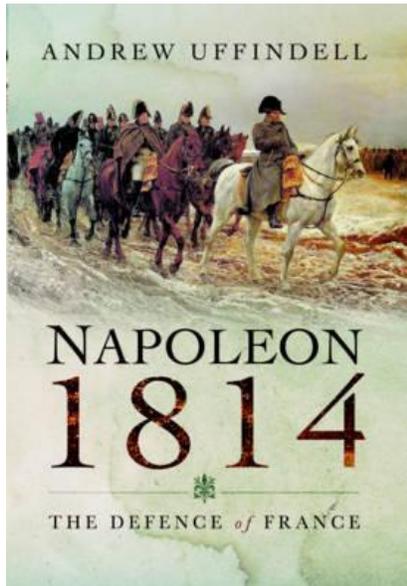


The Napoleon Series Reviews

Uffindell, Andrew. *Napoleon 1814, The Defence of France*. Barnsley (UK): Pen and Sword, 2015. 324 p. ISBN# 9781473842564. Paperback. £16.99/\$29.95.



The Campaign of 1814 is often brushed off as an anticlimax to the immense struggle of 1813, or treated as a simple continuation of the campaigns of that year. Others view the campaign in France as a glorious deed of arms, bookending Napoleon's thunderclap of 1796. Andrew Uffindell treats it on its own merits, showing how severely constrained both sides were by politics, terrain and weather. This book is a very welcome addition to the recent studies of the campaign. It is highly readable, with well-formed prose, cogent arguments and clear descriptions.

It is immediately apparent from first inspection that while the book presents an overview of the campaign, complete with 23 maps, that Mr. Uffindell places the campaign in two contexts: the larger strategic issues including the retreat from Germany and the selection of the theatre of operations; and, the impact of conducting a campaign on home soil intended to save the regime. Nearly one third of the book is dedicated to the non-military aspects of the campaign. It should be noted that this book is primarily a study of the issues faced by France in fighting this campaign. While some may wish a more balanced approach, there is much merit in thoroughly exploring one position. Perhaps the author has companion volumes planned for the Coalition. Those who seek a new account of the fighting from Brienne to Paris will not be disappointed, and those wishing to understand the broader situation from a French perspective will be equally pleased.

In describing the campaign, Uffindell generally separates discussion of military and non-military events, except where he identifies clear intersections of the two spheres. In this manner, he is able to provide insight into strategic decisions made by all parties which make limited sense if only considered from a military perspective. At the same time he is able to position the military campaign within the context of French domestic politics and the aims of Austria, Prussia and Russia. He is also able to show how the coalition state aims were initially divergent, but converged over time.

The book is written in four parts, of which the first three address the military situation. It opens with a summary of the strategic situation, describing the disparate objectives of the main coalition partners, the logistical challenges, and the difficulties integrating Napoleon's erstwhile allies. On the French side, the challenges to reconstitute another new army are briefly reviewed, with particular emphasis on the limited time and the

paucity of suitable horses. Uffindell makes the point that the strength of the French army lay in its deep pool of experienced generals, though the system was not currently able to generate large quantities of manpower due to shortages in equipment and cadres. In comparison, the coalition forces were beset by logistical problems driven more by distance than paucity. Uffindell makes the point that the Allied generals were also experienced, though he avoids making any direct comparison to the French generals. The distinguishing strategic feature that he does draw out is that due to the very nature of coalition warfare, each contributing state had diverging aims, and laboured under asynchronous pressures. He does an excellent job of illustrating how and why the Austrian army conducted itself as it did throughout the campaign by focusing on two significant factors driving Austrian decisions: the extremely limited supply of manpower within Austria and the desire initially to retain either a Hapsburg son-in-law or grandson on the French throne.

The theme of discordant aims extends into the description of the first days of the invasion, and is continually woven into the narrative. The description of the campaign is clear and lucid. The emphasis is on the strategic motivations of all parties and the options available to the commanders, which in turn constrained operational decisions. The descriptions of the operations are exceptionally well written. It is very easy to follow the twists and turns of this most confusing campaign. Uffindell provides a very useful description of the theatre of operations, explaining how the differing terrains within the theatre impacted both planning and action on the ground. This enables him to effectively reference such considerations in his narrative.

The military description is thin at the tactical level, but a study cannot be all things to all people. The very structure of the book makes it clear that the campaign is considered in a larger context and is therefore not a series of battle studies. It is, instead, a campaign study.

The fourth part of the book addresses the civilian experience. All military campaigns affect civilians, but defensive campaigns fought on domestic territory are especially affected. Therefore assessing the impact of the campaign on the civilian population over time is very relevant to understanding the French military situation. However, this section is the weakest part of the book as it seems somewhat disjointed, though it still succeeds in bringing forward many issues that are often mentioned in passing, but not considered in detail.

Uffindell uses a broad range of sources from all combatant nations, and several minor states, to illustrate the many issues affecting operations, particularly troop quality, weather, hours of daylight, road quality, bridges and intelligence. Sources span from primary material, through well-respected secondary works to current tertiary analyses such as the recent work of Michael Leggiere. Of particular interest is his use of Alexander Mikaberidze's *Russian Officer Corps of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* in a similar manner to how researchers have long used George Six's *Dictionnaire*

biographique des généraux & amiraux français de la Révolution et de l'Empire. It is a pleasure to see newer works become employed as standard tools in current research.

This work is highly recommended as a clear description of the campaign, for the grasp of Napoleon's use of internal lines and for conveying the effect of the terrain in the theatre.

Reviewed by [Dave McCracken](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: December 2015