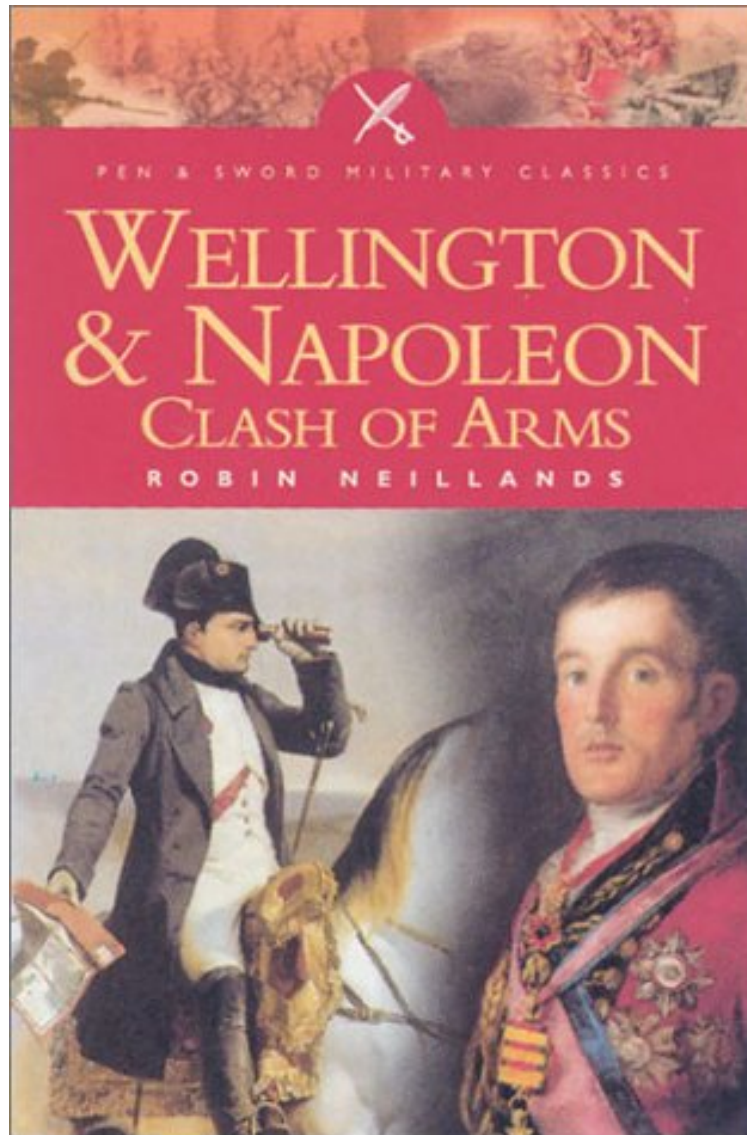


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Wellington and Napoleon: Clash of Arms (Pen and Sword Military Classics)

R Neillands

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R Neillands : Wellington and Napoleon: Clash of Arms (Pen and Sword Military Classics) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Wellington and Napoleon: Clash of Arms (Pen and Sword Military Classics):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Readable, but biased.By Chris RhettIts pretty ridiculous to compare Napoleon to Wellington. Both men were consummate generals. However the scale of Wellington's campaigns and

