WATERLOO: Myth and Reality

GARETH GLOVER
Robin de Wilde - What we know and what we know we don’t know! Review of Gareth Glover’s ‘Waterloo - Myth and Reality’ Someone said that a Battle is like a ‘Grand Ball’. At such an occasion everyone knows who the hosts of the Ball are, in whose honour it is being given, what time the Ball starts, who some of the guests are, and depending on the numbers how many other people, friends and acquaintances are present, though the crush may too great for you to meet everyone, even if you knew them, and at which Table you sat and finally at what time it ends. If you think about ‘Waterloo’, the analogies become obvious. More people attended it than at any Ball! Some did not make it, Grouchy, for example. However, the consequences for everyone were overwhelming. Napoleon exiled to St. Helena. Ney shot by a firing squad! Peace in Europe for the next 35 years or so, or something approaching that! The Duke was Prime Minister on three occasions. The creation of the idea of the British Empire, over which the sun never set. It had existed before, but could never have developed and grown without the Royal Navy and the skills they developed during what most of us seem to call ‘the Napoleonic Wars’. The British Army became properly organised and better led, by officers and NCOs who were given real professional training. Gareth Glover is one of a splendid core of people who have taken the study of this era to new and acclaimed heights. I came to this much later than I should have done, and it was a someone else’s review which made me purchase this volume. He has made himself a master of this period, and the way he sets out the ‘Battle of Waterloo’ the questions he asks and discusses, his mastery of the extensive written sources, make it a volume to be treasured. He is honest about the things he does not know, he appreciates that some of the witnesses may be unreliable, the evidence is sometimes confused and contradictory. I was in company with a retired officer, who had been, in his time, Chief of the General Staff, and the third person present made a comment about the Battle, and the General and I immediately said: “You are ignoring the role of the 52nd under the command of Sir John Colbourne, later Lord Seaton”. I was delighted that the General and I took the same view of this crucial moment. Gareth Glover’s research and scholarship on this area, six volumes of Waterloo Sources, make this particular volume likely to be the definitive account on one of the great moments in European history. It is a tribute to his original training as a Royal Navy Officer! The question and answer discussions make this a book worth having. There ought to be regular occasions for Lectures on the whole period. I go every year in May to the ‘Boswell Book Fair’ held at Dumfries House in Ayrshire. It is a delightful occasion. Some of the speakers are outstanding. A lot of books are sold. Perhaps such an occasion exists, but I have missed discovering it.

GPsomas - Enjoyable. Explores some new areas. Not a bad retelling and worthwhile for neophytes and Napoleonic buffs alike. I want to read Glover’s other work.

fchb - Five Stars. Good maps.

J. Kane - WATERLOO: MYTH AND REALITY. The book is well set out and balanced. It starts with the situation prior to the main event. Covers the event itself in great detail and describes what happened subsequently. As it goes it discusses common held beliefs about Waterloo, where those ideas came from and how valid they are. the author does an excellent job of sticking to his narrative. There are a large amount of notes that are referenced at the end of the book. If you wish to follow each one during the course of reading you have to find them at the back, however, you don’t have to and were they all included at the appropriate point the narrative would become
hopelessly disjointed. As it is the author does an excellent job of exploring certain wider points without going off track. It might be useful to have a complete knowledge and understanding of the battle and it's narratives prior to reading the book but such an understanding is for students of the subject and is completely unnecessary for the enjoyment of the book. I would thoroughly recommend this book.

Kindle Customer - Final Chapter in Napoleonic Military History. Excellent read on some factual information about events that culminated in the defeat of the French at Waterloo.

Desmond J. Keenan - What really happened at the Battle of Waterloo. This book examines all the evidence regarding the run-up to, and during the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815. Many myths that grew up regarding the battle are disposed of. The British claimed that they won the victory, while the Prussians claimed that they did. But without all the allied forces working together it would not have been won. Napoleon was strangely passive, and lacked his chief of staff, to change verbal directions into precise commands. Perhaps he was ill. Again, the mis-handling of D’Erlon’s corps two day previously, when it could have been decisive, is noted. But why were repeated cavalry attacks made on unbroken infantry. Presumably Napoleon who had never met Wellington in battle, thought they were broken. They should have been. Altogether and engaging book.

Cherry auf Deutsch - Met Expectations. No intent to write a book review, so I won't.

G. D. Kendall - Not for beginners, but very solidly researched. This book rests on very wide - one might almost say comprehensive - research, but you should be aware that it doesn't set out to be a narrative. The title is an honest one in that the book examines the evidence and then provides the author's conclusion in respect of number of points on which other writers and authorities have offered differing, and so conflicting, historical descriptions. The broad sequence of events is often somewhat clouded by an unrelenting procession of lower detail. The author pretty much assumes a reasonable knowledge of the battle from prior reading. That said, with a bit of effort and repeated references to the battle maps, it is possible to read this and understand the key fights and battle manoeuvres. Overall, the solid base of evidence and author's willingness to describe the horrors authentically makes for a satisfying read, even if the reasoning supporting some of the conclusions, presented here as 'realities', occasionally seems rather skimped.

