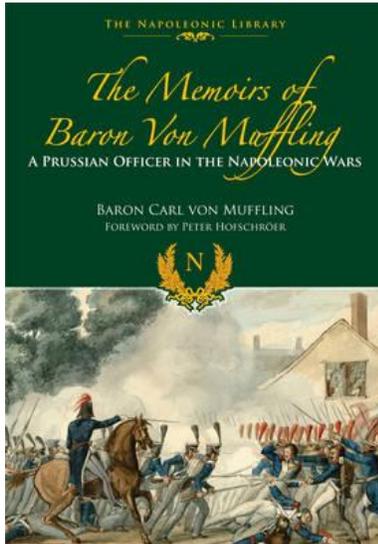


The Napoleon Series Reviews

Friedrich Karl Ferdinand Müffling, Freiherr von. *The Memoirs of Baron von Müffling: a Prussian Officer in the Napoleonic Wars*. Introduction by Peter Hofschröer. London (UK): Frontline, 2015. 517 pages. ISBN# 9781848328273. Hardcover. \$49.95/£25



Friedrich Karl Ferdinand Freiherr von Müffling (1775 – 1851) served as Blücher's liaison officer in Wellington's headquarters during the Battle of Waterloo. He joined the Prussian army in 1788 and by the time of Jena in 1806 was a junior officer on the Prussian General Staff. His particular interests were military cartography and topography. He was, it seems, an opinionated man, and therefore not always the most popular of officers.

His memoir, a lengthy volume, comprises three parts. Firstly, from 1805 to the close of the 1814 campaign at the first Peace of Paris; then the campaign of 1805 and the aftermath, including his difficult tenure as Governor of Paris; and finally, detailed accounts of his service with the Silesian Army under Blücher in the campaigns of 1813 and 1814. The first two parts were written in 1844 and published immediately after the author's death in 1851. The third part was originally published in 1824 and therefore not part of the original memoirs.

The work leaves us some interesting pen-portraits of senior Prussian officers. The Prince of Hohenlohe-Ingelfingen, who commanded at Jena, 'suffered from gout... his fitness for field service was more than doubtful.'¹ Gneisenau '...fell into the error of always estimating his own powers too high, and those of his adversary too low.'² Prince Blücher 'understood nothing whatever of the conduct of a war; so little, indeed, that when a plan was submitted to him for approval... he could not form any clear idea of it, or judge whether it were good or bad.' And, 'it became known that Gneisenau really commanded the army, and that Blücher merely acted as an example of the bravest in battle and the most indefatigable in exertion.'³

Müffling entered the 1815 campaign with the expectation of a high post on the Prussian General Staff, and was somewhat startled to be appointed liaison officer at Wellington's head-quarters, 'although in my early studies of the English language I had not got beyond the Vicar of Wakefield and Thomson's Seasons'.⁴ Then follows an interesting paragraph:

¹ Page 8

² Page 33

³ Page 225

⁴ Page 212

*On my departure General von Gneisenau warned me to be much on my guard with the Duke of Wellington, for that by his relations with India, and his transactions with the deceitful Nabobs, this distinguished general had so accustomed himself to duplicity, that he had at last become such a master of in the art as even to outwit the Nabobs themselves.*⁵

In his Introduction Peter Hofschröer points out criticisms of Müffling's performance in the Waterloo campaign by German historians, claims concerning being left in the dark by Wellington.

Müffling's understanding of topography came to the fore late in the afternoon at Waterloo when he made the crucial intervention with Zeiten's Corps, bringing them northwards to attack near Papelotte and thus put d'Erlons Corps (or what remained of it) to flight. On page 250, his account of the general allied advance at Waterloo following the repulse of the Middle Guard tells us that 'when the line of infantry moved forward, small masses of only some hundred men, at great intervals, were seen everywhere advancing.... The English cavalry formed a second line, ready to support the infantry, should the French still be in a position to attack it.'

I particularly enjoyed the Appendix to the Waterloo section, which contains the somewhat acerbic correspondence between Gneisenau and Wellington concerning the Prussian proposal to execute Bonaparte, and Müffling's nomination to the post of Governor of Paris by Wellington (in preference to Zeiten); one can see all sorts of political overtones.

As to readability, his memoirs come across as a work written by... well, a vain and somewhat pedantic elderly Prussian staff officer. The whole makes for a somewhat weighty and ponderous read; what serves in the book's favour is the fact that it was written by a very senior serving officer, especially from the point of view of the Waterloo campaign, and from a German source. However, it was written many years after the events, and thus may contain elements based on hindsight.

Recommended for anyone interested in the Prussian army of the era, and the Waterloo segment is an essential first-hand account of the 'view from HQ'.

Reviewed by [Steve Brown](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: November 2016.

⁵ Ibid