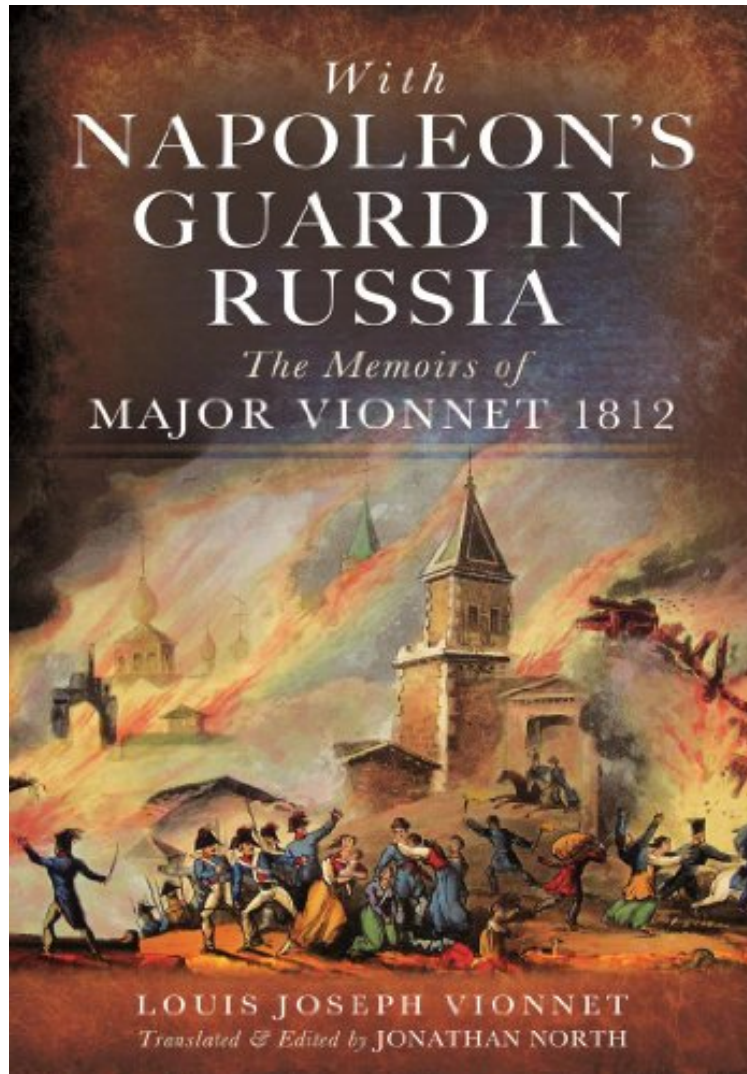


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## With Napoleons Guard in Russia: The Memoirs of Major Vionnet, 1812

*Von Louis Joseph Vionnet, Jonathan North*  
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**Von Louis Joseph Vionnet, Jonathan North : With Napoleons Guard in Russia: The Memoirs of Major Vionnet, 1812** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised With Napoleons Guard in Russia: The Memoirs of Major Vionnet, 1812:

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen1 von 1 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. A valuable addition to the library of Napoleonic memoirs.,Von customerThe perfect companion for all military history enthusiasts is the ROMA VICTRIX WINE BEAKERRoma Victrix Wein BecherBorn in 1769, Vionnet came from a humble background. Vionnet enrolled as an artillery cadet in 1789 and was appointed to Louis XVI's Constitutional

