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William Siborne

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Originally published in 1844, this two-volume work by William Siborne (1797–1830) represented the first major history of the Waterloo Campaign that was based on eyewitness accounts. Although Siborne, an infantry officer, had not served in the campaign himself, he did write to scores of officers who had, and their replies provided him with information he later used to construct the famous but controversial model of the field at Waterloo, which earned him the enmity of the Duke of Wellington (largely because Siborne's view of events conflicted with the Duke's). Siborne used much of the material for this book, which covers the entire campaign from Napoleon's escape from Elba in February 1815, through the battles of Ligny, Quatre Bras and Waterloo, right up to the Allies' entry into Paris in July. The maps published in a third volume can be viewed online. Volume 1 takes the story up to the opening stages of Waterloo.

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# History of the War in France and Belgium in 1815

VOLUME 1

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CONTAINING MINUTE DETAILS

OF THE

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AND

WATERLOO.

BY

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CONSTRUCTOR OF THE "WATERLOO MODEL."

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TO THE

QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.

MADAM,

IN graciously deigning to accept the dedication of these pages, Your Majesty has afforded the greatest possible encouragement to my humble endeavours to record, with simplicity, impartiality, and truth, the incidents of an eventful war, resulting in a long-enduring peace; a war which shed a new and brighter lustre on the valour and discipline of the British Army, and once more called forth the consummate sagacity and far-extending prescience of that illustrious Chief,

## DEDICATION.

whom Your Majesty, with wise appreciation and a just pride, retains at its head.

Earnestly hoping that the result of those endeavours may prove not altogether undeserving of Your Majesty's approbation,

I have the honour to be,

With profound respect,

MADAM,

Your Majesty's most humble

And most devoted servant,

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## P R E F A C E.

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SOME years ago, when constructing a Model of the Field of Waterloo, at a particular period of the battle, I found it necessary to make great exertions to procure that detailed information for which I had sought in vain in the already numerous *published* accounts of the military transactions of 1815. Anxious to ensure the rigorous accuracy of my work, I ventured to apply for information to nearly all the surviving eye-witnesses of the incidents which my model was intended to represent. In every quarter, and among officers of all ranks, from the general to the subaltern, my applications were responded to in a most liberal and generous spirit; and the result did indeed surprise me, so greatly at variance was this historical

evidence with the general notions which had previously prevailed on the subject. Thus was suggested the *present* work. I was induced by the success of this experiment to embrace a wider field, and to extend my inquiries over the entire battle, and, ultimately, throughout the campaign itself, from its commencement to its close.

Having become the depository of such valuable materials, I felt it a duty to the honourable profession of which I am an humble member, to submit to it, and to the world, a true and faithful account of this memorable epoch in the history of Britain's military greatness.

Though not so presumptuous as to imagine that I have fully supplied so absolute a desideratum, yet I consider myself fortunate in being the instrument of withdrawing so far the veil from Truth. One of my Waterloo correspondents has humorously remarked, that "if ever truth lies at the bottom of a well, she does so immediately after a great battle, and it takes an amazingly long time before she can be lugged out." The time of her emerging appears to have at length arrived, but, while I feel that I have brought to light much that was involved in obscurity, I cannot but be sensible that I may have fallen into errors. Should such be the case, I shall be most ready, hereafter, to make any corrections that may appear requisite, on my being favoured, *by eye-witnesses*, with further well authenticated information.

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I take this opportunity of returning my sincere thanks to the numerous officers of the British Army, who have so kindly committed to my keeping their recollections of the events which I have attempted to describe. Similar thanks are likewise due to the officers of the King's German legion and Hanoverian subsidiary corps; as also to the General Officers who respectively furnished me with such information as related to the troops of Brunswick and Nassau.

I beg also to express my obligations to the Prussian Minister of War, and the officers of the Prussian general staff in Berlin, for the readiness and liberality with which they have supplied me with such details concerning the dispositions and movements of the troops of their sovereign, as were essential to me in prosecuting the task I had undertaken.

Having briefly explained the circumstances that led to the construction of the work which I thus venture to place before the Public, I have now only to express a hope that my labours may be crowned with usefulness. Should such a result occur, I shall then have attained the only fame I seek.

W. SIBORNE.

Royal Military Asylum, Chelsea,  
March, 1844.

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