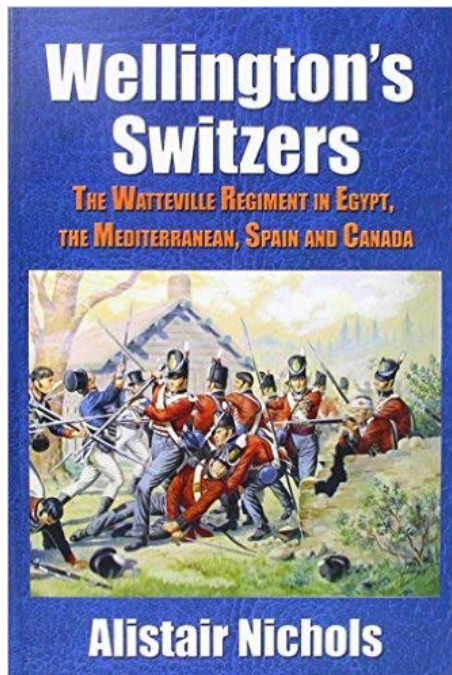


## The Napoleon Series Reviews

Nichols, Alistair. *Wellington's Switzers: the Watteville Regiment in Egypt, the Mediterranean, Spain and Canada*. Godmanchester: Ken Trotman, 2015. 304 paged. \$30 ISBN: 9781907417535



During the Napoleonic Wars Great Britain raised four regiments of Swiss Mercenaries: the Dillon, Meuron, Roll, and Watteville Regiments. They are relatively unknown to the modern scholar, having served mainly in the Mediterranean Theater and not with the main British Army under the Duke of Wellington. The most famous of these units was the Watteville Regiment, raised in 1801 by 25 year-old Louis de Watteville from Bern. A single battalion regiment, it would be one of the strongest in the British Army.

Although the Watteville Regiment is the best known of the Swiss mercenary regiments in British service, little has been written about it until now. *Wellington's Switzers* is the first comprehensive history in English of the regiment from its origins in the French invasion of Switzerland of 1798, to its raising in 1801, through its disbanding in 1816. Much of the time it was on garrison

duty in Sicily and Malta, but it saw extensive active service in southern Italy in 1806. It distinguished itself at Maida on 4 July and in as part of the garrison in Cadiz, Spain in 1811 and 1812. Where it gained its most fame however was in the War of 1812 in Canada, serving there from 1813 and 1815. During those years it was part of the siege of Fort Erie in August and September 1814 and led the right flank on the disastrous assault of it on 17 September 1814.

When they were on active service they were often in the forefront of the army, especially in Canada. In two separate incidents they lost almost a third of their strength. In October 1813, 190 officers, NCOs, and other ranks were captured when their convoy was attacked by the American Navy on Lake Ontario; while at assault at Fort Erie in September 1815, another 249 were killed, wounded, or captured.

Mr. Nichols draws heavily on official records, memoirs, and letters to tell its story. The regimental officers left a considerable number of letters, diaries, and memoirs which are quoted quite extensively throughout the book. Additionally, especially for their service in the War of 1812, officers in other regiments also wrote about them. The reader is left with an inside look at how the operated, the problems of raising and maintaining the strength

of the regiment – having to enlist prisoners-of-war to bring them back up to strength due to casualties and desertion. Mr. Nichols includes 23 maps in the book. Because this history takes place in theaters of operation that are not well covered in Napoleonic literature, the maps greatly enhance the narrative and keep the reader from having to consult other sources.

The last chapter covers the disbanding of the regiment and what happened to its soldiers. Many were offered tracts of land in Canada to farm, while most returned to England and then went home to their own countries.

Throughout the book, Mr. Nichols tracks the nationalities of the soldiers in the regiment. When it was first raised, about a third of them were Swiss, but as the war went on and access to Swiss recruits became more difficult, the number of Swiss steadily declined. By the end of war less than 15% of the other ranks and 27% of the sergeants and corporals were Swiss. Half of the other ranks were from one country, which surprised me. However throughout the life of the regiment, its officer corps remained heavily Swiss.

Mr. Nichols closes the book with a series of appendices including one of short biographies of all officers who served in the regiment; a copy of the Capitulation – the original contract with the British government and its terms of services for the regiment; its authorized strength over the years; descriptions of the uniforms worn by the regiment; a by-name list of other ranks casualties from 25 June – 24 September 1814, in addition to their name, it includes the date they became a casualty, their rank, the nationality, the year and place they enlisted, and the type of casualty they were; and information on the regimental personnel who chose to settle in Canada after the disbanding of the regiment.

*Wellington's Switzers* is a superbly written history of one of the least known regiments in the British Army during the Napoleonic Wars. Mr. Nichols should be commended for rescuing its story from obscurity. Recommended.

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

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