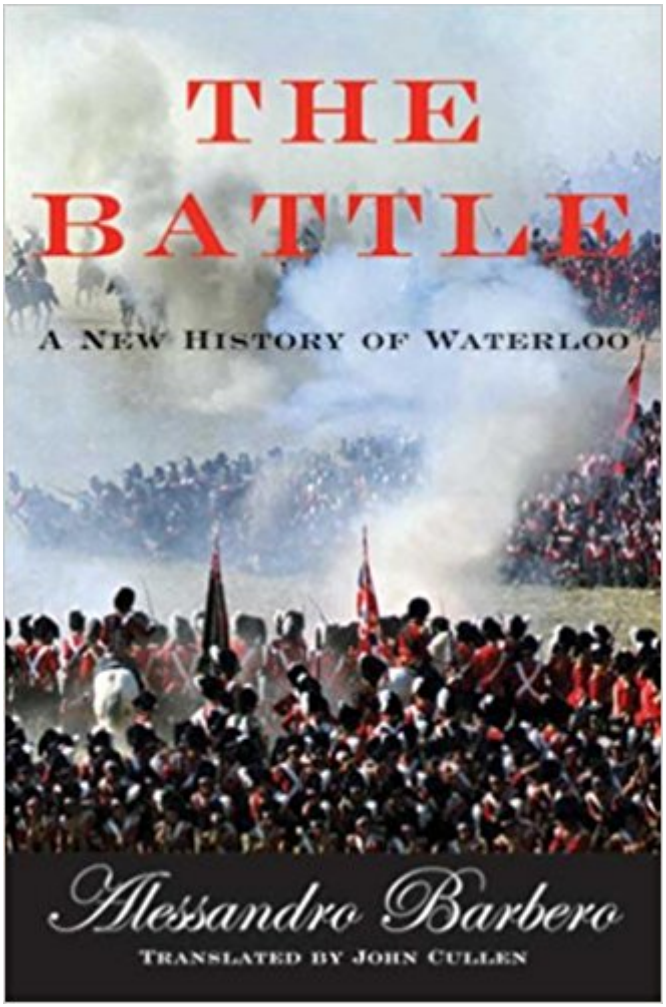
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The Battle: A New History Of Waterloo



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Synopsis

A vivid human and military history of the legendary battle At Waterloo, some 70,000 men under Napoleon and an equal number under Wellington faced one another in a titanic and bloody struggle. In the end, as John Keegan notes, contemporaries felt that Napoleon’s defeat had "reversed the tide of European history." Even 190 years later, the name Waterloo resounds. Italian historian Alessandro Barbero’s majestic new account stands apart from previous British and French histories by giving voice to all the nationalities that took part. Invoking the memories of British, French, and Prussian soldiers, Barbero meticulously re-creates the conflict as it unfolded, from General Reille’s early afternoon assault on the chateau of Hougoumont, to the desperate last charge of Napoleon’s Imperial Guard as evening settled in. From privates to generals, Barbero recounts individual miracles and tragedies, moments of courage and foolhardiness, skillfully blending them into the larger narrative of the battle’s extraordinary ebb and flow. One is left with indelible images: cavalry charges against soldiers formed in squares; the hand-to-hand combat around farmhouses; endless cannon balls and smoke. And, finally, a powerful appreciation of the inevitability and futility of war. To be published on the 190th anniversary of Waterloo, The Battle is a masterpiece of military history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This new and valuable history of the 1815 French defeat begins with a minimum of background for the non-Napoleonic student, but does superlatively well once Wellington and Napoleon have arrayed their armies for battle (and does not forget the Prussians waiting in the wings). The

narrative is unusually accessible, and as experienced readers march on, they will find some novel insights and analyses. For Barbero, cavalry was not on the whole effective, but it could usefully suppress artillery, a welcome change from the usual denigration of everybody's equine forces (even the British are given credit for superior horses). The role of the Prussians, and also of German allied troops in Wellington's ranks, is studied in much more detail than in more Anglocentric accounts, and that many of the Prussians were half-trained militia is emphasized. Finally, Napoleon's army did not go off completely thrashed and in disarray, but substantially maintained order and discipline for several days. The author also does a better job than many popular historians in dealing with factors such as rate of fire, accurate range and the sights, sounds and smells of a Napoleonic battlefield. And while rejecting certain "patriotic myths," he supports the concept of Waterloo as a battle of unusual intensity. (July) Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Italian historian Barbero offers a very readable narrative of one of the most significant battles in European history. From soggy June 17 (the day before) to the bloody night of June 18-19, he describes Waterloo as if telling a story, including details--such as both Wellington's and Napoleon's use of telescopes to keep an eye on one another, and the fact that experienced soldiers smeared their blankets with mud to waterproof them--to fill in the picture for those unacquainted with the fine points of Napoleonic-era warfare. Barbero also provides enough information on tactics to depict how and why as well as what the commanders were trying to do, which makes the book an excellent resource for those with limited knowledge of the battle. It also puts such vexing questions as whether Napoleon should have attacked earlier in the day, and to what extent Ney and Grouchy left undone what they ought to have done, in the context of what the various commanders knew and had reason to expect. Frieda MurrayCopyright Ã Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved

