical details are sketched in. Likewise, the turbulent political events of Vandamme's lifetime are traced to provide background and context, but they are not the focus of the book.

Vandamme's life does indeed work well as a case study, illustrating the military career of a Napoleonic general. As Gallaher says, "His career is a classic example of the transformation of the French army from one dominated by privilege to one marked by ability" (p. 295). Yet Vandamme's life also provides a case study of a personality type with strong social and political motives seeking military glory in the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon. The personal, social, and political aspects of Vandamme's ambitions are impossible to ignore between the lines of Gallaher's military study. General Vandamme was a middle-rank general officer for most of his military life, and is not as famous as any of Napoleon's marshals or even many of the other generals of the period. Indeed, Gallaher's is the first full-length English-language study of Vandamme. It is not necessarily Vandamme's varying levels of military success that make him an interesting topic. Much more compelling is Vandamme's consuming military ambition, operating (and sometimes thriving) within the tumultuous political environments of the French Revolution and Napoleonic period.

Vandamme was not born of a military family. His family, of Flemish origins, lived as bourgeoisie in the town of Cassel, located between Dunkirk and Lille. Like many who later became generals, Vandamme's early military service just predated the beginning of the French Revolution. Despite an innately rebellious nature, he performed well in the army, and found it attractive as a career. With the wars of the French Revolution, unprecedented opportunity for advancement suddenly became possible for professional bourgeois soldiers who, like Vandamme, had chosen life in the army. His rise was rapid,

mainly because of the need for officers in the army, a need greatly exacerbated by the departure of so many aristocratic French officers who had become émigrés.

The rank of general was bestowed on Vandamme at the ridiculously young age of twenty-two (p. 15). Vandamme possessed none of the extraordinary genius, cunning, luck, or personal political connections of a young General Bonaparte, but he possessed ample amounts of ambition. He made war on the enemies of France doggedly, and commanded his troops aggressively, learning his trade mostly through native intelligence and hard experience, rather than with brilliance or inspiration. He came to excel at solving concrete military problems, being especially good at siege operations. Gallaher never quite spells out such a specific evaluation of Vandamme's generalship, but informed readers can draw their own conclusions.

Much of Vandamme's early military career was spent not very far from his home in northern France. Important military operations were frequent in that general region during the Wars of the Revolution, and the French army and Vandamme found his employment there mutually beneficial. Politically, Vandamme embraced the Revolution enthusiastically. There is scant evidence, at least through a reading of Gallaher, that Vandamme's understanding of the principles of the Revolution was particularly deep. In this, he was hardly unique. He instinctively understood that his family stood to benefit from the Revolution, and his ambitions for his own career were inextricably linked to the success of the Wars being waged by the French Republic.

The harsh wartime measures frequently employed by the Republic, especially during the Terror, found an obedient soldier in Vandamme. When ordered by his superiors to burn the ostensibly anti-Revolutionary towns of Rousbrugge and Poperinghe in September 1793, Vandamme did not hesitate, although he made certain that the villagers were allowed to evacuate and carry away some belongings (p. 14). In July 1794, during the campaign for Nieuwpoort, Vandamme had at least 160 émigré prisoners shot, in accordance with the standing orders of the Republic (pp. 34-35). Foreign enemy soldiers were to be treated as prisoners of war, but Frenchmen who had taken up arms against the Republic were to suffer a different fate. Gallaher does not dwell long on Vandamme's excellent credentials as a willing soldier of the Terror. It is left for the reader to contemplate this manifestation of Vandamme's ambitions. Gallaher attributes Vandamme's occasional ruthlessness to his natural sympathy with the Revolution, his dislike for those who would take up arms against their own country, and soldierly willingness to "obey orders."

