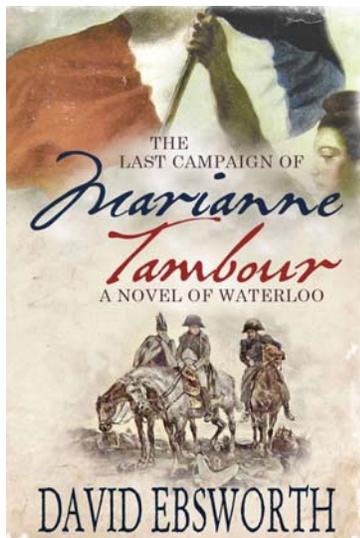


Napoleon Series Reviews

Ebsworth, David. *The Last Campaign of Marianne Tambour*. Bristol: Silverwood, 2015. 360 p. ISBN 9781781323212. Paperback. \$17.49 (also available as an eBook)



This is a Waterloo novel told from an unusual aspect, mainly from the rear: Marianne Tambour is a *cantinière* working with a battalion of the Imperial Guard, she been a camp-follower all her life but has determined that, for the sake of her young daughter, this will be the campaign that enables her to quit and set up business in civil life. She has her own preoccupations and sees the troop movements and actions from the afternoon of June 14th 1815 to the evening of the 18th from that perspective. A higher level of insight is provided by Liberté Dumont, a woman who is not only an agent of Fouché but also serves in the French army as a dragoon; she is sent to find Wellington and give him the French battle plans. As an agent she can meet senior Allied commanders and as a dragoon she can play her part in the main battles. As she works her way through the French rear her path crosses that of Marianne and she becomes aware of a psychic link between them; a relationship that the reader, privy to the memories of both, will work out a long time before they do. During the four days they meet again in dramatic incidents as the link between them is drawn ever tighter. At the same time the campaign moves steadily on to the (from the novel's point of view) unexpected and tragic end.

This is an exciting story, well-told and grittily realistic, as historically accurate as a novel needs to be and full of detail about life in the battalion for both men and women; while I cannot answer for this being absolutely correct it reads as well-researched and convincing. I have one quibble, which is that the author has decided to translate place-names into English, giving us the Pebble Farm (le Caillou) and the Gum-Hill Manor House (Hougoumont) explaining in the preface that “since this story is told from a French perspective, I’ve chosen to use translations of some more commonly known French place names in an effort to convey what those names would signify or convey to French-speakers.” I could just about tolerate that if it was completely consistent but since quite a lot of French words, especially those of a colloquial nature, are used in the text I found it very irritating.

On a deeper level I did feel that the manoeuvres which enable the two women to see all the important parts of the campaign and battles and meet all the important people often seemed too contrived in places and, though Marianne was easy enough to believe in, I found Liberté a little more difficult—her dual role was not entirely convincing to me and her political debates often seemed stilted and improbable. The immense amount of action was just enough to carry it off though and the final outcome of the relationship between the two women was a neat and satisfying plot twist.

As a final word I feel obliged to warn readers that this is not one for the squeamish: perhaps it is best described as displaying all the bits a battle painter leaves out, with added odours. Male readers should be warned this also includes graphic childbirth scenes.

Author webpage: <http://www.davidebsworth.com/books/and-next>

Reviewed by [Susan Howard](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: December 2014