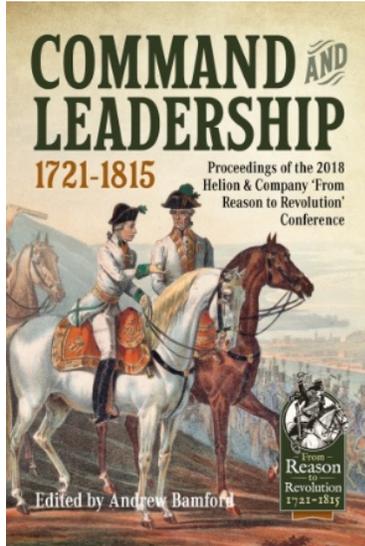


The Napoleon Series Reviews

Bamford, Andrew (ed.). *Command and Leadership 1721 – 1815: Proceedings from the 2018 Helion & Company 'From Reason to Revolution' Conference*. Warwick: Helion, 2019. 164 pages. Hardbound. ISBN# 9781911628538. £30 / \$34.



On 29 April 2018, Dr. Andrew Bamford hosted the inaugural “From Reason to Revolution Conference” at York Army Museum in York, England. Its focus was Command and Leadership from 1721 to 1815. Eight noted scholars gave presentations. In addition to giving a talk, they also provided a detailed paper on their talk. Half of the papers were on subjects prior to 1790 and the others were about the French Revolutionary and Peninsular Wars.

The first two papers looked at junior officers in the French and Austrian Armies during the Seven Years Wars:

“Everyone’s an Expert: Specialist Knowledge and Leadership in the French Army in North America 1755 – 1760” by William Raffle

“He did his part as a brave officer’ Notions of Leadership Identity in the Habsburg Army Officer Corps 1740 – 1790” by Dr. Tobias Roeder

While the next two examined both sides of the leadership of the Jacobite Rebellion:

“Jacobite High Command in the ‘45” by Dr. Arran Johnston

“From Defeat to Victory: The Duke of Cumberland and the British Army in 1746” by Dr. Jonathan Oates

Three papers were about the Revolutionary Era from 1793 – 1801:

“Generalship in the Flanders Campaign 1793 – 1795” by Carole Divall

“So Incompetent a Brigadier’ (. . . or not?) Lord Chatham at the Helder 1799 and the Interplay between Politics and the Military” by Dr. Jacqueline Reiter

“French Leadership in Egypt, 1798 – 1801: The Maverick, the Hero, and the Bureaucrat” by Yves Martin

And one was on the Peninsular War:

“The Portuguese Engineers in the Peninsular War” by Dr. Mark Thompson

I will be the first to admit I know little about the Seven Years War other than what I could glean from the 1992 movie “The Last of the Mohicans” which did have French siege

artillery in it. I always wondered how the French got the guns to Fort William. “Everyone’s an Expert” actually discussed the difficulty of moving artillery through the heavily wooded countryside of upper New York. But that was really just a side bar of the paper to illustrate the difficulties European armies had operating in North America. Other issues included conflicts between the European and colonial officers, usually with the former looking down their noses at the colonial unwashed and disregarding their advice and their abilities, controlling Native American allies, and long lines of communication with a headquarters hundreds and sometimes thousands of miles away. After reading the paper I was left with a better understanding of the problems the French and the British had fighting in North America.

I know even less about the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 - 1746, other than what I glean from “Outlander”. The two papers “Jacobite High Command in the ‘45” by Dr. Arran Johnston and “From Defeat to Victory: The Duke of Cumberland and the British Army in 1746” by Dr. Jonathan Oates were quite enlightening. The first was an overview of the Jacobite command structure under Bonnie Prince Charlie. It provided a look at the strengths and weaknesses of it and its leaders and how internal politics between various leaders undermined their army’s ability to fight against the English. When things went well, the command structure was effective, however when they were forced to retreat, these fissures turned into major fault lines that eventually saw the defeat of the movement. The second paper on the Jacobite Rebellion looks at the other side and its command structure. It had a more unified command, but a less experienced commander in 25-year-old Duke of Cumberland, a son of King George II. Dr. Oates explores the impact the Duke had on his army, both good and bad.

Since this a bit of true confessions, I will also admit I know very little about the Austrian Army, regardless of the era. So, I read “He did his part as a brave officer” with interest, especially since it dealt with the ethos of the officer corps in terms of duty, honor, and class. The examples Mr. Roeder, were quite enlightening. It did pique my interest in exploring the subject so more.

Three papers covered the Revolutionary Wars. Ms. Carole Divall’s “Generalship in the Flanders Campaign” did not focus on just one nationality or side of the conflict, but looked at all the countries involved and the goals, both military and political of each. She also looked at the impact of political interference, whether by the Austrian Emperor, the British cabinet, or the French revolutionary government, had on operations. By the end of the paper she makes a strong case for the dominance of the French due to fresh ideas and new ways of waging war. Dr. Jacqueline Reiter looks at whether Lord Chatham in “So incompetent a brigadier” was as bad as a general as history makes him appear. Chatham, who would command the Expedition to Walcheren in 1809, had little field experience when he was given command of an infantry brigade in the 1799 expedition to den Helder. He performance during the campaign was mediocre at best, but she argues that his military role was not his primary mission. He was “both the prime minister’s brother and a serving member of the cabinet meant he occupied an ambiguous, artificially privileged,

position within the expedition hierarchy, meaning that he punched well above his weight in terms of military rank.”¹ In many ways he served as a spy for the prime minister. Dr. Reiter makes a strong case that his real value was as a political representative than as a general. In the third paper in this group Yves Martin takes us from Europe to Egypt and examines the leadership style of the three leaders of the French expedition there. The first was obvious. . . Bonaparte the Maverick. A brilliant leader who focused on his own ambitions. Succeeding him was General Jean Kléber, a military hero who had little political acumen. Decisions were based on what was good for the Army. After Kléber’s assassination in 1800, General Jacques Menou took command. Bonaparte had the idea of creating a French colony in Egypt. Menou was determined to set up rules and regulations to run it efficiently. Thus becoming a bureaucrat. Mr. Martin does a good job explaining the different styles of leadership they each used and how some of the things worked and others did not.

The only paper that covers the Napoleonic Era is Dr. Mark Thompson’s “The Portuguese Engineers in the Peninsular War”. In it he provides a history of the Portuguese Corps of Engineers from 1800 to 1814. This includes information on their service before the French Invasion of 1807, their work for the French after they captured Lisbon, and their role in the Allied Army under Wellington, including the repair of fortifications and the building of the Lines of Torres Vedras, the Telegraph Corps, and field operations with the main army. There is also information on the Battalion of Artificers. This is the best source of information in English on the Portuguese Engineers in the Napoleonic Wars that I know of.

When I first received this book, I was a bit skeptical about whether such a wide range of topics would hold my interest. I was pleasantly surprised to find out that it did. The papers were both informative and thought provoking. There is something in it that will keep the interest of any historian of the era. Recommended.

Helion hosted the second annual “From Reason to Revolution Conference” in April 2019 at the Derby Museum and Art Gallery on the theme of “Life in the Red Coat: the British Soldier 1721 – 1815”. Its proceedings will be published in 2020. A third conference is being planned, with the theme of “Armies and Enemies of Napoleon 1789 – 1815”. It will be on 25 April 2020 at the Derby Museum and Art Gallery. More information can be found at [The 2020 From Reason to Revolution Conference](#).

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

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