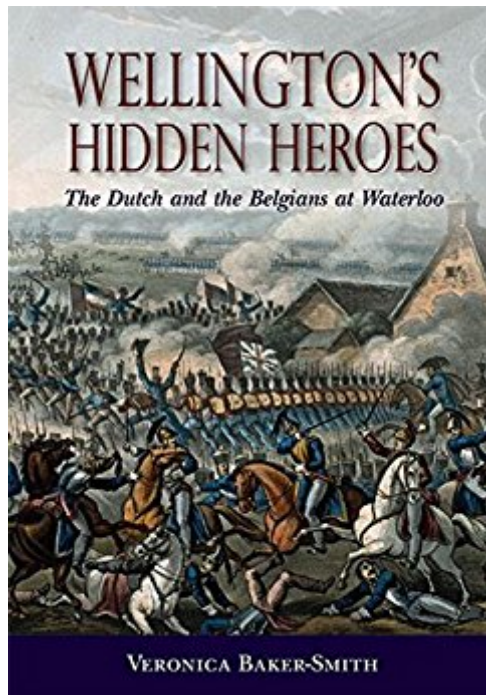


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Wellington's Hidden Heroes: The Dutch And The Belgians At Waterloo



Synopsis

The Duke of Wellington described the Battle of Waterloo as "the most desperate business I ever was in . . . I was never so near being beat." The courage of British troops that day has been rightly praised ever since, but the fact that one-third of the forces which gave him his narrow victory were subjects, not of George III but of the King of the Netherlands has been almost completely ignored. This book seeks to correct a grave injustice through the study of Dutch sources, the majority of which have never been used by English-speaking historians. The Dutch-Belgians have been variously described as inexperienced, incompetent and cowardly, a rogue element in the otherwise disciplined Allied Army. It is only now being tentatively acknowledged that they alone saved Wellington from disaster at Quatre Bras. He had committed a strategic error in that, as Napoleon advanced, his own troops were scattered over a hundred kilometers of southern Belgium. Outnumbered three to one, the Netherlands gave him time to concentrate his forces and save Brussels from French occupation. At Waterloo itself, on at least three occasions when the fate of the battle hung upon the cusp, their engagement with the enemy aided British recovery. Their commander "the Prince of Orange" has been viciously described as an arrogant fool, "a disaster waiting to happen" and even a dangerous lunatic. According to the assessment of Wellington himself, he was a reliable and courageous subordinate. This book reveals a new dimension of the famous campaign, and includes many unseen illustrations. For the first time, a full assessment is made of the challenge which Willem I faced as king of a country hastily cobbled together by the Congress of Vienna, and of his achievement in assembling, equipping and training 30,000 men from scratch in 18 months. During this 200th anniversary year of the Battle of Waterloo, the veneration which the Duke of Wellington justifiably enjoyed after the campaign should not be allowed to overshadow his lifelong lack of recognition of the debt he owed the Netherlands. As he once said himself, "there should be glory enough for all," and in these pages some of his most vital allies are finally allowed to claim their share.

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Customer Reviews

Exceptional Book.... a must-have for Waterloo Campaign Enthusiasts. In truth, I love reading most books about the otherwise grim and fascinating history of this world-changing saga dating back 200 years. It's a tale of endless discoveries and of varying opinions, versions, erroneous conclusions and rethinking of what we thought we knew about this history. So in all this sea of information any new book on the topic really has to explode with a good basic telling of the campaign to the general reader and starting historians, and also satisfy with intelligent indulgence the niche it explores related to a particular angle it brings to an already savvy Waterloo informed community. This book caught my eye right away as do most collected-works featuring the controversial topic of the Netherlands' kingdom military role in the Waterloo campaign. This controversy usually revolving around actually clarifying misconceptions, lies, paranoia and self-inflicted painful bias attitudes that many ultra-nationals typically begrudgingly hold against sources that expose as tripe their maliciously held reinventions of history against targeted non-guilty nationalities. I was very eager to read this book. Overall it's a fantastic compact historical source filled lavishly with witness accounts, other notable authors opinions of a wide variety of campaign events. The book tackles all controversies and mostly moves along at a pleasing reading pace. Avoiding any spoiler alerts I'm writing a lengthy summarized review; despite appearances of being too telling, my review is hardly revealing of the detailed content itself. The writer is obviously expertly familiar with all aspects of Napoleonic history and in telling a well written story that sticks with common-sense. Chapters are delightfully short in this 200 page book. It starts with gratitude to many helpers including British sources. Very thankfully, the history of the Netherlands Kingdom is clarified in a lovely concise short few pages from its Belgian and Dutch separate beginnings and various Kingdoms inclusions of each

