

Waterloo Staff Ride

During the USAREUR staff ride we will consider challenges and developments facing the antagonists of 1815. At various stations on our tour, there will be opportunities for the participants to discuss how these pertained at critical times and places in both the campaign and on the day of battle. Observations on such matters may also be relevant to current times and the issues and opportunities now facing USAREUR. Among the ideas to discuss are as follows:

Coalition Arrangements: How did senior commanders in the Waterloo campaign coordinate their efforts? Did national interests converge or diverge? What were the political and diplomatic antecedents to the campaign? What nations were present on the Allied side? On the French side? What were the strengths of the alliances; what were the weaknesses? To what degree did trust (or distrust) between key leaders (both command and staff) from different national armies impact on operational matters. What techniques were used to facilitate an integration and unity of effort? How key were liaison officers? When plans or unfolding actions by different coalition members appeared to be counter to the overall objective, what options to (diplomatically) correct them were available (consider, for example, the role necessitated for the Prince of Orange and his ability to fulfill it)?

Command and Control: Were lines of command clearly drawn? Was unity of command achieved; was it necessary? Did different national entities understand each other's intentions and were they prepared to support those intentions? Were commanders able to control and coordinate the actions of key subordinates? Did staffs anticipate the directives of commanders and ease the execution of the commander's intent? How well did command and staff arrangements on the opposing sides function (consider the relations between Wellington, Blucher, and Napoleon and their respective chiefs of staff – De Lancey, Gneiseneau, Soult)? Did subordinate leaders (Ney, Jerome, Macdonell at Hougoumont, Baring at La Haye Sainte) seize the initiative to fulfill the intentions

of their senior commanders? How well did they understand overall intentions (consider d'Orleans at Quatre-bras and Ligny; Grouchy at Wavre; Uxbridge and his cavalry charge into Napoleon's depth; Baron General von Muffling and his relationship to both Wellington and Blucher)? To what degree did subordinates elect to interpret instructions to fit their own predilections? To what degree did personality play a part in key decisions and subsequent actions? Did commanders place themselves in key locations at critical times to have optimal impact on operations?

Operational Art: What was the strategic backdrop to the Waterloo campaign? What were the major objectives of the Allies and the French? Did the senior commanders (Wellington and Blucher for the allies; Napoleon for the French) clearly articulate their visions of how they wished events to unfold? Did original plans remain unchanged as the campaign and the battle unfolded? Were key adjustments to the plan articulated and/or understood in a timely and coherent manner? Did the plan of campaign (the operational level) support the strategic objective of the allied nations? What were the combined arms and joint (army-navy) warfare considerations? Were they well-coordinated? Did the tactical dispositions lend themselves to supporting the operational concept? What risks were the opposing commanders prepared to take? What risks were believed to be unacceptable? Conceptually, what did either side consider the main effort; what were the supporting efforts? Did those concepts remain steady during the course of the campaign, and especially on the day of battle?

Organizational Considerations: What were the conditions of the opposing armies? Their horses? Their equipment? Who comprised the troops? Where did their loyalties lie? What was the state of their training? Was discipline good? Did commanders engender trust? Did soldiers display confidence? What were the key logistical considerations? At the operational level (consider Wellington's lines of supply back to the Channel; Blucher's back to the Rhine; Napoleon and the competing risks he faced on the campaign and in his rear)? At the tactical level (consider Hougoumont and La Belle Alliance)? What was the impact of terrain and of weather on all of the above?

The Morale Factor: How good was the respective leadership? What was the loyalty of the troops to the “cause”? To what degree did the leadership inspire their soldiers? To what degree did leaders care for their soldiers and look to their needs? Did the traditions of service and/or unit cohesion play a part on either side? Were commander’s actions constrained by national interests?

Lessons to Be Drawn: What are some of the lessons that USAREUR can draw from the Waterloo experience? Are the foundations for good coalition operations in place? What lateral communications are necessary across coalition army, navy, and air forces? How do combined arms work today? Joint operations? What are the optimal ways to integrate coalition organizational efforts, combat and combat support elements, information-exchange, plans, resupply and maintenance systems (what recent experiences do we have, for example, in operational and tactical resupply efforts in a non-counterinsurgency environment), coordinate post-combat/post-crisis developments, and cyber operations? How do USAREUR’s dynamic presence pillars of initiative, simultaneity, depth, adaptability, endurance, lethality, mobility, and initiative apply?