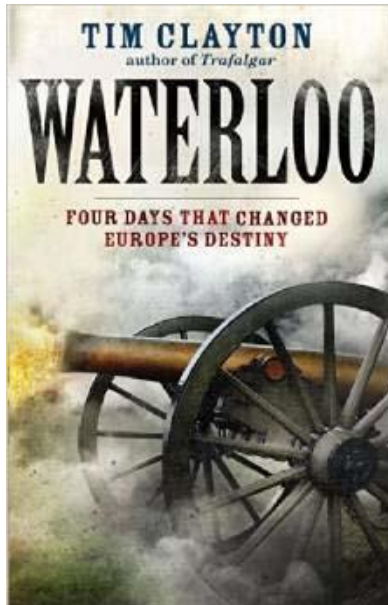


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

### Waterloo: Four Days that Changed Europe's Destiny.

Clayton, Tim. *Waterloo: Four Days that Changed Europe's Destiny*. London: Little Brown, 2014. 610 pages. ISBN# 9781408702482. Hardcover. £25



Tim Clayton, the author of *Trafalgar*,<sup>1</sup> turns his attention to the 1815 Waterloo Campaign. I own over 50 books on some aspect of the Waterloo, so I picked up *Waterloo* with some reluctance, for what new could the author tell me? I was hooked from the very beginning. The author has written an exciting, fast paced story of the Napoleon's last campaign. Many of the books I have read on Waterloo are told only from the perspective of one country, usually the British. Over the past twenty years, this has changed, but usually only told from another nationality, including the Prussians and the Dutch. Mr. Clayton's as taken a more balanced approached and tells the story as seen by the French, the Prussians, and of course the British. He draws heavily on first person accounts into the thick of the action and includes many passages from Prussian and French sources, as well as the British. Furthermore it is not told as only seen by the senior officers, but also the junior officers, NCOs, and the privates. My favorite is Franz Lieber, a 15 year-old volunteer who joined the

Colberg Regiment as a jaeger. He fought at Ligny, Wavre, and Waterloo and 45 years later was in the United States working with the Union Army! Possibly the only veteran of Waterloo to serve in the American Civil War.

*Waterloo* is told in three parts. Part I covers the events that led up to campaign, beginning with Napoleon's escape from Elba and Europe's reaction. It discusses the composition of each of the major armies and the moves they took to re-arm and position themselves for the upcoming campaign. Part II, is about the opening days of the campaign and of course tells the story of Quatre Bras and Ligny. However, Mr. Clayton devotes several twenty-five pages to the opening moves of the campaign, including descriptions of where the French crossed the border and the problems they had coordinating the movement, and the skirmishes at Charleroi, Gilly, Gosselies, and Frasnes – something that is usually overlooked in most studies of the campaign. Part III is on the battle of Waterloo. As one would expect, all the major events are covered in detail, such as the French Grand Battery, the assaults on Hougoumont and La Hay Sainte, the British and French cavalry charges, the attack of the Imperial Guard, the arrival of the Prussians, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Co-authored with Phil Craig and published in 2004. The full name of the book is *Trafalgar: the Men, the Battle, the Storm*.

One of the most difficult things when writing about a battle or a campaign is keeping track of the events that were occurring simultaneously. The author solved this problem by dedicating each chapter to a single event, such as Chapter 53: "The Charge of the Union Brigade." He also helps to place the setting by providing the location of the action and the time it was occurring.

*Waterloo* is an engrossing read and possibly the best single volume book I have read on the battle. It held my attention from the very start. Yet this book is not for most readers of the Napoleon Series. The author assumes the average reader knows little to nothing on the events that led up to the battle, the different armies, and the weapons and the tactics used by them. A good portion of the book is dedicated to explaining them. For a reader who has a good background in the Napoleonic Era, these explanations will often be tedious. However *Waterloo* is the perfect book to give to or to recommend to someone who is interested in finding out more about the battle.

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: March 2015