before expanding on the Congress of Vienna's creation of the Kingdom. The King is often mentioned in the creation of the new Dutch-Belgian army and the Nassau regiments within - and importantly dwells upon the backgrounds of the multi-lingual, Peninsular veteran Prince of Orange and important generals Rebecque, Perponcher and Saxe-Weimar [who all crucially saved the Allied army and Prussians from disaster by independent quick-thinking actions taken early on June 15th when the surprise Napoleon's French offensive struck at Charleroi between their allies' armies]. The short chapters proceed to carefully interweave the historical campaign story with the commonly-held controversies associated with the Netherland's army as they appeared. Intelligently all the accusations and myths are explored in an open manner with counter-witnesses, logical conclusions, plausible speculations. Pre-war logistics and preparation of the Netherland's army is covered in one chapter, as are Allied army HQ intelligence reports and patrol messages covered in another. The tempo of the book rises strikingly with the chapter tackling the crucial June 15th manoeuvres by the Prince of Orange and battle-experienced staff of the Netherland's units closest to the opening French advance. Whereas Wellington clearly initially ordered ALL his troops to concentrate at points away from the French, with his Prussian allies as was the initial plan, instead the Netherland's staff did the unthinkable and smartest option - disobey Wellington's orders and instead hold onto the obvious blocking spot which prevented Napoleon's wing commander Ney from effectively splitting the allies in two and ultimately forcing a game-ending defeat on Blucher and thus thereafter compelling the outnumbered army of Wellington to run back to the Belgian ports. The essay related to Wellington's clumsy counter-moves upon reacting to the opening French hostilities is well explained with diverse information references and thus clarifying the legend of Wellington's deceit to the Prussian commanders that his army was assembling in the area very quickly when in fact it would take 2 days before his army could nearly fully combine. The author smartly explores all the actual moves and reasoning behind each Allied commander's decisions that critical day of June 15..... timing was everything - including the veteran Nassau commander Saxe-Weimar's own initiative to hustle his battalions of Nassauers to the crossroads of Quatre Bras from a few miles away - arriving barely 1 hour before a French Imperial Guard probe could capture the campaign winning prize that would have opened a triumphant French march up to Brussels. The book then intricately details the myths and error-filled impressions of cowardice by witnesses and historians of the Netherland's army at the battles of Quatre-Bras and Waterloo. Added are accounts of British and Prussian command follies - particularly both Blucher and Wellington being smug in believing Napoleon was in no position to launch an offensive against them before the Coalition Allies' other armies would arrive by July 1815. Also pointed out in dedicated chapters are the expected topic of performance of Bylandt's