I have been reading about the Battle of Waterloo for almost 40 years. This rates as the best account so far. Barbero has an eminently readable style that provides strategic and tactical insight, as well as the human experience down to the soggy KGL soldiers scrounging for food and dry bedding. Barbero gives a balanced account of the contribution of the Prussians and Netherlands armies, as well as the German troops in the British army who played a key role throughout the battle. The significance of their role is acknowledged from the start, with reference to the work of other fine historians of more recent times, such as Peter Hofschroer. There are other works which can provide

a greater depth of technical data, on unit strengths, frontages, and uniforms etc. But for a fine explanation of why the battle was being fought; why it was fought on the ridge of Mont St Jean; how decisions were made; and the impact upon the individuals involved in the execution of those decisions, this is a superb account.

A fine overview of the battle and its context that is divided into concise, well written and thematically driven chapters that include valuable information on how forces of the era were organized and fought. The book is very rich in conveying personal experiences of participants and in the development of the battle and its immediate aftermath. It conveys relatively little on Napoleon, but is far fuller on Wellington. This engaging study is a bit weak on maps--they are easily available online anyway--but very, very rich in looking at the topography of the battlefield and the dramatic events that took place on its stage. Fascinating study by a great writer! "Reads like a novel"--a really good one!

Rarely does the course of a continent’s history ride on a single battle (maybe Africa’s as a result of the Battle of Zama?), but many have argued that Waterloo was the definitive end of empire in Europe (the Germans were slow learners, apparently). Thankfully, none of this is at issue in this history of Waterloo. It is about the battle, pure and simple, and it is done so clearly that one can literally feel the ebb and flow of battle as it changes minute by minute from noon to sunset. Barbero has the unlikely ability to provide a clinically accurate account of the battle (within the limits of the constant arguments of professional historians) that has emotional power that forces you to put it down from time to time to let your mind absorb what you’ve just read. I would love to see what he could do with the Battle of Tsu Shima.

I’m not sure how much of Barbero’s book is actually "new", my main narrative of the battle comes from David Howarth’s Waterloo: Day of Battle and of course, Keegan’s Face of Battle and I don’t remember anything in those being contradicted by Barbero. But then again, I read them long ago. He does have a few things to say about Hougoumont and the massive French cavalry charge that Napoleon attempted to disown and foist off upon Ney in later years, so perhaps that is it.Barbero’s view seems to be that Napoleon lost the battle by failing to launch his reserve at the correct moment, the time when the French cavalry had virtually the entire Allied infantry in square, and had brought up enough guns to "soften them up" for an infantry charge. Barbero does concede that Napoleon was hampered by the action taking place on the reverse slope of the ridge, out of his

LOS, but then goes on to say that the Napoleon of 5 years before would have simply ridden up to see for himself what was going on.Barbero's book is well written (at least this translation is) and he gives a very detailed narrative and does a very good job of blending the personal anecdotes of primary source accounts of the battle with the "big picture" stuff that keeps the personal anecdotes contextually placed within the overall battle. Highly recommended. In fact I'll be keeping the book.

I had to read this book three times before I memorized officers' names enough for the battle to come through. The names, you see, won't tell you an officer's nationality, so you can't rely on a French-sounding name to indicate a French officer. It turns out that the population in Britain and Europe was much more cosmopolitan than I assumed. Someone familiar with the history of Waterloo would not have this problem. Stay with it though, and you will see Barbero lay out the whole field of battle and create a flowing, understandable narrative. This is a translation, but it's an excellent one.

I'll just add to what the other reviews indicate. This is a great book on the battle of Waterloo. As the title states, it covers little else! Just the battle, told practically minute by minute, with stories from all sides. The text is very well written and translated. A bit dry at times, but for the most part very engaging. I've read other histories (like Hibbert's and lots of others from the mostly British point of view), and it ws great to learn a lot more about the Allied forces and the French.The fighting for Hougomont, La Haye Sainte, Placenoit and to the east are all covered in detail.Even if you've read other histories of the Battle of Waterloo, this one will provide some new insights and descriptions of events!

Some reviewers noted that this book provides 'new' information. Obviously they have previous access to descriptions of the battle of Waterloo from other sources.However, if this is the first time you decide to read in details about the momentous conflict 'The Battle' is the book you should pick up.Like all major enagagements Waterloo involved many elements and it is a Herculean task to portray the events, people and other aspects with a clear perspective and orderly sequence. The author has succeeded admirably in doing that and more. Most importantly he has made the book interesting and enjoyable to read.

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