battles never came close to those of Napoleon. The only time the two met on the battlefield was the desperate encounter at Waterloo - where Napoleon's tactical options were extremely limited. Wellington on the other hand was under no such handicap. A painfully obvious Anglophile, Neillands concludes on the basis of this engagement that Wellington was the superior general. That said, the book is worth reading as a fairly honest and straightforward account, especially of the French struggles in Spain, and the part Wellington played in it. Though biased, Neillands is an excellent writer and unlike many historians, his work is pleasantly readable. 7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Well, this isn't a bad book for the price. By Jeffrey Reed I like this book. It's not very weighty, and gives a pretty breezy overview of a long period of time. It also tends to be a very traditional telling of the story of Napoleon's downfall. However, I would like to point out that the previous reviewer somewhat misconstrued the nature of this book. Neillands' goal is to see Wellington and Napoleon as parallel lives. Both lived in the military traditions of their countries, and in important ways, came to embody those traditions; Napoleon, the audacious, fast moving, hard hitting French soldier, and Wellington, the quieter, conservative, and solid nobleman/soldier. Napoleon moved through the professional training schools of the Old Regime, to become a general of the French Revolutionary armies. Wellington became an officer in the quaint English way of buying his commission. Both learned warfare by working through the ranks, Napoleon in Provence and Italy, Wellington in India. And both finally fought each other at the last battle of the wars, at Waterloo. Neither man really ever fought the other until that last battle. Napoleon's attention was focused on Central Europe - Austria and Germany - and Russia, while Wellington spent almost the entire time period covered by this book in Spain and Portugal. Only briefly did Napoleon personally intervene in Spain, preferring to leave Spanish affairs to his brother Joseph, Napoleon's handpicked king of Spain, and his Marshals. Wellington marched all over the western and central portions of the peninsula, and experienced great frustration working with the Spanish generals and Spanish system (calling it a government might be generous) Napoleon's overstretch, which led to his eventual downfall, began in Spain, with the Spanish uprising. The French could beat just about any Spanish regular military force, but they had no way to defeat the guerillos who swarmed along every road and in every town. French soldiers were killed retail, which, in the long run bankrupted the French war effort. The Spanish ulcer, despite its 'sideshow' quality, was the major cause of Napoleon's collapse. He could not afford the strain on manpower, supplies or treasure that the Spanish war caused France. Now, the reason the ulcer was inflamed and played its role as a drain on French resources was Wellington. His army, led, not always brilliantly, but for the most part competently and professionally, kept the French off guard, helped keep the Spanish and Portuguese armed and supplied and gave the Spanish regular armies, after their usual drubbings, a place to rally. Napoleon could continue to throw troops into Spain, but it was, by 1810, a losing investment, but one that he couldn't write off. Napoleon himself was losing his touch, to be sure. The battles of Aspern-Esseling and Wagram are not prime examples of Napoleon at his best, and the invasion of Russia was clearly a disaster. But, without the drain on his resources caused by Spain, would he have been better or worse off? Would the extra hundred thousand veterans wasting away in Spain, have been better used in Austria or Russia? Hard to say, but they might have helped. I give Wellington all the credit in the world (as Liddell Hart did too) for keeping his small army in being, managing to cooperate to a certain extent with the Portuguese and Spanish (and eventually the Dutch), and for taking advantage of the French style of warfare, to bleed Napoleon's armies in Spain, and eventually defeat him at Waterloo. Often, Wellington had the best of both worlds; an offensive strategy that put him in the tactical defensive position. For it is in the defensive art that Neillands feels Wellington made his mark. His ability to see the defensive quality of the terrain, to use the reverse slopes, and to rely on the marksmanship of the British 'thin red line' all worked to his advantage because Wellington well knew how the French were going to fight. His tactics were based on this understanding, and the French never really did work out a means of countering it. At Waterloo Napoleon tried massed artillery, cavalry charges and infantry shock attacks, and never made much of a dent in the British position. So, the Spanish war was an essential part of the downfall of Napoleon, and Wellington was essential to keeping that war going to a successful conclusion. Does that make him the greatest general of the war? Maybe not, but he certainly earns high marks, and is one of the best. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Poorly thought out, but an adequate summary of events. By A Customer Neillands says Napoleon was in decline for the last 8 yrs and the reason for that decline is the campaigns in Spain. NB however really did not campaign there, and devoted secondary attention to it. Neillands says that no one man played a more decisive role in that struggle than Wellington. He proved France could be defeated and his victories in Spain revived spirits of the allies. He slowly chipped away at the myth of invincibility of Napoleon. The final element contributing to Napoleon's downfall was himself. He went too far, refused to recognize enough is enough. Neillands argues that British soldiers did well against Napoleon's troops if well handled, well-positioned and could not be galled by cavalry and artillery. Well, who wouldn't be if all of these preconditions were met! The author's aim is to reduce the jumble of confusion of 20 years study the time period through men. Neillands claims that in the end W's tactical skills on the battlefield proved decisive. He doesn't say much to support this, and overlooks to a large degree the Prussian contribution to NB's defeat. NB's tactics never varied - it was to seek out the enemy and destroy his army - with blitzkrieg. Wellington knew @ command, logistics, was at ease at court. He had important political connections too. He had gained a clear idea of how, by setting attainable objectives and relying on his own force a campaign could be won. Wellington's army was

superior in training, discipline, marksmanship tactical ability, says Neillands but this is open to debate as well. Tellingly, Neillands admits that most of the Peninsula campaign was a side show. What he ought to have said is that because of this, the book's title of Wellington Napoleon is a bit misleading, as NB was not directly involved in Spain for much of Wellington's tenure there. The title is a stretch. Is Neillands correct when he says that 'Wellington must be considered the greatest general of his age.' Hardly.

Wellington and Napoleon tells the story of the convergence and final clash of two of the most brilliant commanders ever to meet on the field of battle. Wellington, his men said, "didn't know how to lose a battle". But Wellington himself admired his adversary: In Portugal and Spain, Wellington helped wreck Napoleon's Continental System, bled his reserves away and showed the 'unbeatable' French could be beaten after all. The opposing armies, like their commanders, were not at all similar. Napoleon's were large conscript armies, living off the land and led by marshals who rose by merit. Wellington's was a smaller, volunteer force, ruled by the lash though paid, and his officers were those the government chose to send. It was the British infantryman who made the difference. Napoleon never learned to counter Wellington's infantry, and at the great climax at Waterloo it cost him dear. Even so, the battle was so near-run that, but for luck and the Prussians, history might have taken an altogether different course.

About the Author Robin Neillands is a well-known military historian and travel writer. He is the author of *The Hundred Years' War*, *The Wars of the Roses* and *Great War Generals on the Western Front 1914-1918*