



EMPIRE TOTAL WAR

The Wars of Empire: Diary 3

It's now time to turn a bleary and gin-sodden eye (drinking gin is a large part of "method designing" for Empire Total War) to matters military in the 18th century and in particular land warfare in the period. I can promise that the next few instalments are not going to be a detailed history lesson – hurrah! – but more a gallop through the subject – huzzah! – while backhanding matters of interest with a sabre – swish! – from time to time.

So what happens to armies and warfare during the Empire period? That depends on the army, and even the continent, involved in warfare. The French and English/British still fought like two cats in a sack, but where they fought was very different. Their soldiers would face each other in the Rhineland, the backwoods of America and the steamy heat of India. This is a function of what today is termed "power projection" (or "putting your army in some other blokes' country and making an awful mess over there"). This was what the Europeans learned to do during the 18th century: they could ship troops halfway round the world and fight on their own terms. Doing this involved naval power (so that's why there are naval battles in Empire: Total War!), and that's a subject for another day; here we're looking at land warfare. Firstly, don't run away with the idea that the 18th Century is one of unbridled expansion for the Europeans, backed up by muskets, bayonets and the guts to use them effectively. The effectiveness of European armies varied from decade to decade as lessons in warfare were learned, copied by enemies, and then discarded in favour of a new idea. European armies didn't always have it their own way. In the Balkans, the Turks may have been slightly old-fashioned but their Janissary armies were no laughing matter for anyone facing them, even if they could be beaten. In India, more than one nasty shock awaited the Western invaders as elephants (and what's a Total War game these days without some heffalumps?), rockets and imported European artillery (along with imported European gunners) were turned against

them. The cannons made by Indians weren't all that bad either, even if they did go in for a lot of decorative fiddly bits. The use of massed rocket attacks impressed the British so much that they copied them as the Congreve rocket system, and then turned them on their own enemies in later wars (without, it has to be said, very much success). In North America a completely new style of light skirmishing warfare was required for success in the dense forests of the eastern seaboard. In short, depending on where you're fighting, you'll have a different experience in the game.

Not only had the nature of warfare changed, but its context and purposes too. Any medieval monarch could have understood the "why" of the War of the Spanish Succession: to stop the French Bourbons putting one of their relatives on the throne of Spain. Less than a hundred years later, the Bourbons' problems, guillotine-wise, brought their power to a sudden, painful and cravat-ruining halt. Once they were gone, the French Republic was engaged in a very different kind of war of survival. Other powers (for which read "the rich, powerful and well bred") wanted the infection of revolutionary Republicanism cut from the European body politic before it could do any more damage (the bloody progress of events shocked supporters of the infant Republic). Napoleon Bonaparte's seizure of power (and his conscious aping of Roman precedent) merely confirmed the view that a new, dark tyranny (of the unwashed masses, if nothing else) that threatened the natural order of things had arrived. The concept of a war of ideas – republicanism, liberty, patriotism, tyranny, equality, freedom – had arrived.

If the French Revolution hadn't happened in France, the rest of European civilization probably wouldn't have been so bothered by the whole business. Hang on, then it would have been the French Revolution... Still, revolutions are going to be possible; you might even be able to engineer one. Back to the point: It was almost an article of faith that the French were the pre-eminent experts in war, and fielded the finest army in Europe. The French army did suffer defeat on occasion, but it remained a mighty instrument of policy. It defined "soldiering" for generations: young men who wished to be soldiers went to France to learn the serious business of killing. Both of Britain's greatest generals, John Churchill, the Duke of Marlborough (yes, same family as Winston), and Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington (yes, the boots man), had French connections early in their careers. Churchill even received a commendation from Louis XIV for his bravery in leading a forlorn hope. He might have purchased his first commission from his profits as the Duchess of Buckingham's toy boy, but John had guts! Young Arthur was quite a bit more respectable (or a stuffy prig) as he attended a French military academy after his schooldays at Eton.

We'll return to this gallop across land warfare in the next part of this developer diary. In the meantime, I'm off to polish my Patriotic Fund sword. Here's to a bloody battle, or the pox!

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