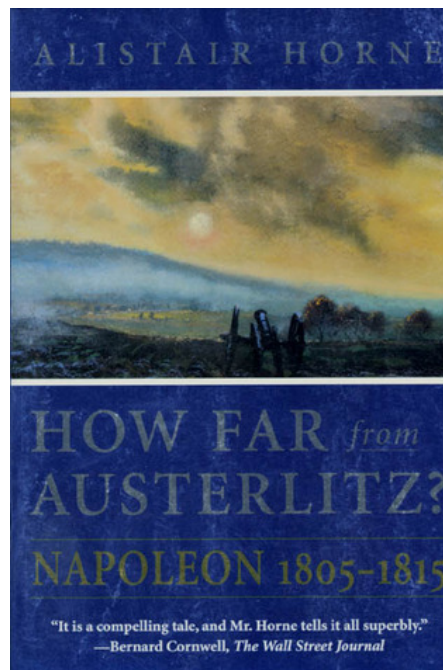




How Far from Austerlitz? Napoleon 1805-1815

Alistair Horne

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Daily Telegraph Book of the Year

How Far from Austerlitz? Napoleon 1805-1815 Details

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Dave says

Excellent narrative, as is usual with Mr. Horne's books. The Price of Glory and To Lose A Battle are two of my all-time favorite military history books. I gave this 4 stars, though, because the maps, at least in the edition I read, just stink! They are not detailed enough, and they often leave out features/places that Mr. Horne mentions in his narrative. To make matters worse, they usually were stuck 20-30 pages removed from where they needed to be! Otherwise, excellent book!

Douglas Berry says

A fine overview of Napoleon's career, reaching from his height of success to final exile and death. Highly recommended for anyone curious about one of the men who shaped modern Europe, but don't want to get bogged down in the muntains of information we have about the Napoleonic Age.

Guillermo Hernandez says

While otherwise a very fluid and readable introduction to the Napoleonic Empire's rise and fall, this book is encumbered by excessive comparisons to Hitler and WWII, plenty of untranslated French quotes, and what feels like a desire to cram every single piece of information the author knows into an introductory book. That said, Horne does a great job of getting into Napoleon's mind as he takes you throughout the Emperor's triumphs and defeats, giving even a first-time reader a great understanding of the why and how of France's military fortunes. Great way to start (or continue) learning about Napoleon, but expect it to take some time.

Frederic Kerr says

One of the best books I have read on Napoléon, focused on the last ten years of his reign. The Battle of Austerlitz (1805) is widely considered Napoléon's greatest battle, as his tactics were brilliant. Things went downhill from there.until his 1815 defeat at Waterloo and second abdication.

Sean Chick says

The part on Austerlitz is an unoriginal, but well written recounting of the famous battle. The rest is a dull and shallow recounting of the Napoleonic Wars. The comparsions to Hitler are mostly trivial, and are of course now stock among British historians. If they really want to find a man like Napoleon, they would have to compare him to Cromwell, but that would be too close to home. In fact that is the trouble with British historians writing about Napoleon. They demonize and demean him, compare him to utterly evil men, and mock him as a warmonger. In the same breath they forget Cromwell, British expansionism, and warmongering. I'm not saying Napoleon was right, because as Spain showed, he was often a nasty man.

What I am saying is, I'm tired of British and French historians whitewashing the era by ignoring the less savory actions of their respective nations.

France and Britain were involved in a struggle that touches on nationalistic feelings in both countries. When you read Horne, you'll see the entire catalogue of British virtues paraded before you, but barely a mention of the rigid class system, worker exploitation, numerous violations of neutrality, and refusal to sit down with Bonaparte. In fact, all this is excused as the lesser of evils when fighting the "Corsican ogre." It is almost worthy of British propaganda of the era. Also, the idea that Trafagar doomed Napoleon, while not implausible, seems just a little too convenient to the British Horne, and violates his thesis that Napoleon destroyed himself. As the book proves, the British are very much like Wellington when it comes to Napoleon. They are utterly fascinated and repulsed by him, but more importantly, annoyed that he captures the imagination in a way no Englishmen ever has. Of course, the British have never quite understood the importance of the French Revolution and how it set the world ablaze so go figure.

Claire says

I liked seeing the names my instructors discussed, but I felt overall I do not have a strong enough background in French/international history to really understand the subtleties of exactly what happened there.

I sense there's still myriads of things I could still glean from this book, but I must stop reading it now and change to something I understand better.

Betsy says

An entertaining, if somewhat tongue-in-cheek look, at the great and not so great years of Napoleon's empire. The man I found most intriguing was Talleyrand. What a manipulator--he even managed to improve France's position after Waterloo!

The battles are discussed, but this book is more about the people and the times--and the consequences of that decade on world history. To go from the heady victory of Austerlitz to the finality of Waterloo, France paid a high price for its short flash of glory.

