

# BATTLE DIGEST™

Lessons for Today's Leaders

Volume 1 ★ Issue 2

Early European & Asian Wars:

## Waterloo

**DATE:**

June 18, 1815

**LOCATION:**

In modern-day Belgium  
(then part of Kingdom of the Netherlands)

### OPPOSING FORCES

**The 7th Coalition of European Allies (Great Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia):** Anglo-Dutch Army, under the command of Field Marshal Arthur Wellesley, the duke of Wellington. Approx. 68,000, composed of 23,000 British, 17,000 Dutch and Belgium, 11,000 German, and 17,000 others. Prussian Army under the command of Field Marshal Prince Gebhard von Blücher. Approx. 89,000 (72,000 of whom would fight at Waterloo).<sup>1</sup>

**The French Army of the North:** Commanded by Napoléon Bonaparte with Marshals Michel Ney and Emmanuel de Grouchy. Approx. 105,000 (72,000 of whom would fight at Waterloo).<sup>1</sup>



Wellesley of Wellington

army would act as reserve to reinforce success. Wellington's Anglo-Dutch army, and the Prussian army under Blücher, as the closest forces, quickly positioned themselves south of Brussels to block any French advance.<sup>2</sup>

**Actions by Napoleon** – Facing pressure on several fronts, including rebellion in Paris, Napoleon quickly reassembled his army. (*Map 1*) Knowing the Allies could amass over 700,000 troops in a few short months, he faced a strategic

dilemma. He could stay in France, continuing to build his army, in the hopes of assembling enough men and material to counter the inevitable attacks that would come. Or, he could move quickly, with a smaller force, and strike before his enemies could join forces.

With characteristic boldness, Napoleon opted for the latter, believing a quick victory would build support at home while driving a wedge into the alliance. He planned to march his

Army toward Brussels and gain central position between Wellington and Blücher. Once there, he would defeat Wellington before turning on the Prussians, who he thought might sue for peace. Even though it was a gamble, he had gambled before and won.

Napoleon moved north in two wings, with Ney commanding the left and Grouchy commanding the right. Napoleon, and his Imperial Guards, remained in the center as

a reserve. After crossing the Sambre River into the Netherlands on 15 June, he occupied Charleroi to control the key east-west route between Wellington and Blücher. Even though the Allies had positioned themselves to expect an advance on Brussels, Napoleon, through security and deception, still caught them



Gebhard von Blücher



Michel Ney



Emmanuel de Grouchy

### HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

A year prior to Waterloo, Napoleon was defeated at Leipzig, after which the victorious allied powers restored King Louis XVIII to the French throne and banished Napoleon to the small Mediterranean island of Elba. Although the Allies thought they had put an end to Napoleon's wars, they were mistaken. Not only did Napoleon escape – landing back in France on 1 March 1815 – but the troops King Louis sent to stop him ended up defecting instead. In just three weeks, Napoleon reached Paris, reclaimed his title as Emperor, and began assembling his Grande Armée. Louis, meanwhile, fled to Belgium.

Faced once again with their old nemesis, the Allies formed another coalition to defeat Napoleon for the last time. They would finally succeed at Waterloo, bringing over two decades of French aggression and conquest to an end. The word "Waterloo" itself has come to symbolize complete and utter defeat. And while Europe would enjoy four decades of relative peace after the battle, the stage would be set for a new rising power – the Prussians.

### STRATEGY & MANEUVER

**Actions by the Allies** – As Napoleon made his escape, the Allies were still in Vienna arguing how to carve up a post-Napoleon Europe. When the news reached them, they put aside their