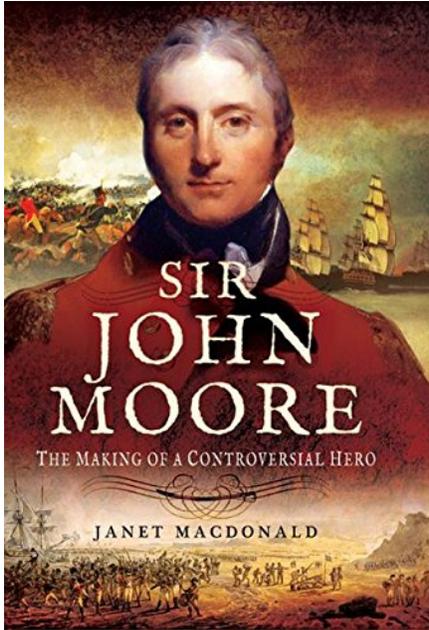


The Napoleon Series Reviews

Macdonald, Janet. *Sir John Moore: The Making of a Controversial Hero*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2016. 304 pages. ISBN# 9781473833944. Hardcover. £25/\$30.



“I...shall go and do my best wherever I am ordered.” These words were uttered by General Sir John Moore when he was ordered to go to Sicily in May 1806 as second in command to General Fox, commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean. And these words neatly sum up John Moore’s military career. He served where he was sent, served honorably and capably, incurring at least three wounds in his career ending up being killed in action at the victorious battle of Corunna on 16 January 1809.

John Moore is usually remembered for two things: the training camp at Shorncliffe and his unsuccessful campaign in Spain and Portugal in 1808-1809. However, his accomplishments and dedicated service to the British Army and his country amount to much

more than that.

In the new biography of John Moore by Janet Macdonald, *Sir John Moore: The Making of a Controversial Hero*, the author sheds light not only on Moore’s years of distinguished service and his accomplishments as a soldier and a man, but gives excellent insight into who John Moore was. It is about time that this dedicated soldier gets his historic due. And the author tells the tale excellently, with verve and wit, as well as excellent research and sourcing. The author covers the subject from childhood through his mortal wounding and death at Corunna in 1809. There is also an excellent ‘assessment’ of Moore’s character in the last chapter of the book. That chapter fittingly begins with a General Order issued by the Duke of York on 1 February 1809 that is a tribute to Moore, his career and character.

Moore was an excellent soldier, who did more than his assigned duty. He also possessed character of a very high order, and that is clearly demonstrated throughout the text, especially in his accepting assignments that he did not particularly want, and in his dealings with such diverse characters as Admiral Sir Sidney Smith, with whom he

disagreed in supporting the Calabrian insurgents (commonly called brigands and bandits by both sides) and Queen Maria Caroline of Naples, who Moore succinctly calls a 'bitch' in his personal journal. The ruling Bourbons of Naples were both incompetent and had degenerated as a ruling family over the years and it seems from Moore's reaction to them, especially Maria Caroline, that he thought little of them personally and professionally.

Moore's crowning achievement, which is unfortunately overshadowed historically by his failed campaign in Spain and Portugal in 1808-1809, was his actions and accomplishments at Shorncliffe, where his skill as an organizer and trainer shaped the British light infantry arm for the future. Without Moore's skills in this area, Wellington's later campaigns in the Spanish Peninsula might have been far less successful than they were. To say that Moore is at least partially responsible for those later successes is an understatement.

This volume is enthusiastically recommended and it is at present the definitive volume on the life of Sir John Moore. Any student of the period should have this book in his or her personal library and it is one more 'arrow in the quiver' of the collective knowledge on the period. It is also a lasting tribute to a skilled professional soldier and a man of high character.

Reviewed by [Kevin Kiley](#)

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