

Waterloo

A Guide for Teachers

The film was made in 1970, a joint Soviet-Italian venture directed by Sergei Bondarchuk and produced by Dino De Laurentiis.

At over £12,000,000 it was then one of the most expensive films ever made. Commercially it was an expensive failure, not least because it employed 15,000 Red Army Soviet infantrymen and 2,000 cavalrymen as extras! Whilst the film is generally regarded as focusing upon Rod Steiger's Napoleon, the second half contains a useful dramatisation of the battle suitable for use with younger viewers. There are, of course, limitations with regard to historical accuracy. The film makes only passing reference to the actions of Ligny and Quatre Bras on 16 June: Lord James Hay, who appears in many scenes in the film, before being killed rallying a square at Waterloo, was actually killed at Quatre Bras. More contentiously, the Prussians appear later at Waterloo than many modern accounts would have it, completely ignoring the savage fighting between French and Prussians for the village of Plancenoit. And though many of the bon mots, especially from Wellington, are verifiable in the historical record, they are used wildly out of context. Still, the film offers several theses as to why Napoleon lost the battle - for example, his indifferent health, the weather, Ney's and Grouchy's shortcomings - that might serve as the basis for plenary activity. The film is easily and cheaply obtainable and the following is offered as an approximate guide.

From 0-36 minutes

Napoleon's abdication and exile on Elba, return from exile etc. This might easily be skipped.

From 37-46 minutes

Duchess of Richmond's Ball, 15 June 1815. Explains Napoleon's invasion of Belgium and the discomfiture of his adversaries.

From 47-50 minutes

Brief allusion to Ligny & Quatre Bras & the Prussian decision to withdraw north to Wavre.

From 50-61 minutes

Wellington withdraws to the Waterloo position on 17 June; receives promises of Prussian support on the morrow.

From 62-64 minutes

Daybreak on 18 June.

From 64-72 minutes

Wellington, Napoleon and their plans for 18 June.

From 73-81 minutes

Panorama of Wellington's position, opening shots and the French diversionary attack on Hougoumont

From 82-92 minutes

Napoleon's grand artillery barrage and the French infantry assault on Anglo-Allied lines. This is repulsed by Picton (who dies) and the cavalry, famously the ill-fated charge of the Scots Greys.

From 92-97 minutes

Grouchy hears the sound of the guns from Waterloo but refuses to march towards them. The approaching Prussians, meanwhile, are spotted in the distance by both Napoleon and Wellington.

From 97-105 minutes

Wellington's order for the infantry to take advantage of reverse slopes in order to protect themselves is interpreted by Ney as a general retreat. He consequently orders cavalry to charge – in the event a fruitless decision against unbroken Anglo-Allied infantry squares. Wellington's Quarter-Master-General, Colonel Sir William de Lancey, is fatally wounded at this juncture.

106-113 minutes

With La Haye Sainte taken and the arrival of the Prussians imminent, Napoleon decides that it is time to commit the Imperial Guard. They are repulsed by the English Guards, signalling the collapse and flight of the French army. Wellington orders a general advance.

114-120 minutes

Lord Uxbridge is famously wounded and General Cambronne, equally famously, declines to surrender. With the battle won, Wellington rides off back to his headquarters at an inn in Waterloo.

For more information see

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waterloo_\(1970_film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waterloo_(1970_film))

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