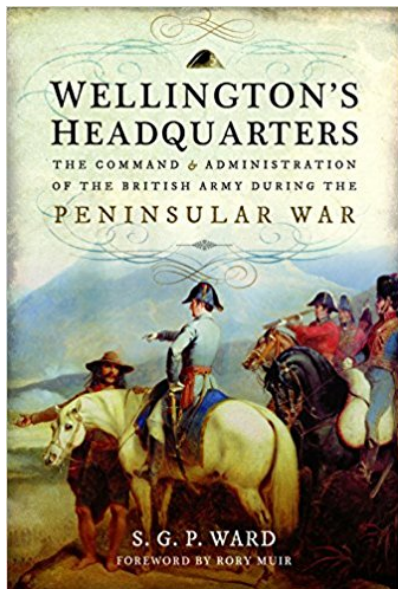


The Napoleon Series

Ward, S.G.P. Wellington's Headquarters: The Command & Administration of the British Army During the Peninsular War. Barnsley South Yorkshire (UK): Pen and Sword, 2017. 221 pages. ISBN# 9781473896826. Hardcover. £19.99/\$39.95.



Contents: List of Figures. Forward by Rory Muir. Acknowledgements. Preface. Chapter 1: The Administration of the Army in Peace and War. Chapter 2: The Personal and Official Relationship at Headquarters. Chapter 3: The Maintenance of the Army in the Peninsula. Chapter 4: The Collection and Transmission of Intelligence. Chapter 5: The Quarters and Movement of the Army. Chapter 6: Wellington and his Staff. Appendixes: I List of Officers serving in the Adjutant-General's and Quartermaster-General's Departments in the Peninsula, 1 April 1809 to 25 June 1814. II The Composition of Headquarters, October 1813. III Staff attached to a Division. IV List of stores for a Hospital of 500 men. V List of articles of Camp Equipment and the scale of issue in the Peninsula. VI (1) Memorandum of Wellington's for movements on 6 August 1812, and (2) Movement orders issued by the Q.M.G. 5 August 1812. VII Draft movement order for 15 March 1811. VIII (1) Draft Movement orders, and

(2) extract from the 'Arrangement' for 12 June 1813. IX Comparative table of the Headquarters staffs of the British, Russian, and Austrian contingents of the Allied Army of Occupation in France, March 1816. Biographical Note. Index.

Slim elegantly designed cover. 6 maps. 8 pages of images, 19 black and white images, average of 2 per page. Attractive selection with one or two rarer subjects.

There is an engraving in the national portrait gallery. It is by Heaphy and shows Wellington during the Pyrenees campaign. I greatly admire Heaphy's watercolour studies for their realism and the engraving is of typical composition, the great commander surrounded by his generals, with little of the later academic appreciation of the lower ranks. What I find wonderful about the piece is that it portrays practically everybody who served on Wellington's staff at the end of the war.

For a long time I lived and died for a book that explained the Duke of Wellington's headquarters and staff. I used to glance enviously at the studies, dedicated to the French staff corps. Little did I know there was such a book, hiding in that shadowy corner reserved for vital but out of print works. Indeed I have often been heard to say wistfully that no such book existed. Heresy though it might seem in the age of the "ordinary soldier's point of view", I find Wellington's headquarters perhaps the most interesting element of his army. Any regular reader of British Napoleonic history might be forgiven for missing the vital work of what is usually referred to as staff, or headquarters. Sweeping statements are like "Wellington ordered" and it was done. Most of the time highly detailed breakdowns of Army organisation and Army life neglect to examine the beating heart of the peninsular Army in any detail.

The mystical qualities of a successful general tend to erase the efforts of the men who make his orders into a reality. The mystique of a successful Army works in the same way. In the Peninsula there is a sort of simplistic appreciation of operations based around Divisions, Brigades and Battalions, loosely connected by hard riding ADC's, without any proper consciousness of what really made it work. Only when a reader appreciates the administrative infrastructure of the Army, which is never far from studies of other armies, can they really begin to sense the real mechanics of soldiering in Britain's most successful military campaign before the 20th century. Unfairly cast as either disinterested desk warriors, or effete and clueless snobs in most fiction, staff work was no picnic, especially if your "General Commanding" was Wellington.

The book is separated into large chapters and begins with a rather dry one that delves into an overview of Army's administration at home and in the field. This chapter though lagging now and then provides a fascinating insight into how command and control could so easily break down, the brilliance needed to make it work, and why there was little in the way of longevity in the staff department until 1904. Just as the Army and Navy could often derail a campaign by bickering, the terrestrial establishment itself, separated between the Ordinance, Adjutant and Quartermaster-General's departments was just as easily unglued. When one reads how Wellington managed to cut all the departmental rivalries dead and made a military staff almost into a personal one, it is hard not to admire his abilities.

The nature of the Army comes into a sharper focus when the author explains the difference between personal staffs and appointed positions attached to generals in the field, how generals of department had their own territory and would tend to report directly to their own superiors at Horse Guards, and how it was a continental practice to refer to themselves as being attached to particular General's. Therefore technically the Duke of Wellington had no Quartermaster Generals but the "Army in Spain" did. This is why this book is invaluable for students interested in the command system of Wellington's "complete machine".

I am baffled when I think of all the tommy rot that has been perpetuated about Wellington's staff officers, when this book has been around to set them straight. The staff officers of the Peninsular War have been branded ever since Napier with the "Cold shade of aristocracy", and a preserve of a snobbish elite that sounds more Victorian than regency, taking a position of reverse snobbery and judge men by their family connections and titles rather than whether they did the job.

War is not a simple business, writers often simplify it for the convenience of their readers but it is a complicated thing to run an army. Brilliant commander were so because they could master the intricacies of strategy and also management. Although some say the soldiers win the wars and the generals take the credit a general even the indifferent ones doe much more than riding here and there, giving orders or writing quotable letters and generally aspiring to our ideal of military portraiture.

The book shows the ignored early success of Le Marchant's military college which subtly came to dominate staff appointments. The origination of the administrative arm and its composition in Spain and Portugal. How the day to day gathering of intelligence was done. Communications, right down to the telegraph systems then in use. Logical and sensible observations lead to a fair appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of Wellington's command style, without being hagiographic. Breaking myths about Wellington's inflexible

or autocratic command style in a way only another soldier can appreciate, SGP Ward was a staff officer himself during the 2nd World War, and studied deeply Sir George Murray's papers. It is a book geared towards the student rather than the casual reader, those who wish a deeper insight into how an army was managed and conducted in the 19th century should consider it essential reading.

Many are quick to praise the Prussian staff corps, and indeed the French, despite its failings. All too many dismiss Wellington's staff as a collection of amateurs doing a professional job, or just there to keep him company, kept working by Wellington himself. This is not so, and in fact the headquarters administration Wellington was able to build between 1808-1814 stands as one of the best in Europe. This book opens many doors. Insight is gained into why things happened as they did, surprisingly it even touches on why the Crimean war was such an administrative failure.

It is a superb survey of the duties of the departments of the Army in the Peninsular War. An eye opening investigation into the true nature of Wellington's command style, written by a man who knew the Duke's habits and character as well as if he had himself served under him. Further it is a wonderful testament to the unsung hero of the war, Sir George Murray, who worked with Wellington as no other man could. Highlighting as it goes the ease with which the two men knew each other. There is no finer book in print that does justice to this understudied but brilliant headquarters.

Reviewed by [Josh Provan](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: July 2017