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Rory Muir, *Wellington: The Path to Victory, 1796-1814*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2013. Pp. xvi, 728. ISBN 978-0-300-18665-9.

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Many years ago at the Naval Postgraduate School, I managed to read all seven volumes of Sir Charles Oman's masterful *History of the Peninsular War*.¹ The experience deepened my appreciation of the generalship of Sir Arthur Wellesley, later the Duke of Wellington. I have since often recommended Oman's work to students interested in Wellington's achievements, especially on the operational level. Now, however, I will instead recommend the first volume (and the second to come) of Rory's Muir's fine political-military biography.

Muir (Univ. of Adelaide) has written several extremely readable histories of the Peninsular campaigns and Napoleonic warfare and tactics in general.² Some thirty years of scholarly research underlie his new biography.³ His book is not merely a shorter, updated version of Oman shorn of all its other narratives and concentrating only on Wellington. Muir presents a veritable Clausewitzian⁴ analysis of the man, stressing "the connection between politics and war, the army and Parliament" (xiii). Throughout, he casts his subject as a political general of the first order, fully attuned to the politics of the day, both domestic and international; Wellington used his military expertise in the service of various British governments, both in India and during the generation-long conflict with the French and Napoleon.

The book is organized in four parts, treating: Wellington's early life prior to his career as a young officer in India; his time in India, where his military and political talents first became generally recognized while he achieved fame as a "sepoy general"; the period after India and before his overall command in Portugal; and, occupying almost half the book, his campaigns in Portugal, Spain, and southern France up to Napoleon's first abdication in 1814. It may surprise some that Muir does not conclude this first volume of his biography with the Battle of Waterloo (1815). However, since Wellington's career after 1814 became primarily political, Waterloo may be seen to belong to the later phase of his life. And, too, there is a pleasing symmetry in the bookending of the long final section of the volume between his defeats of Marshal Nicholas Soult at Oporto in 1809 (305-14) and at Toulouse in 1814 (566-83). Muir himself provides no rationale for his choice of endpoint. He concludes his final chapter, on Toulouse, with a summary of Wellington's attributes as a commander from 1809 to 1814. Finally, a short epilogue prepares the reader for volume 2 with a vignette of Wellington's triumphant return to Dover Roads in June 1814—" [he] would never be quite as popular again until his death, almost forty years later, united the nation in mourning" (591).

Readers unfamiliar with Wellington's early career will find the biography's first three parts especially valuable for their discussion of his time in India, the period shortly after his return to Britain, and his assumption of command of the main British field army in the Iberian Peninsula. Here we see a dynamic, ambitious officer constantly striving to prove his worth, first to his elder brother, Richard,⁵ and then, on a much larger stage, to his brother officers, various British government leaders, and even the king. He faced

1. Oxford: Clarendon Pr, 1902. A particular strength of Oman's work, however dated it may now be, is his frequent quotation of Wellington's own words, often at length.

2. See, e.g., *Britain and the Defeat of Napoleon, 1807-1815* (New Haven: Yale U Pr, 1996), *Tactics and the Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon* (New Haven: Yale U Pr, 1998), *Salamanca, 1812* (New Haven: Yale U Pr, 2001), and, co-authored with Bob Burnham, Howie Muir, and Ron McGuigan, *Inside Wellington's Peninsular Army: 1808-1814* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2007).

3. "I have been researching subjects closely related to Wellington's life ever since 1984 (when I began work on my doctoral thesis [Univ. of Adelaide 1988]), and I have been working full time on this biography ... since 1994" (xiii).

4. In the sense of conceiving of war as an extension and reflection of politics. See Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Peter Paret and Michael Howard (Princeton: Princeton U Pr, 1986) 87-89.

5. Second Earl of Mornington, created Marquess Wellesley 1799.

the challenges, Muir writes, of competition with other aspiring and talented officers, often senior to him, like David Baird, and the shifting fortunes of his political allies, especially his brother. Worse, Wellington was not well thought of by the head of the British Army, the king's brother the Duke of York, or for that matter King George III himself. Despite his good connections, he had to show himself deserving of the opportunities that came his way and then make the most of every one of them.

Part I, "Obscurity and Dependence," follows the standard pattern of trying to understand how Wellington rose to greatness without relying unduly on after-the-fact memoirs that hint at future distinction. Muir shows him developing his skills while attached to the military establishment in Dublin as a young man overshadowed by an up-and-coming older brother. Only in his discussion of Wellington's part in the disastrous British campaign in the Low Countries (1794-95) do we begin to glimpse the personal qualities that led to his later successes:

He learnt many lessons from the campaign: that a Commander-in-Chief should not be too distant from his troops, but should see everything for himself, and ... be seen by the ordinary soldiers ... and officers who made up the army; that the commissariat and the medical department needed close attention if they were to perform well, and that they were essential to the efficiency of the army; and that good relations with the local civilian population were vital, and could only be maintained by strict discipline and by ensuring that the troops did not need to plunder in order to eat. Above all, he learnt that war was a serious business which should be undertaken in a thoroughly professional spirit or not at all. Having discovered what defeat was like, he gained a fierce determination to avoid it in future. (37)

Thus Muir highlights Wellington as the archetype of a new kind of British officer—a dispassionate, hardworking, consummate professional earning his way on his own merits as much as (or more than) through his family connections. This Wellington will be familiar to those who have read John Keegan's famous portrayal of him at Waterloo.⁶ But Muir's Wellington is a skilled politician as well as a master of military operations.

