

The Napoleonic Wars, as illustrated by J. J. Jenkins (reprint Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2019)

For an era such as the Napoleonic Wars, which clearly predated the invention of the camera, art provides some of the most evocative depictions of conflict. Although often implicitly censored, and often showing little, if any, resemblance to the reality of the horrors of warfare, contemporary artwork is nonetheless an important source in helping us to understand how the public engaged with an ideal of war, and the nature of the propaganda which they were exposed to.

Pen and Sword's recent publication *The Napoleonic Wars*, is a fine example of this, and is in fact a reprint of *Martial Achievements of Great Britain and Her Allies from 1799 to 1815*. As the book's blurb confesses, the text of the book is pure British propaganda. This in itself makes the book an entertaining read, but the text also includes extracts from a number of letters which, although consistent with the hubristic tone of the piece, are nonetheless enlightening, valuable, and even thoughtful additions. Equally useful to the researcher is the inclusion within the original text of lists of officers killed and wounded in the battles that the book covers. It has to be acknowledged that the original, yet unengaging title, is a more accurate indication of its contents, with the book's obvious Francophobic bias meaning that its only engages with successful British campaigns and crushing defeats for Napoleon, rather than offering comprehensive coverage of the period.

In truth, however, it is for pictures rather than the text that readers will buy this book. The volume contains 54 genuinely spectacular paintings, caricatures and prints from the period, which have all been produced in full colour. The effect is mesmerising. The bold colours produced by the copper etching and printing techniques of the early nineteenth century have been reproduced in stunningly vivid detail, in a volume that has been printed and bound to the high quality so characteristic of Pen and Sword publications.

Some of these images, such as 'the Death of Sir John Moore, or 'the storming of San Sebastian', are well known. However, they are usually reproduced in black and white, and therefore almost always fail to do justice to the vibrancy of the originals contained in this book. Equally, many others are not widely available, making the book a treasure trove of colourful British propaganda of the war.

The images, it should be noted, show no correlation to the battlefields that they supposedly depict. The image for the Battle of Bussaco, for example, shows a sequence of fortified hills more reminiscent of the Lines of Torres Vedras, over a hundred miles to the south. Similarly, the landscape of Belgium, depicted in images of the Battles of Quatre Bras and Waterloo, has, in the artist's mind, suddenly acquired mountain ranges that punctuate the skyline. However, the book, in truth, does not profess to provide accurate depictions of the battles, but instead succeeds admirably in its aim of overawing the reader with artwork designed to inspire the imagination.

There are some blemishes which are worth reflecting on, all of which stem from the lack of a dedicated editor for the new version of this book. It is very clear from the printed text that the reprint has been sourced from a mediocre quality facsimile, which has been interpreted by a machine rather than a human. The result is some glaring errors where the software has incorrectly transcribed the original text. The Battle of Rolica, for example, is repeatedly referred to as the 'Battle of Roleia', and, more embarrassingly, the date given for

the battle is 17th August 1308. (The battle actually took place in 1808, showing how the software error has not been identified as it would have been by a well-informed editor). This is, sadly not an isolated example, with garbled words such as 'cor-SCTly' (correctly?), 'Leipsic' (Leipzig) and 'Moorise' (Moorish), to name just a few, making their way into the text.

More significantly, however, there is a sense of missed opportunity in the decision to not appoint an editor to this reprint. This book is a spectacular piece of art history and propaganda, and a sequence of editor's notes, or even just a few pages of introductory remarks, on the accuracy of the text, the wider context, and the origins of the artwork, would have turned a beautiful book into an important contribution to our appreciation of the public's engagement with the period, and popular memory of the conflict. Whilst these issues are irritating, they are not enough to spoil the book, which is a wonderful volume.

The Napoleonic Wars is a truly beautiful reproduction. Visually striking and offering a rare and comprehensive insight into the nature of British propaganda during the early nineteenth century, this is essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand how the British sought to mould the memory of the Napoleonic Wars in the formation of a national mythology. Perhaps more importantly though, the book's unique nature and stunning contemporary artwork makes this a beautiful collector's piece.