



# The Defense of the Napoleonic Kingdom of Northern Italy, 1813-1814

*George F. Nafziger, Marco Gioannini*

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Little has been written about the defense of the Kingdom of Northern Italy, and this is the first study in English to detail the two-year conflict (1813-1814) within the larger context of the Napoleonic Wars. The French commander responsible for the defense was Eugene Beauharnais, stepson of Napoleon and son-in-law of the King of Bavaria. Outnumbered three to one, Beauharnais fought an outstanding defensive campaign, covering all of Napoleon's southern front while Napoleon faced off against the main allied armies as they invaded France.

This was only Beauharnais's third command, and as a result of his less than stellar performance in his two earlier posts, he had acquired a poor reputation as a leader. Nafziger and Gioannini explain, however, that in this instance Beauharnais proved himself once and for all as the commander of an independent army, defending one of the most important parts of the French Napoleonic Empire. He made full use of geography, keeping his army in being, rather than risking it to seek a decision in the field. Because his stepson held the plains of Italy, Napoleon was able to concentrate his energies upon the evacuation of Germany and to demonstrate his military prowess in France.

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