Captain D - Excellent overview of battle. This writer has an engaging writing style and methodically examines many aspects of the battle, with special insets highlighting particular events of the battle, as to whether they really happened or not. Related maps are excellent. Highly recommended for all students of this battle!

Dr. Leonard L. Haynes III - Outstanding!. An excellent treatment and thoughtful analysis of a historic battle that changed the world.

JGS - Myths are researched. Common myths about the battle of Waterloo are researched. Some are debunked and other are show to be correct. As all military histories on a Kindle device, no illustrations or the ones in the text are unusable, which means all the details of positions and tactics can’t be seen on a map. When Kindles allow multiple windows for maps and words and you can press a statement in
the words and an arrow will show up on the map, military histories will be bought by way more people.

Robin de Wilde - Which is the best recent production on Waterloo?. this is an impossible question to answer. Each has its own qualities, but I prefer that of Gareth Glover, for his enthusiasm for the subject, his study of the whole area, and the separate works on aspects of Waterloo, make me an enthusiast for this Edition. His clarity is admirable, as is his detail in support of his reasoning. With some of the other copies, I began to lose enthusiasm for the excessive detail, in comparison to that of Glover, who has avoided some of the sins committed by his rivals. I will not spell out what I consider to be the many sins committed by other authors. The reality is that despite handicaps, the Duke of Wellington outthought Napoleon, had better equipment, and positioned himself in the best place that he could, having some time previously considered the site of the battle as being appropriate. One of the dangers is thinking one author is better than another. That is unreal. Of course, Blucher and the Prussians turned out to be essential to the final result. My own view is that Wellington, yet to be Prime Minister at least twice, was not as tired as Napoleon, and outthought him. Napoleon had spent his life alienating people, and his Exile was justified, but his behaviour is in contrast to that of Napoleon.

HMS Warspite - Myth and reality.... The Battle of Waterloo has long been considered a decisive moment in European history. Its bicentennial in 2015 has prompted a flood of new books on the battle. Two hundred years on, many aspects of the Waterloo campaign remain controversial. "Waterloo: Myth and Reality" brings some fresh meat to that fight. Gareth Glover is the editor of the "Waterloo Archive", an extensive new collection of sources on the campaign of Waterloo. His background informs this book, which provides both a highly serviceable narrative and Glover's final argument on a number of cherished myths about the battle. The narrative should appeal to the general reader and the student of the battle. The comments on various myths may inform and/or infuriate, depending on the attachment of the reader to, for example, cherished regimental histories and/or national honors. There is a limited but excellent selection of maps, diagrams and illustrations to support the narrative. This reader was particularly fascinated by Glover's careful deconstruction of the final assault by Napoleon's Imperial Guard on Wellington's battered lines on the Mont St Jean ridge, late in the day on 18 June 1815. Relying heavily on French sources, the author identifies three separate and distinct elements to the attack, each of which were defeated by different Allied regiments, perhaps accounting for the still active controversy over who really won the battle. Glover's approach is methodical and even-handed. Not every reader will like his findings, but all should find this a worthwhile read. Strongly recommended.

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“A radical re-assessment . . . This is fascinating stuff . . . a most useful addition to the Waterloo—and indeed Napoleonic—bookshelf. ”—Military Modelling Magazine

More has probably been written about the Waterloo campaign than almost any other in history. It was the climax of the Napoleonic Wars and forms a watershed in both European and world history. However, the lethal combination of national bias, willful distortion and simple error has unfortunately led to the constantly regurgitated traditional “accepted” version being significantly wrong regarding many episodes in the campaign. Oft-repeated claims have morphed into established fact, and it is high time that these are challenged and finally dismissed. Gareth Glover has spent a decade uncovering hundreds of previously unpublished eyewitness accounts of the battle and campaign, which have highlighted many of these myths and errors. In this groundbreaking history, based on extensive primary research of all the nations involved, he provides a very readable and beautifully balanced account of the entire campaign while challenging these distorted claims and myths, and he provides clear evidence to back his version of events. His thoughtful reassessment of this decisive episode in world history will be stimulating reading for those already familiar with the Napoleonic period, and it will form a fascinating introduction for readers who are discovering this extraordinary event for the first time.

“An enjoyable and informative review of the battle that shaped Europe for the next two centuries. ”—Firetrench Editorial Reviews

About the Author

Gareth Glover is a former Royal Navy officer and military historian who has made a special study of the Napoleonic Wars for the last 30 years.

The book by Gareth Glover has a rating of 5 out of 4.5. 133 people have provided feedback.