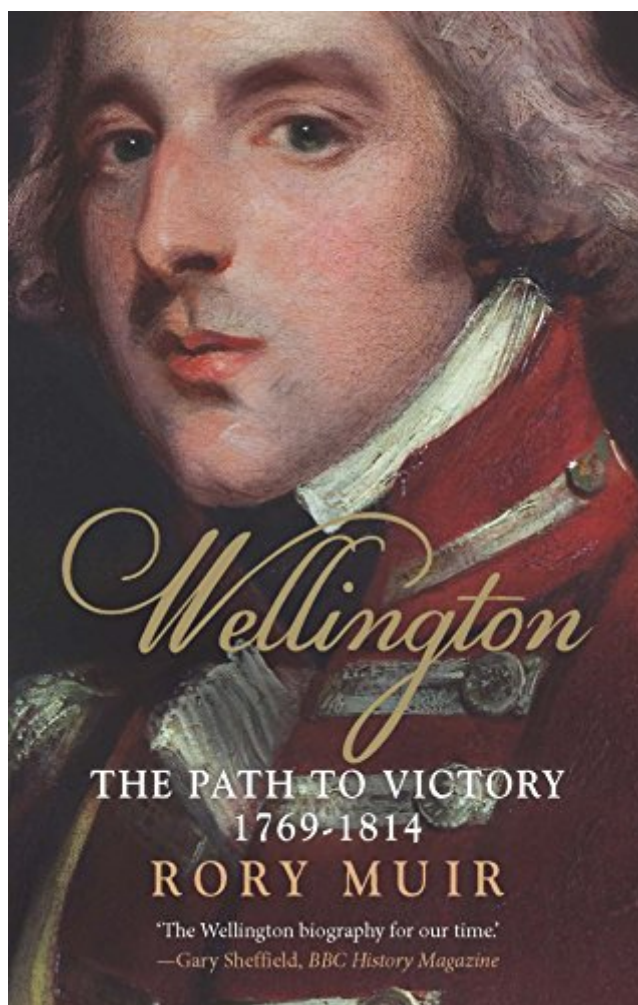


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Wellington: The Path To Victory 1769-1814



Synopsis

The Duke of Wellington was not just Britain's greatest soldier, although his seismic struggles as leader of the Allied forces against Napoleon in the Peninsular War deservedly became the stuff of British national legend. Wellington was much more: a man of vision beyond purely military matters, a politically astute thinker, and a canny diplomat as well as lover, husband, and friend. Rory Muir's masterful new biography, the first of a two-volume set, is the fruit of a lifetime's research and discovery into Wellington and his times. The author brings Wellington into much sharper focus than ever before, addressing his masterstrokes and mistakes in equal measure. Muir looks at all aspects of Wellington's career, from his unpromising youth through his remarkable successes in India and his role as junior minister in charge of Ireland, to his controversial military campaigns. With dramatic descriptions of major battles and how they might have turned out differently, the author underscores the magnitude of Wellington's achievements. The biography is the first to address the major significance of Wellington's political connections and shrewdness, and to set his career within the wider history of British politics and the war against Napoleon. The volume also revises Wellington's reputation for being cold and aloof, showing instead a man of far more complex and interesting character.

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Customer Reviews

Rory Muir's two volume biography of the First Duke of Wellington promises to be the most comprehensive since Elizabeth Longford's study a generation ago. Certainly the first volume, "Wellington: The Path to Victory, 1769-1814" should be a page-turning treat for keen students of the man and the era. Muir, an experienced historian of the Napoleonic wars, has done his research. The narrative follows Arthur Wellesley from birth through his youth, his formative military service in India, and his career-making leadership of an almost legendary Anglo-Portuguese Army in the Peninsular War, ending with his triumphant return from France in 1814. Along the way, Muir offers both detail and perspective on Wellington's career and his personal development. His commentary is blunt but even-handed: the future Duke was an ambitious young Army officer, not above pulling strings to get ahead. Wellington was also a gifted military professional in the modern sense of that word, and a dedicated public servant. The battle narrative is mostly kept at a campaign level of perspective; Muir does not attempt to refight the Peninsular War. The insightful chapter "Life at Headquarters", late in the book, offers some intriguing insights into a mature Wellington in his early forties. The text is enhanced by a thoughtful selection of maps and illustrations. The next volume, still to be published at this writing, will cover the climactic Waterloo Campaign and the Duke's long political career after Waterloo. Highly recommended.

