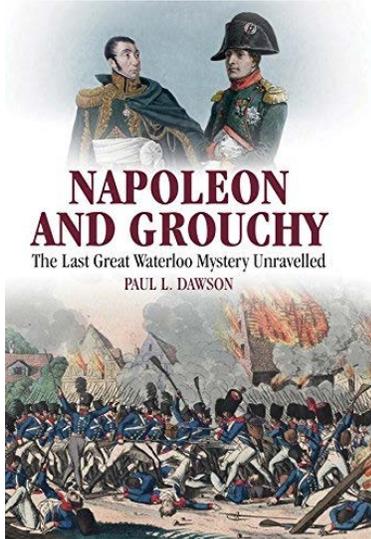


The Napoleon Series Reviews

Dawson, Paul L. *Napoleon and Grouchy: the Last Great Waterloo Mystery Unravalled*. Barnsley ,UK: Frontline, 2017. 352 pages. ISBN# 9781526700674. Hardcover. £25/\$45.



Paul Dawson, best known for his studies of the cavalry of the Napoleonic Wars,¹ has turned his attention to the Waterloo Campaign. His goal is to tell the story of the 100 Days from the French perspective. *Napoleon and Grouchy* is the third book in the series. Like his previous two books,² he believes that much of what is accepted as truth about the French is wrong and that to truly understand what happened you must consult the French Army archives. *Napoleon and Grouchy* and the other two books in his study is based on the hundreds of hours he spent in the French Army Archives and over a million documents he amassed from there.

When Napoleon invaded Belgium on 15 June 1815 victory depended on him catching the Anglo-Allied Army under the Duke of Wellington and the Prussian Army under Marshal Blücher before they could unite. He hoped to defeat each separately, for should they join forces they would badly outnumber him. He caught both armies by surprise and the next day he had Marshal Ney fight to hold the Anglo-Allies at Quatre Bras while he fought the Prussians at Ligny. Marshal Emmanuel Grouchy was with Napoleon at Ligny.

After defeating the Prussians at Ligny, Napoleon turned his attention to the Anglo-Allied Army and left Marshal Grouchy to pursue the Prussians. Although a third of *Napoleon and Grouchy* is about the events to the battle of Ligny, the rest of the book is the story of Grouchy's pursuit of the Prussian and how it affected the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. The thesis of the book is "Grouchy has been made, and is made by twenty-first century historians, the bad guy, the stooge, who was not fit for command and lost Napoléon the war."³

Despite Grouchy's negative reputation, there are many questions about his performance: What were his orders? How much discretion did he have in fulfilling these orders? When did Grouchy know that a battle was being fought at Waterloo? How did he re-act to the

¹ Among his cavalry titles are [Boots and Saddles: Horses and Riders of Wellington's Army](#) and [Crippled Splendour: the French Cavalry from Valmy to Toulouse](#)

² *Marshal Ney At Quatre Bras: New Perspectives on the Opening Battle of the Waterloo Campaign* (Frontline Books, 2017) and *Waterloo: The Truth At Last: Why Napoleon Lost the Great Battle* (Frontline Books, 2018)

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information? Should he have ignored his orders and marched to the sound of the guns at Waterloo? Could he have marched to Waterloo in time to affect the outcome?

To answer these questions the author looks at hundreds of primary sources including the orders that were given by Napoleon prior to leaving the main army to fight the Wellington; the orders he sent to Grouchy on 18 June; letters, memoirs, and diaries of those under Grouchy's command, as the well as the Prussian, plus numerous letters and papers from Grouchy himself. Mr. Dawson looks at these sources and does not just present the ones that support his thesis, but also provides those that do not. He examines all the evidence to come to his conclusions.

Mr. Dawson's time in the French archives was well spent. In addition to those sources that directly bear on his thesis, he goes into great detail on the battles fought by Marshal Grouchy and his command. These include Ligny, Wavre, and the little known battle of Namur on 19 June. He provides many strength and casualty returns for them, something I have not seen anywhere else. Because some regimental returns have been lost over time, he acknowledges when they are missing. He does not just use the official returns, he also provides numerous anecdotes of the battles by the participants at all levels – from Marshal Grouchy, to his subordinate generals, to regimental, battalion, and company commanders, to sergeants and privates.

My only real complaint about the book is its lack of maps. Although many readers will be familiar with the topography of Quatre Bras, the area where much of the story takes place will not be. As a minimum, having a map of the area of operations would have been very beneficial for understanding the assessments Mr. Dawson makes.

In *Napoleon and Grouchy* Mr. Dawson's assigns blame and credit based on the information he uncovered. His conclusions are controversial and will cause the reader to re-think what he knows about Grouchy's role in Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. Recommended.

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: June 2018