

Tactics and the Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon

By Dr. Rory Muir

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What was it like to be a soldier on a Napoleonic battlefield? What happened when cavalry regiments charged directly at one another? What did the generals do during battle? Drawing on memoirs, diaries and letters of the time, this book explores what actually happened in battle and how the participants' feelings and reactions influenced the outcome. Rory Muir focuses on the dynamics of combat in the age of Napoleon, enhancing his analysis with accounts of those who were there - the frightened foot soldier, the general in command, the young cavalry officer whose boils made it impossible to ride, and the smartly dressed aide-de-camp, tripped up by his voluminous pantaloons. This book sheds light on how military tactics worked by concentrating on the experience of soldiers in the firing line instead of the abstractions of drill manuals. Muir considers the interaction of artillery, infantry and cavalry; the role of the general, subordinate commanders, staff officers and aides; morale, esprit de corps and the role of regimental officers; soldiers' attitudes towards death and feelings about the enemy; the plight of the wounded; the difficulty of surrendering; and how victories were finally decided. He discusses the mechanics of musketry, artillery and cavalry charges and shows how they influenced the morale, discipline and resolution of the opposing armies.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal
Quite a few books deal with the military aspects of the Napoleonic era, especially campaigns, battles, and tactics, but very few focus on the nature of battle or what actually goes on during battle with any serious analysis. Research fellow Muir (Britain and the Defeat of Napoleon, Yale Univ., 1996) has filled a significant gap in the study of the period with this engaging study of the mechanics of a Napoleonic battle. Muir uses a tremendous number of firsthand accounts to discuss battlefield events, breaking down each into its component parts. A brief discussion of battles and battlefields is followed by a detailed treatment of each army component: artillery, infantry, and cavalry and the nature of their combat roles as reflected in contemporary accounts. In a separate section, the author considers the role played by the generals and their subordinate commanders, rounding out a well-ordered analysis. Strongly recommended for all good history collections.ADavid Lee Poremba, Detroit P.L.
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Review
"A stunning evocation of campaigning and battle, presented largely in the words of the participants, and enhanced by Muir's huge...knowledge of his subject." Toby Buchan, Literary Review "A major work." David Seymour, Military Illustrated "An important and useful study." Jeremy Black, Archives "Muir has filled an important gap in the study of the Napoleonic era with this engaging study of the mechanics of a Napoleonic battle." Library Journal

About the Author

Rory Muir is a visiting research fellow at the University of Adelaide. He is the author of *Britain and the Defeat of Napoleon, 1807-1815*, published by Yale University Press.

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