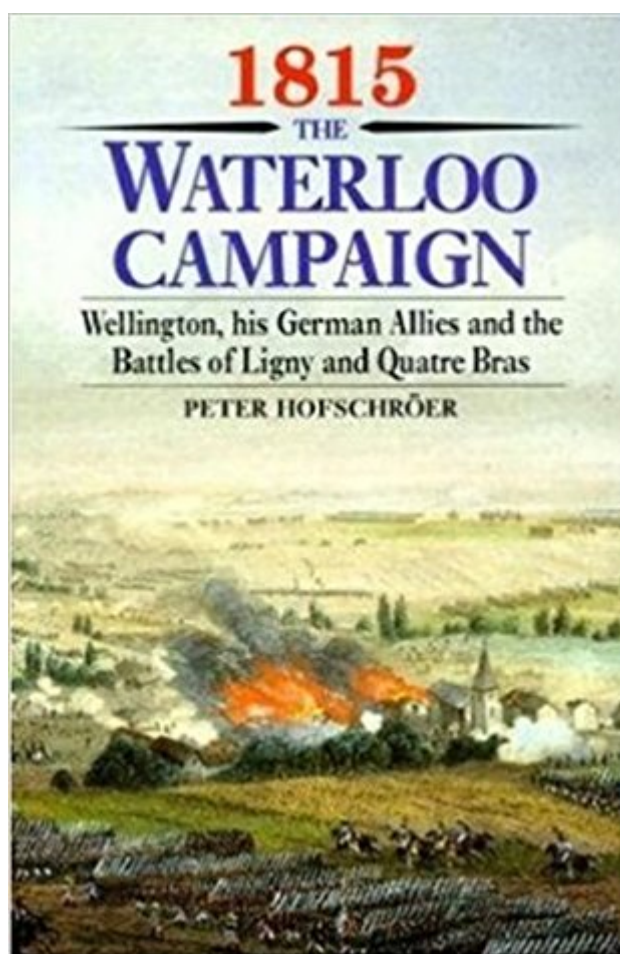


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1815 The Waterloo Campaign: Wellington, His German Allies And The Battles Of Ligny And Quatre Bras



Synopsis

Previously unpublished eyewitness accounts and battle reports German, British, and Dutch archive material published for the first time Controversial reassessment of the whole campaign Here is a unique reassessment of the Hundred Days and a powerful analysis of the epic confrontation at Waterloo. The first of two volumes, this study is a thoroughly researched examination of the opening moves of the campaign from a new perspective based on evidence never before presented to an English-speaking audience. Hofschrer arrives at far-reaching conclusions about the controversial theory that the Duke of Wellington deceived his Prussian allies and all subsequent historians of the campaign. By presenting events from the perspective of the Germans, the author undermines the traditional view of the campaign as one fought out by the French and the British and reveals the crucial role of troops from Prussia and the German states.

Book Information

Hardcover: 416 pages

Publisher: Greenhill Books (February 19, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1853673048

ISBN-13: 978-1853673047

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 1.5 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.7 pounds

Average Customer Review: 3.5 out of 5 stars 27 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #844,708 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #59 in Books > History > Europe > Belgium #166 in Books > History > Military > Napoleonic Wars #2783 in Books > History > Europe > Germany

Customer Reviews

The events of Waterloo must be read in the light of what happened on the days before. This volume is a must for anyone that wants to know why the forces arrived at Waterloo on the 18th. The two battles of the 16th were based on a comedy of errors by both sides. One French corps ends up at neither battle. The entire debate on why Wellington did not aid the Prussians is discussed. Excellent book!

This book along with the second volume "The German Victory" seems to have touched a nerve ending among many readers. The book covers the overall situation in Europe before Waterloo, the

fragile coalition between the Allies, the fighting around Carleroi, Franes and of course the dual battles of Ligny and Quatre Bras. Peter Hofschröer writes almost entirely from a Prussian perspective which is refreshing but at times a little frustrating (as I would have liked a bit more French input). He tries to convince the reader that the Waterloo Campaign was more of a German/Prussian victory than a British one based on the make up and numbers of the Allied forces that actually fought in the campaign. He also pulls no punches on the Duke of Wellington's performance in the opening rounds of the campaign and concludes from the evidence of his research that the Duke deceived his Prussian Allies into fighting at Ligny when he knew he could not offer any support. I enjoyed reading this book which I found to be thoroughly researched and thought provoking and also made good use of maps. Peter Hofschröer has certainly come up with an interesting alternative view point which may polarize the way many people view how the Waterloo Campaign was won.

For some one interested in the real development of the Waterloo campaign. Rich in details and very well documented. An historical investigation written by a serious professional military historian.