Unfortunately for Vandamme's ambitions, the wildly careening course of the Revolution sometimes left him on the wrong end of political developments. His choice of mentors such as Dumouriez, and later Moreau, were detrimental to his advancement. Vandamme's brash ambition seems to be the source of his abrasiveness, although Gallaher suggests that this trait was the general's natural tendency. Vandamme was not shy about complaining to subordinates and superiors alike, most admirably in situations pertaining to the supply and welfare of his troops, and least admirably in regard to matters of his own promotion, assignments, and frequent leave time. As a result, Vandamme made many personal enemies. Recurring accusations of skimming from requisitions and plunder, and lining his own pockets thereby, haunted Vandamme throughout his career. Gallaher maintains that such charges were unfounded, although it is not a point that appears either provable or disprovable, despite Gallaher's exhaustive research. It seems likely that the muddy nature of such charges made them a convenient weapon for Vandamme's personal enemies to use against him. Vandamme's most cherished ambitions encountered obstacles as a result of personal enmity. Ambition, when too blatant, can create its own frustrations, and Vandamme comes across as a pushy "squeaky wheel" who stepped on too many toes.

As a professional soldier, it was natural for Vandamme to admire General Bonaparte's military (and political) success. Gallaher does not belabor the point, but readers will not be surprised to find

Vandamme hitching his wagon to Napoleon's rising star. Vandamme adjusted easily and readily to the Consulate in 1799. Likewise, he embraced the transformation from Consulate to Empire in 1804. Gallaher clearly sums up Vandamme's priorities, stating, "A future with the emperor Napoleon could bring military glory, financial well-being, and nobility" (p. 115). Vandamme's only disappointment was not being on the list of generals named as marshals with the advent of the Empire. It was a disappointment never to be resolved. Nonetheless, the eve of the Battle of Austerlitz (December 2, 1805) found General Vandamme leading the cheers of "Vive l'Empereur." He "...shouted himself hoarse in a piercing voice, louder than his drums" (p. 136).

Austerlitz, Napoleon's greatest victory, was one of the few major battles in which Vandamme fought "under the eyes" of the Emperor. Rather unfortunately for Vandamme's dreams of glory, some of his troops bore the brunt of the counter-attack by the Russian Imperial Guards, and had to be rescued by Napoleon's own Imperial Guard. Vandamme had not necessarily committed any egregious tactical errors, at least none that Gallaher chooses to emphasize, but he did not get much credit for Napoleon's great victory, and did not further his cause in pursuit of a marshal's baton.

Vandamme missed the 1806-1807 Napoleonic battles of Jena-Auerstädt, Eylau, and Friedland. Napoleon took advantage of Vandamme's siege warfare expertise during this period. At the same time, Napoleon tried to promote the image of his youngest brother, Jerome, by giving him titular command of satellite kingdom Bavarian and Wurtemberger troops in order to carry out siege operations against the Prussians. In reality, it was Vandamme who directed the operations, simultaneously performing as de facto military mentor for Jerome. This served Napoleon's purposes nicely, but it was far from an ideal arrangement for Vandamme, who increasingly nursed his grievances regarding his lack of advancement and recognition. Not surprisingly, he clashed with Jerome, although the two had smoothed things over by the end of the campaign.

Commanding a corps of Wurtemberger troops during Napoleon's 1809 campaign against the Austrian Empire, Vandamme had opportunity to distinguish himself. Gallaher does not make too fine a point of the matter, but several times in the book it becomes apparent that Napoleon had serious doubts about Vandamme as an independent commander, especially regarding his ability to maneuver strategically (pp. 192-193). Vandamme did manage one impressive success in this campaign. He was able to come up on the flank of the Austrians attacking Marshal Davout's troops, and contribute significantly to the victory at Eckmühl (April 22, 1809). It was Vandamme's "crowded hour" as he led his Wurtembergers forward, despite being wounded (pp. 188-189).

Napoleon gave Vandamme command of the satellite Westphalian corps (VIII Corps of the Grande Armée) in 1812 prior to the invasion of Russia, but again only as Jerome's mentor. Jerome was now King of Westphalia, and was expected to take a prominent role in the invasion as the nominal head of the Westphalian corps. The frustrated and resentful Vandamme was expected to enable Jerome's role. There was friction from the beginning of this bad arrangement. The supply situation of the Westphalian corps was terrible as they reached Poland, well before actually crossing into Russia. Vandamme, as was his style, complained bitterly, and threatened to resign his command. To his shock, Jerome accepted the resignation. Jerome and Vandamme both became objects of Napoleon's wrath, and were sent home ingloriously before the invasion of Russia had progressed very far. It was an embarrassing but possibly life-saving development for the erstwhile co-commanders.

