

200th Anniversary of The Battle of Waterloo

By Olive Morrin, Special Collections & Archives

The leaders were [Arthur Wellesley](#), 1st Duke of Wellington commander of the British forces, [Napoleon Bonaparte](#) commander of the French forces and [General von Blücher](#) commander of the Prussian forces.



Capture of Bonaparte's carriage on the night of the Battle of Waterloo from 'The military carriage of Napoleon Buonaparte, taken after the Battle of Waterloo'

The [Battle of Waterloo](#) was fought on Sunday 18th June 1815. The fate of Europe hung on the outcome of this battle. For more than twenty years Europe had been engulfed in nearly continuous warfare. This battle decided whether Napoleon would continue on his march for European domination, or as transpired by the victory of Wellington Europe enjoyed relative peace for nearly 100 years until the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914.

The two main protagonists Wellington and Napoleon were the same age, both excellent strategists with many victories behind them. Napoleon had already defeated General von Blücher's Prussian army at Ligny two days before the battle at

Waterloo. Napoleon commanded 74,000

French troops and had 250 guns. Wellington had 23,000 British troops with 44,000 allied troops with 160 guns. General von Blücher arrived in the afternoon of the battle with approximately 70,000 men.

Wellington was aware he was outnumbered and depended on support from General Blücher. The Prussian army was recuperating after their French defeat 18 miles from Waterloo. Napoleon was hoping to engage each army separately, but unfortunately after heavy rain he delayed his attack until the ground dried out. It was a fatal error as it allowed von Blücher's army time to arrive at Waterloo. It was a closely fought battle, Wellington said afterwards it was "the nearest run thing you ever saw in your life".

The casualties were enormous. The British and allies lost 15,000 soldiers, the Prussians lost 7,000 and French casualties were estimated at 25,000 dead and wounded.

Finally, unable to remain in France or escape from it Napoleon surrendered to Captain Frederick Maitland of HMS Bellerophon on 15th July at La Rochelle. On board the HMS Bellerophon was an Irish doctor called Barry O'Meara (1783-1836) originally from Blackrock, Co. Dublin. Napoleon was impressed with the doctor who spoke both Italian and French.

When Napoleon discovered he was to be imprisoned on St. Helena's he requested Dr. O'Meara to be his personal physician.

Napoleon died in 1821 on St. Helena's. His body was returned to France in 1840 and he was reburied in a crypt under the dome at Les Invalides.

After his military career Wellington entered politics. He was twice prime minister of the Tory party and died in 1852.

The [Russell Library](#) at Maynooth University holds four volumes of *the Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte* by M. de Bourrienne, his private secretary. Volume 4 covers the Battle of Waterloo, exile to St. Helena's and his will.

Lines on the Battle of Waterloo by John Shee is classified as a rare book.

The Russell Library also holds two pamphlets relating to Waterloo:

- PA 719/10 *The military carriage of Napoleon Buonaparte, ..taken after the battle of Waterloo; together with its superb and curious contents and appendages.*
- PA 719/13 *A description of the defeat of the French army,; under the command of Napoleon Bonaparte, by the Allied armies, commanded by Field Marshal his Grace the Duke of Wellington, and Field Marshal Prince Blucher...*



Image from 'A description of the defeat of the French Army under the command of Napoleon Bonaparte'