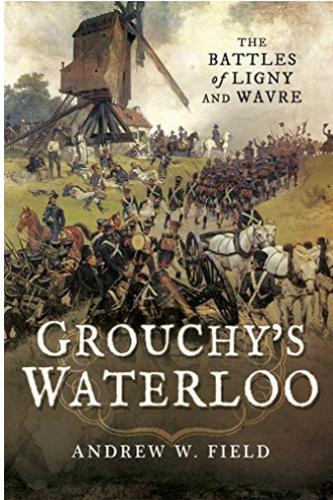


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Field, Andrew W. *Grouchy's Waterloo: the Battles of Ligny and Wavre*. Barnsley (UK): Pen and Sword, 2017. 326 pages. ISBN# 9781473856523. Hardcover. £26/\$50



*Grouchy's Waterloo* is the third book in Andrew Field's four volume study of the 1815 Campaign.<sup>1</sup> Like the first two books, the author tells the story from the French perspective and draws heavily on contemporary French memoirs, letters, and reports. Although many of them are from senior French officers, such as Marshal Emmanuel de Grouchy, and Generals Étienne Gérard and Pierre Pajol, there are also many descriptions of the campaign from regimental, battalion, and company commanders, aide-de-camps, and sergeants.

To put the book in context of the overall campaign, Mr. Field starts with a review of the events that led up to the start of the campaign. But the next 15 chapters look at the activities of the units who were assigned to the right wing of the army under Marshal Grouchy. The battles of Quatre Bras and Waterloo are mentioned in the book, but not in how the impact they had on Marshal Grouchy's forces and vice versa.

The story really begins with Chapter 2: 14 June, which looks how his forces were deployed and what their orders were for the coming invasion. Each subsequent chapter usually only covers a twelve hour period and the events that happened during that time. For example Chapter 5 is about the night of 15/16 June, while Chapter 6 is on the morning of 16 June. The longest chapter is Chapter 8, which examines the battle of Ligny which occurred on the afternoon and evening of 16 June.

The next eight chapters are really the meat of the book. In it, the author explores what Marshal Grouchy and his men did, while the main portion of the French Army marched and fought at Waterloo. Here you will find almost an hour-by-hour account of their attempts to find the Prussian Army, which had slipped away from Ligny on the night of 16 June after its defeat by the French; the late start made by the French to catch them; the battle of Wavre; the lack of trust and insubordination of the French corps commanders; and the confusion in Marshal Grouchy's Headquarters caused by the lack of knowledge about what was going on with the main part of the French Army under Napoleon. The narrative ends on 19 June, when Marshal Grouchy learns that Napoleon

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<sup>1</sup> The first two books are *Prelude to Waterloo: Quatre Bras* and *Waterloo: the French Perspective*. Both published by Pen & Sword Books. The fourth book will be *Retreat from Waterloo*.

had been decisively defeated at Waterloo the day before. The story of the retreat back to France will be told in the final volume.

One of the most famous anecdotes about the battle of Waterloo was General Gérard urging Marshal Grouchy to march to the sound of the guns on 18 June. Because he did not, he is often blamed for the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. Mr. Field tells of this conversation but in the broader scope of the events of what was happening to Marshal Grouchy's forces. In the final chapter he discusses in detail on whether he should marched to the sounds of the guns and if it would have made a difference.

One of the most interesting parts of *Grouchy's Waterloo* is the graphic descriptions of how fractured Marshal Grouchy's command was. Poor staff work and the lack of initiative on his part caused his command to be sluggish in its movements. The lack of respect and trust between him and some of his subordinate commanders further hampered operations. Initially some commanders refused to acknowledge his orders because they either did not believe he was in command or due to his less than forceful personality. This was particularly true with his principle corps commander. Throughout much of the campaign, General Dominique Vandamme was insubordinate and only obeyed his orders when he felt like it.

The book closes with a detailed analysis of the controversies of the events of 15 – 19 June. These include:

- What orders did Grouchy receive from Napoleon?
- Why did Grouchy start the pursuit of the Prussian so late on 17 June?
- Who was responsible for the failure to coordinate reconnaissance after the battle of Ligny on 16 June?
- Was Grouchy supposed to pursue the Prussians or did he have another mission?
- What exactly was the size and composition of Grouchy's force and how did it affect his mission?
- If he was supposed to pursue the Prussians which direction was he expected to take?
- Was Grouchy wrong not to march to the sound of the guns?
- Did Napoleon really expect Grouchy to arrive at Waterloo in time to save him?
- What was his relationship with Generals Vandamme and Gérard?

The final part of the chapter is an assessment of Grouchy's performance.

*Grouchy's Waterloo* is illustrated with portraits of many of the generals who served under the marshal, pictures of buildings and terrain, and early depictions of the battles. Like the other two books in the series, this book also contains many maps. In addition to twelve black and white maps, there are eight pages of color maps!

*Grouchy's Waterloo* is an unbiased look at the performance of the right wing of Napoleon's Army in the Waterloo Campaign. Because Marshal Grouchy is often blamed

for the French defeat at Waterloo, Mr. Field presents all sides of the arguments and assigns credit and blame where appropriate. Although most books on the 1815 Campaign do write about the battle of Ligny and the subsequent actions of the forces under Grouchy, they do so only in passing. This is one of the few books that does it in detail. I highly recommend this book.

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: July 2017