

Ron McGuigan and Robert Burnham, *Wellington's Brigade Commanders – Peninsula and Waterloo* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2017) xiv+322pp. ISBN: 1473850797 £25

Reviewed by Zack White

'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed, by so many, to so few.' Winston Churchill's tribute to the fighter pilots of the Royal Air Force following the Battle of Britain is one of the most famous quotes in history. Whilst his remark is often cited as a moving tribute to the bravery of a relatively small group of warriors, his words also make us aware of a simple truth: wars are never won by one person alone. Such a notion may appear to be self-evident, yet historians often appear to be guilty of failing to recognise this. Detailed biographies of key individuals from military history inundate the world's bookstores, but focus on 'the big players' is often done at the expense of less well known, but equally significant figures in the story of war.

Sadly, this is as true of the Napoleonic era as it is of any other conflict. There are many high quality biographies of the Duke of Wellington, Napoleon, and their immediate subordinates in the chain of command. However, relatively little is known about men further down the order of ranks. Ron McGuigan and Robert Burnham latest work seeks to address this, as they have created a succinct, yet remarkably detailed anthology on 71 senior officers, who commanded large bodies of troops under Wellington, yet have never received the recognition that they deserved.

This is not the first time that McGuigan and Burnham have collaborated to produce noteworthy work. For well over a decade, the two esteemed researchers have been writing enlightening publications on topics related to the British Army in the Peninsular War, many of which are available through Pen and Sword. Each one of these pieces of research has been noteworthy for not only shedding new light on significant, yet little understood topics, but also for their intelligent approach, careful presentation and clarity of writing.

*Wellington's Brigade Commanders* very clearly continues this tradition. It is evident from the briefest glance that this book is the product of careful thought and meticulous research. McGuigan's and Burnham's work is essentially a series of short biographies, examining the military records of those men who commanded brigades for any significant length of time during the Peninsular War or Waterloo campaign. The information is intelligently presented, with each section beginning with a helpful summary table that highlights key biographical details and notes of key developments in the individual's career.

In fact, the entire book is written with the needs of the researcher in mind, with each page being packed with succinct, factual commentaries that amply demonstrate the careful and painstaking research that has gone into this publication. Every page contains a revelation or little known fact about these men, some of which relate to their personal lives, as well as their military careers. So numerous and interesting are these revelations, that they should not be repeated in this review, but instead readers should enjoy reading this superbly researched and written publication. Each chapter also ends with thoughtful

comments on the legacy of each man, and their impact on the war. McGuigan and Burnham's careful attention to the needs of researchers are also visible in their decision to include an appendix outlining the periods when these men served under Wellington, thereby setting their actions and record into context. A wide range of pictures of these individuals are included, and it is a pleasant surprise to see that they are of a very high quality, which is no easy achievement, given that so little attention has been paid to many of these men. Once again, McGuigan and Burnham's professionalism has manifested itself here as it has throughout this book.

As is the case with any publication, there are some areas where the book could be improved, all of which relate to using the book as a starting point for further research. Whilst the use of footnotes (rather than end notes) throughout the book is very sensible, as it makes it easier to track the relevant references, there is a sense that the footnotes could have been more detailed. It is clear from the extensive bibliography that a wide range of material was consulted during the research process, and it would have been helpful to scholars to have a clearer indication of which books were drawn upon to assist with the research of each individual. It would also have been a nice touch for the authors to include a brief comment at the end of each chapter on where researchers should start if they are seeking to learn more about these brigade commanders. In a work which has broken new ground, this would have enabled other researchers to build on this publication far more rapidly. It has to be acknowledged, however, that these small issues do not reduce the enjoyment that can be derived from reading McGuigan and Burnham's work, and are only really relevant to the serious researcher, having little impact on the casual reader. Furthermore, given McGuigan and Burnham's reputations, there can be no doubt that anyone who wishes to know more, will receive all the information that they need by contacting the authors directly.

Ultimately though, reading this book is a strangely moving experience, as Burnham and McGuigan have tracked the lives, triumphs and tragedies of a whole host of individuals who played a pivotal role in the Napoleonic Wars. In the process, they have ensured that those people are finally receiving the place that they deserve in history.