brigade - untold heroics at Quatre-Bras and undeserved scorn at Waterloo - covered as well, General Chasse/ Col.Detmers brigade finale-attack that had the hidden 'glory' of sending the first Imperial Middle Guard attack-column running from its stalled position against that brave part of British Gen.Halkett's brigade which defiantly made a last stand choice and was even readying to charge those Guards themselves - This suppressed episode gets no comparison to the glory and accolades given to the Scots Greys similarly decisive scattering of much of one of D'Erlon's divisions. The rescue of the Scots Grey's by Gen.Ghingy's 'foreigner' cavalry is also highlighted as is General Tripp's 'hidden' Heavy cavalry charge against the French cavalry supporting D'Erlon that seems to have initiated Uxbridge's own decisive Heavy cavalry charges. Mentions are made of equally important roles of Saxe-Weimar's Nassauer troops at Hougoumont stronghold and at the fortified positions on Wellington's left flank where the Prussians were expected to link up. The author also portrays the other allied contingents the Brunswickers and KGL units using related perceptions, histories, roles they played alongside numerous controversies and myths about them; particularly the much debated Prince of Orange perceived 2 big battle blunders are openly discussed as is his noted bravery and strategic intelligence. Lack of British official and High Command credit to known Netherland's army successes are discussed. A very poignant after-battle study is made - somewhat excessively in being spread out in 3 further chapters with former stated information becoming repetitive. I was tempted to give a 4-star rating because there are some minor historical mistakes [-including; responsibility of French cavalry charge decisions, numbers of defenders at La Haye Sainte strongpoint, Grouchy and Ney clear strategic orders they were given in campaign, and the idea Grouchy could have simply marched westwards to join Napoleon in spite of no roads and flooded waterways in the way],. And there are crucial omissions of certain facts that would provide for strong arguments if not conclusive evidence; ie, many British witness accounts stating seeing Bylandt's brigade fought alongside Picton's 2 brigades against D'Erlon's attack, and also the most striking of a well-read British soldier [Halkett's brigade] witness account describing Chasse's glorious charge against the Guard are not fully recounted here for some strange reason. My only other biggest peeves with the book which does have nice pictures in it, are that there is no detailed tables for order of battle shown for the Netherland's army of 1815 - a necessity in most army-specific collective-works books in my opinion. Another flop in my opinion are no battle maps are added to expose controversy errors [ie, Bylandt's brigade's true position not exposed on June 18th and its subsequent place still in battle after D'Erlon's attack] - and the battle positions across Wellington's line of the various units of Chasse and Perponcher's and the Nassau battalions at Waterloo. A map of the June 15th/16th positions of the Netherland's army units near/ at Quatre-Bras

would have been an excellent addition too. I'm also curious and disappointed that the Hanoverian brigades are hardly mentioned in their conspicuous Waterloo roles near Hougomont fortress, in the allied center, and amidst Perponcher and Picton's Divisions on the Allied left wing. I can guarantee that in spite of my lengthy review, I've only just scratched the surface of the volumes of revealing exciting collected information that the author has compiled ever-so excellently. It is everything the book says on one of its opening pages; "This book fully examines the role of the almost-forgotten third of the Allied army [Wellington's army]."

A summary of the review on StrategyPage.Com Ms. Barker-Smith's book joins a number of recent studies with new takes on the events of June 1815, such as Peter Hofschrser's "1815 The Waterloo Campaign: The German Victory" or Andrew W. Field's "Prelude to Waterloo: Quatre Bras, The French Perspective" and "Waterloo: the French Perspective". By perusing Belgian and Dutch archives, memoirs, and histories, she has put together an impressive study of the role of the largely overlooked – not to say dismissed and even denigrated – Dutch-Belgian troops who made up about a third of Wellington's army during the campaign. She makes an excellent case that these troops, and the often belittled Prince of Orange who commanded them, made a solid contribution to the Allied victory, on several occasions playing a critical role. Baker-Smith offers some analysis of the reasons these troops received less credit than was their due, noting, of course, Wellington's gigantic ego as one factor, but more importantly noting that the neglect by historians of the Dutch and Belgian documents played an important role in their slighting of these troops. In several instances she is able to compare how particular events unfolded as understood by British observers with the very same events as viewed by their Dutch or Belgian counterparts, reminding us that perspective can color interpretation. This makes Wellington's Hidden Heroes a valuable addition to the literature on Waterloo. For the full review, see StrategyPage.Com

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