

S.G.P. Ward, *Wellington's Headquarters: The Command and Administration of the British Army during the Peninsular War* (REPRINT Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2017), xvi+221 pp. ISBN: 1473896827 £19.99

Reviewed by Zack White

Historians have long since acknowledged that war is rarely, if ever, glorious. The popular perception of conflict is of heroic deeds, bold actions and daring strategies. Whilst these can, and do, have a dynamic role to play in the outcome of a campaign, in truth, it is the more mundane issues of supply and administration that has the biggest impact on an army and its ability to fight effectively on the battlefield.

It is for this reason that S.G.P. Ward's 1957 publication *Wellington's Headquarters* is so important. Wellington was a phenomenal administrator. He had a staggeringly complex grasp of the minutiae of military organisation, a fact which his voluminous correspondences and General Orders are a testament to. However, it is only on reading Ward's authoritative work that it is possible to comprehend the true extent of not only Wellington's abilities as an administrator, but also the network of individuals who assisted him in making the British Army such a cohesive force in the Peninsular War.

It has therefore always been a huge pity that Ward's work was not more widely known outside academic circles, a fact which was largely attributable to the difficulty in obtaining a copy so long after its original publication. As a result, Pen & Sword's decision to reprint this crucial work is a welcome one, and this book is possibly the most important publication on the Napoleonic Wars this year.

Rory Muir has been a driving force behind the efforts to bring this vital piece of work back into the mainstream, and it is therefore fitting that he introduces the reprinted edition, lending his deep historiographical knowledge to the foreword of the book. It is also pleasing to see that Muir has resisted the temptation to edit or annotate the work, in light of more recent research, which has deepened our knowledge on the topic. Instead, he has chosen to let Ward's work speak for itself, a wise decision, as the greatest credit for this book must go to its original author.

Ward wrote in an engaging style, that reflects the careful thought of a man who understood how to make a complex topic both interesting and accessible. At times he shows wit and an eye for pertinent quotations which amply demonstrate his point. It has to be acknowledged that at times the information is a little dry. This is largely due to the fact that Ward was disseminating a huge amount of information about the complex working of army administration. Although this is particularly noticeable in the first chapter of the book, Ward's writing style becomes increasingly evident as the book progresses, and the points where he is able to break off from description to engage in analysis and historiographical debate are intellectually stimulating. Furthermore, even in the driest sections of the work, it is difficult not

to be impressed by the depth of Ward's knowledge and ease with which he communicates this knowledge to the reader.

It could be argued that Ward takes too favourable a view of the members of the Adjutant-General and Commissariat Departments, seeking to defend the reputations of those who are often considered to have been incompetent in their jobs. However, this is not the place for historical debate, and it is for the reader to decide whether they are convinced by Ward's arguments.

The only other point to raise in critique is the issue of translations. Ward used both French and German comments over the course of his work, without providing translations. In doing this, he was very much a product of his time (writing in the 1950s) when it was assumed that academics would be able to translate these phrases at will. In this sense, it might have been useful for a little addition to have been made for the re-publication of this work to take into account the fact that many who read this book may not be fluent in multiple languages. The one welcome addition that has been made to this book is the inclusion of a series of black and white plates, containing images of both individuals and scenes from the Peninsular War. This sets a lot of Ward's comments into context, and make a pleasant addition from the original work.

The single greatest impression that readers will receive from this book is one of huge amounts of knowledge gained. It is a work that needs to be read at a moderate pace in order to fully appreciate the detail that can be taken from it. Even on reading the book for a third time whilst writing this review, this reviewer picked up fresh pieces of information, such is the depth and value of it.

On the whole, scholars of the Peninsular War may ignore this publication at their own peril. Rory Muir and Pen and Sword are to be congratulated for their efforts in bringing an exceptionally important, but little known, work back into the mainstream. Ultimately there can be no greater testament to the value of S.G.P. Ward's *Wellington's Headquarters* than the fact that, 60 years after it was first published, it has returned to the world's bookshelves, reasserting Ward's well-deserved place in the historiography of the Peninsular War.