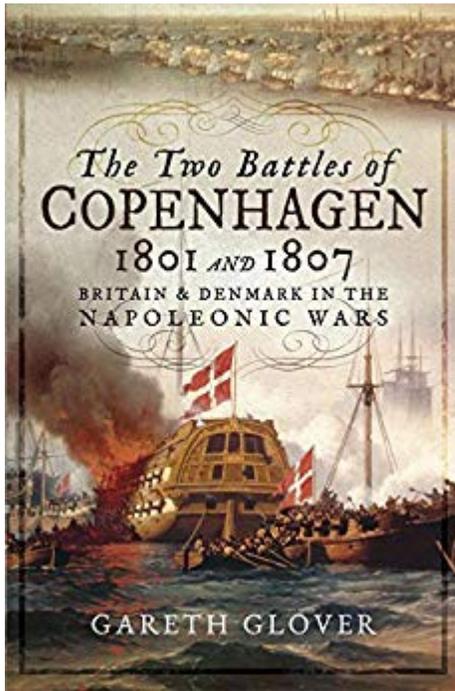


The Napoleon Series Reviews

Glover, Gareth. *The Two Battles of Copenhagen 1801 and 1807: Britain & Denmark in the Napoleonic Wars*. Barnsley (UK): Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2018. 285 pages. ISBN: 978147389831-8. £25.00/\$42.95



As someone who enjoys investigating the more minor and niche aspects of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, when this book by Gareth Glover looking at the relations between Britain and Denmark—and the Baltic more generally during the period—was offered for review, I based my decision on three aspects of its description. With these in mind I have chosen to base my review upon the same criteria.

Explains in Detail the European Politics and Military Strategy that Gave Rise to the Battles

Throughout Glover's book, the theme of European politics and the military strategies of various nations, in particular those of Britain, Denmark, France, Russia and Sweden, in relation to the Baltic Sea—area can be seen. We learn that Denmark viewed Sweden as their 'arch enemy', but if they felt threatened by another nation they would join together in a temporary alliance—often termed a League—which Glover shows would invariably break down, because of 'a severe lack of trust regarding each other's motives'. Britain found the Baltic vital during the 18th Century as a source of timber for her expanding Royal Navy and mercantile fleets; while Russia viewed it, and the strait between Denmark and Sweden, as important, because it gave British and other European merchant shipping access to its ports at St. Petersburg and Reval (Tallinn).

However, this intricate web of mutual dependency, and later, after the Seven Years' War, the loose Leagues between Denmark, Sweden, Russia and Prussia, was often punctuated by bouts of conflict. The Seven Years' War saw Britain and Russia on opposing sides, while Denmark and Sweden remained neutral, trading with both sides. To protect their merchant ships from being boarded and inspected by the British Navy, Denmark and Sweden formed an 'Armed Neutrality'. In 1788 Sweden attacked Russia to try and regain Finland after the Great Northern War, while in 1800 all differences had been set aside once again when Denmark, Sweden, Prussia and Russia joined together in a League, after Britain had intercepted and captured a Danish merchant convoy. Later, when

Napoleon and France controlled most of mainland Europe and was beginning to introduce the Continental System, the importance of the Baltic is looked at in relation to Britain's attack on Copenhagen in 1807. Glover sets out this context to the conflict between Britain and Denmark in 1801 in the first two chapters of his book, and also, as an explanation to the conflict in 1807, in two more chapters (chapters nine and 10) in the middle part of his history.

In–depth Investigation of Anglo–Danish Relations Throughout the Napoleonic Wars

One of the main features of Glover's history is his description and analysis of the relations between Britain and Denmark during this period, and also the way he looks at the diplomacy done by the two nations in the build up to both conflicts. For the conflict in 1801 this begins part way through chapter two—Glover's investigation here being intertwined with his look at the wider context the conflict was set in—and carries on through chapters three, four and five. Here Glover analyses the reasons why Britain felt the need to go to war with Denmark, and also to some extent Denmark's complacency in the build–up to the conflict, due to them feeling negotiations with Britain in 1800 had been a 'diplomatic masterpiece'.

The same formula can be applied to the way Glover looks at the conflict in 1807, when he uses chapters 11 through to 14 to examine how the relationship between Britain and Denmark changed quite rapidly after 1805. Glover argues the main reason British and Danish relations broke down was because of the Treaty of Tilsit signed between France and Russia in 1807. During the Tilsit negotiations agents sent back reports to the British government informing it that Denmark would be invaded. These reports alarmed the British government, Glover writes, as it would lose access to the small ports of Husum and Toningen, Britain's main postal access points to the continent at that time, where letters exchanged contained details of, 'illicit trade deals, correspondence with British agents and reports on French operations.' Not only this, but the agents fed back rumours that the Danish fleet would be used to land an invasion force in Ireland, and that this 'was simply the icing on the cake' for Britain to then pressure Denmark into handing over that fleet to it, or face the threat of invasion, which was the eventual outcome during August 1807.

Graphic Account of the Two Major Battles Fought at Copenhagen during the Napoleonic Wars

To describe both the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801 and also the invasion and short siege in 1807, Glover makes good use of first–hand accounts from witnesses who were there and their personal correspondence. He also gives us an account of the preparations made by both sides in each conflict. For the latter in relation to 1801 Glover uses parts of chapters three through to six, before

describing the naval battle of 2 April 1801 in great detail in chapters seven and eight. Describing the carnage below deck during this battle, Glover writes:

‘The great guns fired solid iron shot which tore through the oak hulls as if they were made of matchwood, the iron sphere macerating any flesh it impacted with, but infinitely worse was the shower of wooden splinters which fanned outwards in a great arc, causing horrendous injuries to anyone unlucky enough to be struck by the jagged fragments, which sliced through flesh like butter and ripped through limbs, leaving dreadful injuries and often embedding bacteria deep within the wounds which would go septic a few days later.’

For Britain and Denmark’s preparations for the conflict in 1807 Glover uses chapters 13 through 15, before using chapter 16 to describe the landing of British troops and the days before the engagement at Kioge on 29 August, which is examined in chapter 17. Glover pays particular attention to the bombardment of Copenhagen, which began in earnest on 2 September, in chapters 18 and 19, and tells us some of the consequences of it. This was not only the surrender of the city and the capture of the Danish fleet, but also some of the civilian cost in lives and possessions.

Following the end of the conflict of 1807, Glover uses the remaining four chapters (20 through 24) of his history to look at the consequences. This included the loss to Denmark of colonial possessions in the Caribbean and Asia (West and East Indies), and the nations attempt to try and remain a naval power in the Baltic. Perhaps the leading consequence was economic ruin to Denmark, as Glover suggests the amount of trade conducted in Copenhagen collapsed, and led to Denmark being declared bankrupt in 1813. Another aspect of Glover’s history is the inclusion of 36 extensive appendices. These give the reader intricate facts and figures about the forces involved in the conflicts of 1801 and 1807, and also the dispatches sent by the senior commanders, particularly those on the British side.

Overall, Glover’s *The Two Battles of Copenhagen 1801 and 1807* is a well-researched history of two of the most minor episodes of the Napoleonic Wars. He gives the reader a clear context as to why the conflicts of 1801 and 1807 came about, the negotiations that went on behind the scenes to try and avert war, particularly in 1801, and gives extensive accounts of the naval and land battles. Anyone interested in the naval history of the wars, would also find this book useful to read about the strategy and tactics discussed and then used by the British commanders for the Battle of Copenhagen on 2 April 1801.

Reviewed by [Daniel Clarke](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: July 2019