My review is intended to refer to both parts of Peter Hofschröer's two-decker history of the events of June-July 1815. Indeed, it is a shame in way that they were published separately, for the events (and Hofschröer's narrative of them) are a seamless unit. Hofschröer has performed an inestimable service by making available, in magnificent detail and fluent English, the story of the Prussian side of the events of June-July 1815. That story has for far too long been glossed over, minimised, almost ignored in English-language histories. Hofschröer has removed for ever the (always slight) excuse given by lack of a good English narrative of the Prussians' deeds. Nothing can take away his achievement in doing that, no matter how flawed his books are (IMHO) by chauvinism, misrepresentation and downright silliness. Hofschröer reveals the new Prussian army's enormous strength of organisation and morale, which enabled it to resume a decisive offensive within 36 hours of its defeat at Ligny, and the formidable tactical grasp of its commanders in the final crisis. Rather than simply falling into line with Wellington's tattered left flank, leaving the French the possibility of withdrawal, the Prussians detached the minimum forces needed to prevent a collapse there, and maintained their drive on the French right rear round Plancenoit. That ground once gained (at terrible cost, for Napoleon knew equally how vital it was) there was no escape for the French as a formed army; their dissolution in rout was the fruit of a brilliant tactical insight ruthlessly executed. But, above all, Hofschröer gives us, for the first time in English, the human voice of the Prussian

combatants. We have long been accustomed to the voices of Harris and Kincaid, Marbot and Marcel; now we hear their German contemporaries. With all this wealth of scholarship at his command, Hofschröer had the opportunity to write the first genuinely balanced history of the Waterloo-Paris campaign, recognising the vital contributions of all the Allies. For an Allied victory (not German, not British) it certainly was. Wellington's decision to stand at Waterloo was based on his agreements with Blücher and Gneisenau for Prussian intervention, and the Prussian advance was predicated on Napoleon being pinned in front by the Anglo-Dutch forces. Neither Allied army could have won, and either or both might have been annihilated, without that basic trust and cooperation. Unfortunately, Hofschröer has sunk to the occasion. He seems to be of that mind-set which believes that balance consists of equal and opposing biases; this works fine for crankshafts, less well for history. In his efforts to redress the pro-British bias of Anglophone histories, he veers to an equal extreme of pro-Prussian bias. His industry and judgement in assembling and selecting data are magnificent; his interpretations are all too often openly, sometimes farcically, partisan. It will probably be another generation before someone achieves a genuine synthesis. It seems to me Hofschröer's problem (my categorisation, not his) stems basically from a view, widespread in Germany, of the events of 1813-15 as the spiritual birthplace of modern (i.e. Prussian-led) Germany and the precursor of national unification. This is the German equivalent of Manifest Destiny, and Germans of even mildly nationalist tendencies bristle at any perception that it is being downplayed or marginalised - as it certainly has been in Anglophone histories. This leads him not to follow through on his genuine insight that Prussia and Britain were pursuing quite different war aims in 1815. The Prussians were seeking revenge for defeat and occupation, and the opportunity to resume Frederick the Great's programme of expansion. The British, on the other hand, wanted to restore France as an orderly member of the European family of nations, powerful enough to act as a check to Austrian, Russian - or Prussian - expansionism if necessary. A similar contrast marked the aims of Russia and the western allies regarding Germany in 1945. It also leads him to downplay the shameless behaviour of the Prussians towards their Saxon allies, 20,000 of whom were sent back from the theatre of war, almost on the eve of battle, after Prussian mistreatment drove them to mutiny. Presumably Saxons don't count as Germans in the context of 'German Victory'. The urge to magnify Prussia's glory years also leads Hofschröer into some very silly positions. He snipes persistently at the disbursement of 'British gold' which he seems to believe unfairly attracted Germans who would otherwise have fought for Prussia. One might point out that the British had retained the old-fashioned habit of paying for goods and services received, in contrast to the Prussians who had discovered the attractions of Napoleon's methods of extortion. More to the point,

however, without the 'British gold' the non-Prussian German contingents in Belgium would have been another bankrupt farce like the German Corps on the Rhine (eloquently described by Hofschoer himself). Without them the Allied line on Mont St Jean would have been 30% shorter, and Napoleon would have broken through before the Prussians arrived. The silliest assertions of all, however, are those around the alleged 'race to Paris' which Hofschoer dwells on almost obsessively in the second volume. It takes a minimum of two to have a race and there is nothing in Hofschoer's account that indicates the British were competing. I for one decline to believe that the Prussian command, so perceptive in its operational planning, was foolish enough to engage in the sort of steeple-chase Hofschoer describes. A far more plausible interpretation is that the Prussians pressed forward in the hope of taking Paris on the fly, and being brought up short before the northern defences had to wait for the British, who had all the siege guns. Probably Wellington, who (Hofschoer concedes) had far better intelligence sources in Paris, knew all along that would happen, and saw no point in wearing out men and horses to no avail.

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