Guard in 1792. When the Guard was suppressed before Vionnet could join he was appointed second lieutenant in the 6th Battalion of the Doubs. He fought in the brigade of Gen. Michaud at Wissembourg and served in the 1796 and 1800 Italian campaigns, being promoted to captain in 1804. Vionnet was named an Officier de la Légion d'Honneur in 1804 and fought at Austerlitz. He entered the Imperial Guard in 1806 as an officer in the Fusiliers-Grenadiers of the Middle Guard. Vionnet's regiment fought in Spain in 1808, against the Austrians in 1809-10 and in the Russian Campaign in 1812. Vionnet wrote his memoirs during the period 1820 to 1823, during the period when the Ultras were consolidating power in the Restoration government. To what extent that and Vionnet's service in the Royal Army colors his memoir is hard to tell, but by the time he came to write them, he was no fan of the Emperor. Vionnet's notebooks on the Russian Campaign were originally published in 1899 as *Souvenirs d'un ex-Commandant des Grenadiers de la Vieille-Garde*. A second edition, much improved was published in 1913 as *Campagnes de Russie et de Saxe. Souvenirs d'un ex commandant des Grenadiers de la Vieille-Garde*. The earlier edition begins two months earlier than the later. The editor of the current edition ends the narrative in 1813. Unfortunately the earlier volumes of Vionnet's memoirs have been lost. In his lengthy introduction Jonathan North traces the history and movements of Vionnet's regiment. Since Vionnet served in the Fusiliers-Grenadiers with a number of others who have left us their recollections, including the well-known memoirist Sgt. Bourgogne (being an elite Guard unit recruits tended to be better educated than recruits in the line regiments), North is able to compare Vionnet's recollections with those of the others. Many of the numerous endnotes are these additional recollections. In addition "Annex I" at the end of the book includes personal accounts of the burning of Moscow by these other Fusiliers-Grenadiers and "Annex II" consists of extracts of accounts of the Battle of Krasnoe by personnel of the Fusiliers-Grenadiers. North also includes many contemporary and later illustrations. In his memoirs, Vionnet makes it clear that he was no fan of the Emperor; airing many complaints about Napoleon such as that before leaving Moscow, Napoleon paid the troops in debased paper rubles, while carting off the treasures taken from the Kremlin. In Moscow Vionnet was disturbed by the sight of young women selling themselves to the occupiers in order to survive, a sight that GIs in Berlin after that city fell to the Allies in World War Two would have seen. Vionnet's complaints might perhaps be partially explained by the fact that his remembrances were written during the Restoration, which had promoted and rewarded him generously. Vionnet observes that "there was a great deal of hostility towards the officers, accusing them of being all the authors of all our woes whereas, in fact, the officers were often the main victims." A natural observation for an officer to make. The feelings of at least some of Napoleon's veterans can be summed up by the reply one made to one of Napoleon's Marshals who was overheard complaining about his lot during the retreat, "Shut up, you old fool! If we must die, we will die." Vionnet describes all the difficulties of the retreat, but almost as a passive participant. He observes the sufferings of the troops, but doesn't describe any actions he personally takes to ease his men's sufferings, as if as an officer he had no responsibility. When he finally returns to France, Vionnet complained that the government had not reimbursed him with an advance on his pay to cover the cost of his lost equipment. Tulard in his *Nouvelle Bibliographie Critique des Mémoires sur l'époque Napoléonienne* calls the memoirs "interesting." Vionnet gives a vivid account of the sufferings of soldiers in the wars of the time. Of Borodino, Vionnet writes that any water "to be found on the field was so soaked with blood that even the horses refused to drink it." All in all, this memoir is a valuable addition to the library of Napoleonic memoirs and Jonathan North has done an admirable job in his presentation.

**Kurzbeschreibung** Major Louis Joseph Vionnet's memoirs of Napoleon's disastrous 1812 campaign in Russia are readable, detailed, and full of personal anecdote and vivid glimpses into the life of the nineteenth-century soldier. His account concentrates in particular on the retreat from Moscow, but he was present at all the major actions and followed the entire course of the campaign from the opening moves in July 1812 to being chased through Prussia by bands of Cossacks in early 1813. He was present at the destruction of Smolensk, toured the battlefield of Borodino and witnessed the great fire in Moscow. Vionnet was a major in the Fusiliers-Grenadiers, a regiment of veterans in the Imperial Guard, and his account provides a wonderful insight into the language, morale and cohesion of this elite fighting force. Jonathan North has translated Vionnet's memoirs for the first time for this English edition. In addition to providing detailed explanatory notes, he quotes from the accounts left by five other soldiers from the same regiment, and these extracts allow the reader to follow the ups and downs of the unit as a whole. Louis Joseph Vionnet, Vicomte de Marignon, was born in Longueville in 1769, the son of a peasant and a lace maker. He joined the artillery in 1793 and was promoted to captain in the line in 1794. He fought in Italy in 1796, in the line infantry in 1798 and the Guard grenadiers in 1806, and campaigned in Prussia, Poland and Spain. In 1809, he joined the Fusiliers of the Guard, fought again in Spain in 1811 and then, with the rank of major, he took part in the 1812 Russian campaign, which he survived. He retired in the 1830s and died in 1834. **Pressstimmen** The publishers are to be commended for making this classic memoir of Napoleon's disastrous 1812 campaign available for the first time in English. **The Bulletin** **Kurzbeschreibung** Major Louis Joseph Vionnet's memoirs of Napoleon's disastrous 1812 campaign in Russia are readable, detailed, and full of personal anecdote and vivid glimpses into the life of the nineteenth-century soldier.

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