This is a fantastic book and seems to be pretty exhaustive. That said, there is hardly anything about Wellington's childhood or younger life. The author works around that to the best of his abilities and uses contemporary information from the era to connect the dots when there is nothing specific to Wellington. Great picture sections that depict the major players at this stage in his life. This book will take you up to the end of the war and the Battle of Toulouse. I thought this was an interesting place to stop the first volume. Like a lot of people I always associate Waterloo as the real end of the war although I know it was a post-treaty engagement. In any case, Muir has saved one last battle for the second volume. As a recovering Catholic I greatly enjoyed the section of the book covering Wellington's time as Chief Secretary for Ireland. The quotes Muir chooses in this book show a man with incredible strength of will but also flashes of compassion and humor. I will admit that Muir seems hesitant to criticize The Duke and there is a certain element of hero worship in the book.

That said, how could there not be? Arthur Wesley (as he started out life) was a pretty good example of a self-made man in a lot of ways. He had family connections and was definitely among the economic 1% of his time, but his early life (continuing into his late 20s) wasn't defined by security. There seemed to be little love and support and his upward trajectory was interrupted with extraordinary disappointments. The book is a treasure chest of behind the scenes politics and gave me an excellent sense of the men who ruled the British Empire and how they made their decisions. This book isn't just a fascinating look at the first half of Wellington's career, it is a reference book for anyone curious about the development of the British Empire and how the war with France consolidated and expanded their political and economic reach. I eagerly await volume 2.

"Wellington: The Path To Victory, 1769-1814", the new biography of the Duke of Wellington by Rory Muir, is simply put the best biography of the Iron Duke now available. It supersedes any previous bios and is a prime example of how biography should be written. Although a massive tome (744 pages in the print edition) it is still only the first book of a two-volume set, the fruit of a lifetime's research and discovery into Wellington and his times by author Rory Muir. As the author noted in his preface, Wellington was not, in the usual sense of the phrase, "a political soldier", but both politics and the army were intimately entwined throughout his career, from the very beginning until the end. He was a Member of Parliament before he saw a shot fired in anger; when he died (1852) he was both Commander-in-Chief of the army and an elder statesman of the Conservative Party in the House of Lords. This has led author Muir to write a two-volume biography that is a thorough reassessment of Field Marshal Wellington's entire life from the cradle to the grave and in which three strands are constantly entwined: Wellington's own actions and perspective; the history of his military campaigns and the political debates in which he was engaged; and the way he was perceived by his contemporaries, or the history of his reputation, which was itself a significant influence on his life and actions. "The Path To Victory, 1769-1814" covers the first forty-five years of his life. Alas, for the Battle of Waterloo (1815), Wellington's crowning glory, we will have to wait for volume two. Rory Muir shows that the 1st Duke of Wellington, arguably, the greatest and most successful of all British generals, was a far more complicated man than the Victorian image of this national hero, the cold and haughty aristocrat nick-named the "Iron Duke", would let us believe. The book has 34 chapters, divided over four parts, which take the reader from his birth in 1769 and an unsettled childhood to Toulouse and the end of the (Peninsular) War in 1814. Although the battles inevitably take center stage from chapter six on, the author meanwhile examines the many strengths and the flaws that together made him a complex and interesting man as well as a great

soldier. Muir's thirty years' research into the Duke of Wellington and his times, has debunked many myths concerning the Iron Duke. This author also pays attention to periods in Wellington's life that have been skipped over by other biographers (take for example the years between his return from India and the beginnings of the Peninsular War, covered in chapters 11-14 in this book) more interested in his military history, as well as a host of other elements of both his public career and private life that never before have received detailed scrutiny. To give a few examples: Although regularly attributed to him in dictionaries of quotations, Wellington never mentioned that "the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton

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