Scott Pierce says

Modern view of the impact of Napoleon on world affairs. - he had an extraordinary impact on people, inspired loyalty, had a superhuman reserve of energy, powers of concentration, and favored action over introspection.

Napoleon's defeat of Prussia had destroyed a feudal army, but launched a national one, so unintended consequences for the French in the long run.

The lesson about coalitions is that they are unwieldy, but they often win in the end.

happy says

Mr. Horne has given the reader an excellent introduction to Napoleon and his campaigns. While giving the reader a brief overview on how Napoleon got to 1805, the main storyline begins with a discussion of the strategic situation in 1805. Napoleon is in northwest France with his Army waiting for his Navy to secure the English Channel long enough to get his army across. Even before Trafalgar make his invasion impossible, he moves his army east where enemies are gathering. With remarkable speed he moves his army from France to what is now the Czech Republic and defeats a much larger force of Russians and Austrians at Austerlitz. This battle is considered Napoleon's masterpiece and has become a textbook example of how to beat a coalition army.

In discussing Napoleon's army, Mr. Horne does a good job of illuminating some of the advances he made to the organization of his army, mainly organizing into self-contained Corps. This increased its flexibility and eased some of the supply and movement problems inherent in large armies of that era. After his victory at Austerlitz and the next year at Jena, Mr. Horne states that Napoleon never again gained such overwhelming victories. Napoleon's battles became near run things and eventually starting with victories and eventually his defeats at Leipzig and Waterloo. Mr. Horne also looks at the disaster that was Russia. The author also comments about the ability of Napoleon to raise large armies, 100,000 to 300,000 men, even after defeats.

In addition to the battles, the author also looks at Napoleon's diplomacy and its failures. These failures include harsh peace terms with Austria, which almost invited Austria to rebuild her armies and fight him again. Another failure Mr. Horne looks at is his European Economic system that attempted to starve Britain into submission by denying her European markets.

Mr. Horne gives us a glimpse of his personal life. His relationship with his first wife is discussed, both his infatuation/love for her and his distress when he finds out she has not been faithful. The author discusses the decision to divorce Josephine and his marriage to Marie Louise, in hopes of fathering an heir. His mistresses are also discussed esp Marie Walewska.

I had a couple of quibbles with the narrative. Mr. Horne is constantly comparing Napoleon to Hitler; both in his decision to invade Russia and his desire to dominate Continental Europe. For me at least it got to be a little much. Also in discussing Austerlitz and the Invasion of Russia, Mr. Horne often quotes from Tolstoy's **War and Peace**. While beautifully written, I'm not sure it belongs in a history.

All in all this is a very readable, fascinating look at Napoleon and his battles – a definite 4+ star read.

Steven Peterson says

This is an easy to read history of Napoleon's descent from the peak of his success, at the battle of Austerlitz, to his final defeat at Waterloo. The author notes a key lesson of such a study (page xxvi):

". . . it is the old repeated maxim of conquest leading only to further conquest; dictators and nations can win striking victories, but still lose wars--and the peace. Then follows the exhaustion, failure, or death of the dynamic leader, and everything collapses. Wellington understood. 'A conqueror, like a cannon ball,' he observed, 'must go on; if he rebounds, his career is over.' Napoleon and Hitler never perceived this. . . ."

The book begins with a brief description of Napoleon's rise. Then, campaigns from 1805 to 1815 are

described. A nice aspect of this book is a series of useful maps, to help make sense of the key battles over time.

The procession of battles begins with major Napoleonic victories at Ulm and Austerlitz. The book does a nice job of explaining how the combination of Napoleon's skills and the skills of some of his key commanders simply was were too much for such inferior commanders as General Mack on the opposing side. Both battles were smashing victories for the French, and may have represented the high water mark of their success on the battlefield.

In 1805--the year of Ulm and Austerlitz--the naval battle at Trafalgar also occurred, and that forever ended any hope of victory at sea. There were other victories to come, but by the time of the win at Wagram (in 1809), these were becoming "hairsbreadth Harry" victories, where the French won but did not destroy the enemy--and led to heavy French casualties. Thereafter, the poor results for France in Spain and the disastrous result of the doomed Russian invasion foreshadowed the ultimate defeat of Napoleon.

Leipzig in 1814 and Waterloo in 1815 ended the Napoleonic era. Overreach. As Horne notes (page 375): "Yet even if Waterloo had been won by Napoleon, it would almost certainly, in view of the overwhelming forces closing in on him, have been followed sooner or later by the ultimate defeat." A lesson that is difficult for major powers to learn. There comes a time when continued efforts at even greater triumphs may lead to ultimate defeat.

'Aussie Rick' says

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this account of Napoleon and I still think that Alistair Horne is one of the best historical writers on French history around today. The book's narrative flowed along well and it was a pleasure to read, I really did not notice the mistakes mentioned and in total they are only minor. Take the time to sit down and read this book, its worth it.

