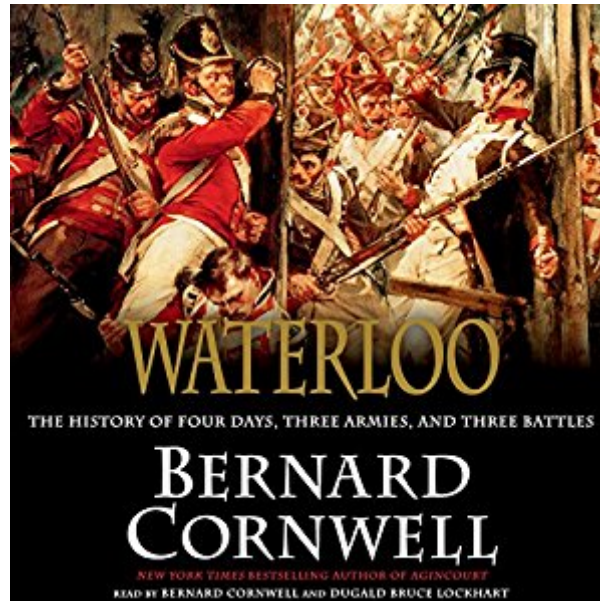




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Waterloo: The History Of Four Days, Three Armies, And Three Battles



Synopsis

From the New York Times best-selling author comes the definitive history of one of the greatest battles ever fought - a riveting nonfiction chronicle published to commemorate the two-hundredth anniversary of Napoleon's last stand. On June 18, 1815, the armies of France, Britain, and Prussia descended upon a quiet valley south of Brussels. In the previous three days, the French army had beaten the Prussians at Ligny and fought the British to a standstill at Quatre-Bras. The Allies were in retreat. The little village north of where they turned to fight the French army was called Waterloo. The blood-soaked battle to which the town gave its name would become a landmark in European history. In his first work of nonfiction, Bernard Cornwell combines his storytelling skills with a meticulously researched history to give a riveting chronicle of every dramatic moment from Napoleon's daring escape from Elba to the smoke and gore of the three battlefields and their aftermath. Through quotes from the letters and diaries of Emperor Napoleon, the Duke of Wellington, and the ordinary officers and soldiers, Cornwell brings to life how it actually felt to fight those famous battles as well as the moments of amazing bravery on both sides that left the outcome hanging in the balance until the bitter end. Published to coincide with the battle's bicentennial in 2015, Waterloo is a tense and gripping story of heroism and tragedy - and of the final battle that determined the fate of nineteenth-century Europe.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As to be expected from such a successful fiction author, Waterloo is an easy-to-read book whose narrative helps make sense of a very confusing battlefield. Cornwell does a great job of not only

setting the strategic and operational stage, helping us understand Wellington, Blucher, and Napoleon, but also weaving in personal anecdotes of the soldiers who fought and died on the battlefield. Waterloo, as can be imagined in a battle its size, was confusing. Many accounts contradict each other or, at least, can't agree on the timing and sequence of events. Cornwell addresses many of the key disconnects and lays out what he believed happened all while telling a story. When it's done you can begin to feel how the battle flowed, not in neat phases but as a series of often overlapping events played out over the battlefield. In this the storyteller comes to the fore because he's able to weave together a variety of multiple events, perspectives, and people in such a way that you see the whole and not the part. It's not just a story of the British or Prussian or French armies, or the common soldier, or the three great leaders. In the end it's a story about how that all came together. In this Cornwell was able to rely on the original work of historians - Cornwell's strength in this book is not original research, there's nothing new historically, but what makes his book worth reading is the way he painlessly tells the tale in a very understandable manner. If I had one complaint, and it's a relatively small one, it's that he switches between the past and present tenses in his writing, sometimes within the same paragraph. I think he periodically switched to the present tense to try to increase the immediacy of what he was describing, but, for me, it tended to interrupt the moment; rather than staying caught up in the story, it reminded me I was reading a book. If you're familiar with some of the post-war finger-pointing among the allies you'll understand, after reading the book, Cornwell's conclusion that, "The battle of Waterloo was an allied victory. That was how it was planned and that was how it turned out. Wellington would never have made his stand if he thought for one moment that the Prussians would not let him down. Blucher would never have marched if he thought Wellington would cut and run." This is one of those books that I still recommend even if you're familiar with Waterloo. Cornwell's ability to tell a story really pulls together the historical elements in a way that allows understanding.

Bernard Cornwell's *Waterloo* is a superb history of the June 1815 battle; rich in detail, highly entertaining, masterfully organized, easily understanding of the more deadly refinements of early 19th century warfare, including great plates of artistic representations (e.g., *The Duke of Wellington*, by Thomas Lawrence, *Lady Butler*, *Scotland Forever* (1881), *Gibb's Closing the Gates of Hougoumont, 1815* (1906)). For Cornwell, well known for his historical fiction (*Sharpe* *Waterloo*, for example), this is his first "non fiction" book and the book came out in England in time for the battle's 200th anniversary in mid June. It was easily a best seller. The

reviewer's book was a paperback version and bought in Canada. Waterloo as a battle has none of the simplicities of directness of, say, Gettysburg; it is complex, with three armies, a multitude of regiments, brigades, different generals (with foreign names) and the myriad sweep of various landscapes and sites of battle and telling and informative maps. Reading this book is like having ocean waves of history wash over the reader scene after scene, battle after battle (Quatre-Bras, Ligny, Hougomont, La Haie Sante, the advance of the Imperial Guard) punch forward without prediction of outcome (yet knowing its outcome). Wellington centric, respectful of the contribution of General von Blücher, filled with contemporaneous diary entries of the warriors, and highly readable, Cornwell makes the case for Wellington's heroism, his fearlessness and tactical genius, the horrors of battle and defeat, the razor's edge of victory, and the justified historical opprobrium of Napoleon's final battle despite, in Cornwell's clever aside at the end, about Napoleon's lasting fame which resides on that æmythical plane where the French are not beaten fairly and squarely, but are victims of a cosmic fate.

Not as detailed or well researched as Waterloo New Perspectives by David Hamilton-Williams. Does not adequately cover the strategic reasons for the campaign which lead to the battle. Downplays role played by allies in defeat of Napoleon, particularly role of Prussians in Ligny and Dutch at Quatre Bras. Book is very readable, but should not be considered the final word on the campaign. A good place for someone, who wants to learn more, to start.

I found this book to be a great history of this epic battle. I went into this only knowing the very basic outline. Not much more than Wellington won. The author described all of the main events and explained that these events were not always serial and were, in fact, going on simultaneously. There is a great description of early 19th century battle tactics both for infantry and cavalry. I learned a lot about how units are organized and how they move through the battle. Another bonus is at the end of every chapter, the author included full color reprints of major art works covering the battle. These works were coordinated to show the action that was just described in the foregoing section. These paintings brought the battle to life. If I had one fault with the book, it was in the first half. There is a lot of repetition-needless repetition to me-where it seems almost like the author was padding the story to increase the page count. Happily, once he got into the meat of the battle, the repetition was reduced to more proper summaries and reminders of just what was going on in the battle. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn more about this famous battle.

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