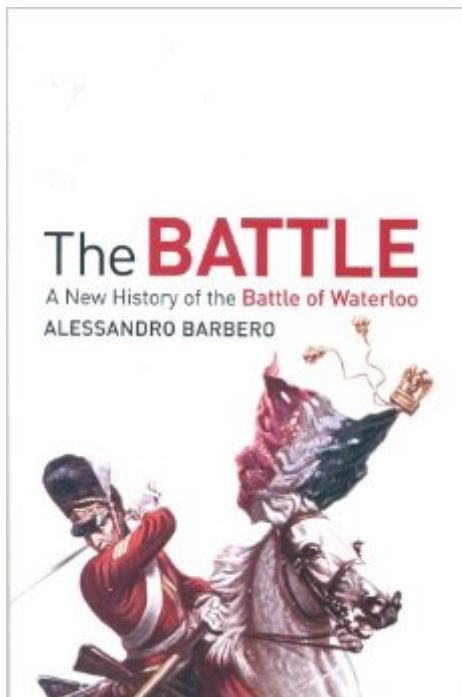


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The Battle: The Definitive History Of The Battle Of Waterloo



Synopsis

On the afternoon of 1 March, 1815, a fleet of ships dropped anchor off the southeast coast of France. After ten months in exile on the island of Elba, the Emperor Napoleon had returned to reclaim his throne. European chancelleries responded by immediately preparing for war. Only one year earlier, four great powers - England, Austria, Russia and Prussia - had combined to defeat Napoleon and now, these four countries made a pledge to invade France from all sides. Napoleon's only recourse was to rearm, and he quickly marshalled his forces: mobilized the National Guard, began mass production of muskets and bought or confiscated all available horses. On the Allied side, by the end of spring, only the Duke of Wellington's troops and the Prussian army, under the command of Field Marshal Blucher, were prepared. The Emperor knew that by attacking the two armies separately, his Armee du Nord stood a good chance of winning. He planned a surprise strike, to destroy the first army he encountered before the other could intervene. Maintaining complete secrecy over his tactics, he manoeuvred the Armee du Nord close to the Belgian border and at dawn on 15 June, sent the first cavalry patrols over into enemy territory, followed immediately by columns of infantry. Thus begins The Battle, a thrilling new account of the great Battle of Waterloo, which survivors from all sides deemed, in the words of an English officer 'a terrible fight for a terrible stake: freedom or slavery to Europe.'

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Alessandro Barbero's "The Battle" may not be quite the definitive history of the Battle of Waterloo promised in the subtitle, but it is nevertheless an excellent and very rewarding entry in a crowded

field. Barbero, an Italian historian, offers a synthesis of the battle that provides unusually equal coverage of all the participants without taking sides. Barbero's narrative ranges from the perspective of Allied and French commanders Wellington, Blucher, and Napoleon down to the level of individual soldiers, without letting any one perspective dominate the story. Barbero's method of recounting the Battle of Waterloo is also unique in focusing more on the experiences of different units and less on the normal but arbitrary division of the battle into five phases. This method emphasizes the continuity of the combat and highlights the incredible strain this day-long battle placed on those units that were in the very thick of the fighting. In particular, Barbero brings out how desperately close the Allied line on Mont Saint Jean came to breaking in the closing hours of Waterloo and how the Prussians overcame a variety of challenges to reach the battlefield. Barbero's synthesis of events leaves the reader with a sense of the sheer horror the survivors must have felt at what was an incredibly bloody battle, even by the standards of the Napoleonic wars. Barbero passes perhaps too quickly over the preliminary combats at Quatre Bras and Ligny that set the stage for Waterloo. His contention that the deployment of Lobau's corps to the French right flank was in support of D'Erlon rather than a response to the advance of the Prussians is a plausible if different reading of events.

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