Amir Dov says

Nice peak into one of the most interesting characters in history. Very informative and interesting, especially for ones interested in Napoleon's personality and European politics of his time. The downside for me was the over detailed description of few specific battles, which I found too long and a bit boring, But on the other hand I guess this should be expected from a biography that focus on a period of only 10 years.

Michael says

"How Far From Austerlitz?: 1805-1815" by title covers the Napoleonic Wars just from the Battle of Austerlitz through the Battle of Waterloo. This is somewhat misleading as the period prior to that is covered just not as in depth. I really liked the book and found it hard to put down. It contains a wealth of information on a myriad of Napoleon related subjects. Of personal interest to me was the sacrifice made by Marie

Walewski of Poland who prostituted herself to Napoleon to save her country, Poland, and failed (exactly as was done by Cleopatra with Caesar to save Egypt and failed). The book is extremely readable although I have two very minor complaints. First, there are several phrases and terms given in French. I do not speak or read French and had to get a translation from the internet. A translation in the book, perhaps in footnote, would have been nice. Second, there are constant references to Hitler. I could understand a book about Hitler referring to his repeating the same mistakes as Napoleon but saw no reason to mention Hitler over and over again in a book about Napoleon. However, these are my minor irritations and probably not of concern to other readers.

Matt says

I read this book to help make sense of *War and Peace*. For awhile, I was reading it concurrently; then I realized that if I wanted to finish Tolstoy before my 80th birthday, I had to make that a full time commitment.

How Far From Austerlitz is a loose historical overview of Napoleon from 1805 to 1815, though the author really stops caring after the battle of Austerlitz in 1805. So really, the full title of this book should be: *How Far From Austerlitz?: Napoleon 1805 to I Don't Care*.

This book was like eating vanilla pudding. The total *whatever* experience of life. I didn't really like it, I didn't really hate it, but it got me interested in Napoleon (much as pudding makes you interested in other, better deserts, such as Drumsticks, with the chocolate at the end of the cone, which is among the great things in life, the list going something like this: (1) sex; (2) chocolate at bottom of cone; (3) representative democracy; (4) the *Lonesome Dove* miniseries).

At the start of the book, there is a pretty good overview of the setting of the Napoleonic Wars, which comes in helpful if your only knowledge of Napoleon comes from *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* or the numerous commercials making fun of Napoleon's small stature/penis. Alistair Horne sets the stage with descriptions of England's continental army as well as France's *grand armee*. There follows a detailed description of the battle of Austerlitz, which is famously told in *War and Peace*. Indeed, Horne quotes extensively from *War and Peace*, substituting Tolstoy's narrative for his own.

After Austerlitz, Horne gives a rushed retelling of the signature moments on the way to Waterloo: Ulm, Jena, Vienna, Borodino, Moscow, Friedland, Leipzig, the 100 Days, etc. The best thing that can be said about this book was that it gives the overall context of the last stages of Napoleon's reign over Europe, and as previously noted, got me incredibly excited to find some comprehensive books on the subject. For instance, the author tantalizingly states, almost offhand, that Napoleon's slaughter of Mameluke prisoners at Jaffa was a result of his learning about Josephine's affair. Really? I could read an entire book about that. And I plan to.

I could quibble with the hurried nature of the last portion of the book. Or the shoddy maps. Or the undelineated descriptions of the battles (other than Austerlitz). Or the undefinable characters (how can a book with Napoleon, Murat, Kutuzov, and Wellington be boring? Well...). Or the incomprehensible description of Waterloo. Or the grossly distorted casualty figures (the numbers of killed and wounded Horne throws around exceed World War II battles...I'm going to need some verification here). But I understand that Horne wasn't looking to do these things. I guess I could say that he reached the modest goal he set for himself.

I will quibble with the insufferable and relentless Hitler analogies. It's as though Horne has to rationalize his writing of a Napoleon book by tying it into Hitler. The comparisons have all the depth of a five-paragraph

theme written by an Arizona State freshman.

Anyway, if I learned anything, it's that Napoleon has to be the most fascinating character in all of human history. I'm just throwing that out there. At one time, Napoleon held more lives, nations, destinies, in his palm, than any other person who ever lived. Then, like Icarus flying too close to the sun, he plummeted to St. Helena and died of stomach cancer. His story is one of adventure, derring-do, sex, lust, betrayal, courage, murder, war, escape, good men, bad men, beautiful women, and clubbed feet. It's an incredible tale, and I begin my search to find the best tellers.

Iain says

An excellent book, both engaging to read, entertaining and educational as well. The sort of book that makes you seek other books by the same author, even if the topics how little or no interest to you now.

An outstanding overview of Napoleon's military and civilian career. At times it is scant on detail, notably during the Waterloo campaign, but given the span, the sweep that the book covers, such can be forgiven.
