

Clausewitz on Waterloo

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On Waterloo: Clausewitz, Wellington, and the Campaign of 1815. By Carl von Clausewitz. Translated and edited by Christopher Bassford, Daniel Moran, and Gregory W. Pedlow. Charleston, SC: Clausewitz.com. 2010. xx + 297 pp. US\$18.00. ISBN 1 4537 0150 8

On Wellington: A Critique of Waterloo. By Carl von Clausewitz. Translated and edited by Peter Hofschröder. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 2010. vii + 251 pp. US\$32.95. ISBN 978 0 8061 4108 4

It is quite astonishing that Carl von Clausewitz's analysis of the Waterloo campaign had to wait until 2010 to be published in English. There has been a French translation since 1899, reprinted in 1973. The vogue for Clausewitz studies since the 1980s, the British interest and stake in Waterloo, and the dynamism of military history in English should have accounted for earlier translations. Now we have two of them.

The German scholar Peter Hofschröder cites no academic title or credentials on the jackets of his books, but the two volumes of his *1815: The Waterloo Campaign* (London: Greenhill Books, 1998 and 1999) remain a milestone in Waterloo studies. Based on archival material and on the very rich German literature of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, they focus on inter-allied problems and tend to ignore the French point of view, but they constitute the most recent and serious study of the whole campaign available in print. Hofschröder had a long debate with John Hussey in this journal, centred on the precise time when Wellington received the news of the French attack on June 15. The duke has become Hofschröder's bête noire, as also testified by his account of William Siborne's famous Waterloo model with the significant title *Wellington's Smallest Victory: The Duke, the Model Maker, and the Secret of Waterloo* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004). For Hofschröder, Wellington made errors of judgement in the Waterloo campaign, reacting too slowly to Napoleon's offensive and failing to help the Prussians at Ligny, while at the same time he wanted to stand in history as the sole victor over the emperor, mistreating Siborne, who provided too much evidence of the Prussian intervention on the field of Waterloo. Hofschröder has established himself as a leading scholar of the 1815 campaign, with a proprietary tendency which leads him to criticize sharply those who dare to

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contradict him or venture to question his strong bias against Wellington, as exemplified again by his chosen title for the current translation of Clausewitz.

The other translation, titled *On Waterloo*, is by three American academics working in defence institutions. Christopher Bassford and Daniel Moran are well-known specialists on Clausewitz. Gregory W. Pedlow, chief of the Historical Office at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, is a specialist of the Waterloo campaign. The trio have a great deal to offer in their volume besides the translation itself, but let us begin with Peter Hofschröder's introduction to *On Wellington*. Besides wondering where he found that Clausewitz was born 'into a family of priests of Polish origin' (p. 7), one is struck that he seems ignorant of Christopher Bassford's major work, *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Had he read it, Peter Hofschröder would not have written that 'the first time Clausewitz's treatise was used as a reference for an English-language book was in Col. Charles Chesney, R.E., *Waterloo Lectures* (1868)' (p. 13). An omission of this magnitude simply indicates that Clausewitz studies are a field in their own right and that historians of military campaigns ignore them at their peril. Aside from this, Peter Hofschröder tells the story of Wellington's reading of Clausewitz's text on the Waterloo campaign quite accurately, and shows his intimate knowledge of the duke's papers in Southampton as well as in the Additional Manuscripts at the British Library. He then reiterates his arguments about Wellington receiving the news of Napoleon's attack at 9 a.m. on 15 June 1815, and not reacting until late in the evening. Dr Julius von Pflugk-Harrtung, who worked in the Prussian military archives before the First World War and is the historian to whom Peter Hofschröder rightly paid the most vibrant tribute in his *1815* (vol. 1, pp. 17–18), had long ago dissected, examined, and refuted this viewpoint in an article which is a model of historical criticism ('Die preussische Berichterstattung an Wellington vor der Schlacht bei Ligny', *Historisches Jahrbuch*, XXIV, 1903, pp. 41–61). Recently, Dr Gregory W. Pedlow has taken up the question and has shown the fallacy of Hofschröder's arguments ('Back to Sources: General Zieten's Message to the Duke of Wellington on 15 June 1815', *First Empire* LXXXII, 2005, pp. 30–5). Peter Hofschröder has of course the right to stick to his point of view, but the uninformed reader of *On Wellington* will not even discover that there is a debate over this issue.

From footnotes we can infer that Peter Hofschröder took as a basis for his translation 'Der Feldzug von 1815 in Frankreich' in the first edition of the *Hinterlassene Werke* of Clausewitz, published by his widow (10 vols, Berlin: Dümmler, 1832–7). His English translation flows smoothly and is enriched with footnotes which sometimes compensate for Clausewitz's lack of information. This is the case on p. 129, on the sequences of the battle of Waterloo. The notes are also well documented on every person cited, but they could be shorter. Most readers of such a publication do not need 15 lines on Marshal Ney. On p. 99, Peter Hofschröder corrects a 'printing error' by changing a 3 into 33, making it the number of an additional chapter in Clausewitz's work! This illustrates again his amateurism in Clausewitz studies. Actually, chapter 43 is missing in all editions and it is always presented as such, for instance in the French translation by Captain A. Niessel (*Campagne de 1815 en France*, Paris: Chapelot, 1899; Champ Libre, 1973, p. 8). By approaching what is a well-established anomaly as if he were the first to see it, Peter Hofschröder weakens any comparison of his translation with the original German text,

and also shows his ignorance of the more accurate, edited text, based on Clausewitz's original manuscript, included by Werner Hahlweg in his critical edition of the Prussian officer's writings. At the end of his book Hofschröder gives a list of Clausewitz's published works, among which we find the *Schriften – Aufsätze – Studien – Briefe* (ed. Werner Hahlweg, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966). But this is only the first volume. In 1990 Werner Hahlweg published a second in two parts, including the 'Feldzug von 1815'. The 'printing error' is in vol. II-2 (p. 1007). Peter Hofschröder concludes his book with a very incomplete list of Clausewitz's published works and a bibliography that does not mention Peter Paret's fundamental biographical study, *Clausewitz and the State: The Man, His Theories, and His Times* (3rd edn, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