Out of favor at the beginning of Napoleon's campaign in Germany in 1813, Vandamme begged for a command. He was allowed to serve under Marshal Davout during siege operations around Hamburg. At first Davout and Vandamme were at loggerheads, but Vandamme for once bit his tongue and actually managed to ingratiate himself to Davout. The result of Davout's favor, and consequently Napoleon's renewed favor, was command of a newly assembled French I Corps for Vandamme. No marshal's baton

came with the command, but it was still a post and an opportunity Vandamme had worked towards during the course of his entire career. It ended in disaster at Kulm in a fight against Coalition forces, August 29-30, 1813. Vandamme had pushed his corps forward aggressively in an attempt to cut off the retreating Coalition army Napoleon had defeated at Dresden. Widely separated from other French corps, Vandamme found himself cut off and overwhelmed by superior numbers. Vandamme and most of his corps were taken prisoner. Vandamme was granted the "honor" of surrendering to Tsar Alexander I in person, and then spent the rest of the 1813 and 1814 campaigns well-treated as a prisoner in Russia.

Gallaher is persuasive in his military analysis of the Kulm disaster, and his conclusion that Vandamme was not to blame. He offers solid evidence that Napoleon and chief-of-staff Berthier were well-aware of Vandamme's line of operations, plans, and location. Indeed, his attempt to cut off the Coalition forces at Kulm was encouraged by Napoleon. The defeat at Kulm was partly the result of the defeat of other French forces that otherwise could have supported Vandamme, and partly due to Napoleon's own over-aggressiveness (pp. 245-254). True to form, Napoleon accepted no responsibility whatsoever for Kulm, and made Vandamme the scapegoat.

Back in France during the First Restoration, Vandamme obsequiously attempted to obtain an audience with Louis XVIII. He was rebuffed. While Gallaher's book may not dwell upon Vandamme's execution of émigrés during his early campaigns, it was a serious matter as far as the Bourbons were concerned. In their eyes, he was no better than a Jacobin and a Terrorist. During the Hundred Days then, Vandamme rallied once again to Napoleon. Napoleon, in desperate need for experienced generals, gave Vandamme command of a corps. Vandamme served under Grouchy during the Waterloo campaign, fighting at Ligny and Wavre, but not at Waterloo itself. With the return of Louis XVIII, Vandamme was exiled. He spent most of the period between 1816 and 1819 in the United States. He returned to France under partial amnesty, and died in July 1830, ironically right before the Revolution of that year.

Some readers might critique Gallaher's restrained analysis in his earnestly straightforward narrative of Vandamme's military career. The style is direct, spare, and efficient. This is a book designed primarily for military historians and "buffs" of the Napoleonic period, yet it has broader potential appeal. Gallaher's research is exhaustive and impeccable. He uses a wide variety of materials, and leaves no stone unturned. Multiple archives plus Vandamme's papers round out a vast array of sources, and ensure a solid and complete study.

Gallaher clearly respects his subject, without being "seduced" by it, a potential hazard he identifies early (p. xiii). Gallaher maintains a gentlemanly demeanor throughout while recounting Vandamme's tendency to clash with superiors. Gallaher argues that this tendency is ultimately what prevented the general's promotion to marshal, rather than any relative lack of ability (p. 295-296). Yet Gallaher acknowledges that Vandamme's own estimate of his abilities was "exalted" (p. 3). Napoleon was keenly aware of this, and of the general's ambitions, and unsurprisingly exploited these traits. In this, too, Vandamme was far from unique. Gallaher's book is not a morality tale, nor is it the story of a hero with tragic flaws, but it could serve as either for readers so inclined. In any case, Gallaher successfully shows Vandamme as a "classic example" of his times.

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