Part II, "India and Independence," concerns much more than Wellington's "sepoy" victories at Seringapatam (where he was not even in command) in 1799 and Assaye in 1803. The lessons learned in India served him well for the rest of his life. More than most other Wellington biographers, Muir captures the ambiguities of commanding a hodgepodge of British regulars and sepoy troops and native irregulars, while managing a coalition of sometimes feckless native allies. In this difficult environment, Wellington first gained a facility for operating in both the political and military worlds independently. In a cogent operational history, Muir demonstrates that Wellington's experience in India was the perfect apprenticeship for his later complex operations in Spain and Portugal.

Part III, "War, Politics, Fame and Controversy," provides an invaluable treatment of the psychological aspects of one of the greatest crises of Wellington's life. The book's prologue opens with his bitter reception in Britain after his return from Portugal in August 1808, when he was booed and hissed, despite his great victory at Vimeiro against the French army of Gen. Jean-Andoche Junot. The reader now gets the rest of the story. After his stunning defeat of Junot, Wellington had been superseded in turn by two senior British officers (Gen. Sir Harry Burrard, then Gen. Sir Hew Dalrymple) who made him sign the infamous Convention of Cintra granting Junot and his army safe passage back to France. This act nearly wrecked his career, despite Vimeiro. Fortunately, Wellington had friends in very high places in the British government, and his stolid and reasonable defense of his actions eventually won over most of those howling for his head, while events in Spain and Portugal went from bad to worse in his absence. Wellington now realized that things could go from good to bad in a heartbeat of the fickle British public and that he might not get any more second chances after the Cintra scandal. This helps explain why he was so driven to succeed, whether that seemed to him to require reckless aggressiveness (at Oporto in 1809 and Badajoz in 1812) or maddening caution (behind the lines of Torres Vedra in 1810-11).

6. *The Mask of Command* (NY: Viking Penguin, 1987) 92-155.

Muir's superlative narrative follows Wellington from his days in India as first a military tribune and then a virtual proconsul in Mysore to his skillful handling of the complex political and military problems posed by commanding Great Britain's field army in Portugal and Spain in a nearly six-year war of attrition against Napoleon's armies. Effectively supreme commander of coalition forces, he oversaw the British Army and the establishment of the Portuguese Army, while coordinating politically and militarily with various Spanish armies and factions, as well as with assorted juntas, non-state actors, and guerrilla bands. He was directly and indirectly responsible for supporting the Spanish and Portuguese insurgencies against the Empire of France. In so doing, he pioneered the sort of compound or hybrid warfare⁷ that still today frustrates counterinsurgents in places like Lebanon, Iraq, and Afghanistan (to say nothing of France's own twentieth-century experiences in Indochina and Algeria).

Another major theme of the book concerns operational- or campaign-level war, designating a category between battle tactics and strategic policy. As Muir makes clear, in all his campaigns, Wellington showed extraordinary concern for logistics and the provisioning of his troops. (His failed bold dash to Burgos in 1813 is a singular exception.) Muir also emphasizes Wellington's skill in translating operational successes into the political and diplomatic means to bargain for a better peace. Even at Copenhagen in 1807, British authorities turned to him to negotiate a conciliatory peace with the Danes (218).

Muir teaches us as well that Wellington shared another trait of great commanders—an ability to express ideas in writing: “Wellesley's unusual confidence in marshalling evidence and setting out an argument in long, detailed memoranda—which had been evident ever since his early days in India ... —made him particularly useful as a military advisor” (229). Like Julius Caesar or Napoleon, Wellington had a knack for hard, often unglamorous intellectual work—clear writing, deft diplomatic maneuvering, and meticulous logistical arrangements.

While Napoleon tamed the excesses of the French Revolution, Wellington helped tame the excesses of Napoleon. In his engrossing, detailed, and comprehensive account of his generalship to 1814, Muir shows how a rather obscure officer from the hinterlands of Britain's Irish possessions accomplished this feat against the greatest military machine of the age in the unlikely theater of the Iberian Peninsula, where British arms had singularly failed during the War of the Spanish Succession a century earlier. I strongly recommend *Wellington: The Path to Victory* to all readers who desire a persuasive and fascinating military-political analysis of the first forty-five years one of history's greatest captains. Well done, Professor Muir!

7. Referring to the blending of regular military operations with irregular or guerrilla actions against a common opponent: see, e.g., Williamson Murray and Peter Mansoor, eds., *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 2012), and Thomas M. Huber, ed., *Compound Warfare: That Fatal Knot* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Pr, 2002).