We are on more solid ground with Bassford, Moran, and Pedlow. They state at the beginning how they proceeded, on which sources they based their translation, namely the text published in the *Hinterlassene Werke* and also the more accurate one published by Hahlweg. They use Bassford's website – Clausewitz.com – to present Lord Liverpool's initial but partial translation (without chapters 1–7 and 48–58) and they help the reader by providing the superb battlefield maps which Clausewitz refers to in his study. Christopher Bassford's Introduction derives from chapter 3 of his *Clausewitz in English*. His story of Wellington's and his circle's encounter with Clausewitz does not differ substantially from Peter Hofschröder's but it falls more within the framework of the history of military thought. The editors then devote 33 pages to the correspondence within Wellington's circle on Clausewitz's study of the Waterloo campaign. With due references to the original texts, they help readers form their own ideas on the question. The translation of the campaign of 1815 is annotated with footnotes. These are not for the most part devoted to identifying the individual participants, but rather to the text itself, detailing possible omissions or additions in the original manuscript. The translation is exceptionally scrupulous, as for example in the case of the interpretation provided on p. 109 of a letter by Marshal Soult (given in French by Clausewitz), in which 'un corps de troupes' is rightly translated by 'a body of troops' because it does not refer to an army corps. Regarding the 'printing error' inappropriately solved by Peter Hofschröder, an elegant solution is here presented: two titles with a '1' and a '2' are given as adjuncts between brackets to facilitate the understanding of the '3'. This is more respectful of the text, as it does not alter the numbering of the following chapters. Sometimes, as on p. 125, a sentence is given which did not appear in the *Hinterlassene Werke* edition, but which is present in the original manuscript (Clausewitz, *Schriften*, II-2, p. 1015).

On some historical details, however, there are minor deficiencies. The moment when the farm of la Haie-Sainte fell into French hands can be estimated more accurately than mentioned on p. 143, n. 57 (see P. Hofschröder's *1815*, II, pp. 131–4). Hofschröder's *On Wellington* (p. 163, n. 149) also gives the correct birth year (1776) of a French general I know quite well (Bruno Colson, *Le général Rogniat, ingénieur et critique de Napoléon*, Paris: Economica, 2006), instead of the commonly mistaken date (1767) taken from Werner Hahlweg (Clausewitz, *Schriften*, II-2, p. 1073, n. 237) and unfortunately reproduced by Bassford, Moran, and Pedlow (p. 180, n. 75). On p. 218, there is a mistaken interpretation and translation. As Luxembourg was already in Allied hands and never fell into French hands in 1815, one cannot say that it was 'occupied' in the sense of this

paragraph, whose title is 'The Conquest of the Fortresses'. It seems as if the Prussians had taken Luxembourg as they had taken the French towns of Charleville, Mézières, Montmédy, and Sedan mentioned in the preceding sentence. In this case, Bassford, Moran, and Pedlow misread the original text published by Hahlweg (Clausewitz, *Schriften*, II-2, p. 1118). They suppress the name 'Longwy' at the end of the sentence, but as one can see in Hofschröder's *1815* (II, pp. 318–20), the Prussian garrison of Luxembourg led by Prince Louis of Hesse-Homburg effectively besieged Longwy, which finally surrendered to Prince August of Prussia.

These are minor points compared to the ability of Bassford, Moran, and Pedlow to relate Clausewitz's 1815 campaign to his major work, *On War*. Both were indeed written simultaneously and the reflections following many events of the campaign found their way into the theoretical framework of *On War*. Clausewitz's translated text is followed by Wellington's *Memorandum on the Battle of Waterloo*, written after the Prussian general's statements had been read. Thus, thanks to the editors, the readers have all the information needed to establish their own opinions. The introduction having been written by Christopher Bassford, the other two editors conclude the book. As a specialist in Clausewitz's writings, Daniel Moran underlines the originality of the *Campaign of 1815*. Written between July 1827 and the spring of 1830, it was not destined to be published, nor was it intended to be a comprehensive account of the events. Its purpose was 'the resolution of strategic questions' (p. 237). 'The ultimate subject of Clausewitz's history of 1815 is the minds of the men who commanded the armies that fought it,' writes Moran (p. 240). The last word goes to Gregory Pedlow, who presents us with a remarkable essay, 'Wellington versus Clausewitz'. It is of immense value for any historian of the Waterloo campaign. Pedlow examines the actions of the duke before and at the start of the campaign, with Clausewitz's critique in mind. In a concise manner, but with copious footnotes showing the depth of his research in archival and published materials from every country involved, he convincingly resurrects Wellington's ideas and actions, and gives a final and excellent reply to the arguments of Peter Hofschröder, while remaining balanced, recognizing the latter's merits and quoting him courteously. Waterloo 'was neither a British victory nor a Prussian victory; it was an Allied victory', says Pedlow (p. 282). For Waterloo enthusiasts, this essay alone justifies buying (or downloading) the book.