



Who do you think can get us out of this mess?

It's June 2019 and here in the UK we're faced with possibly the biggest political crisis in our modern history.

As the uncertainty drags on, there's one burning question we all want answered.

Who can get us out of this mess?

Members of the Conservative party are about to choose their new leader, and the country's new prime minister. While they consider the respective merits of Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt they may find it helpful to look at what happened more than two hundred years ago on 18th June 1815, at the battle of Waterloo. Back then, their choice could have been between Napoleon Bonaparte and the Duke of Wellington.

These two men were the same age but had very different backgrounds and ambitions.

Napoleon was the populist who could increase an army by 40,000 with his presence alone. He understood that citizen soldiers required heroic leadership.

The basis for his victories was the rapid manoeuvre of large bodies of troops living off the land. His ability to stage a comeback in 1815, a year after he'd abdicated as Emperor of the French, and have Frenchmen flocking to serve him, speaks volumes for his undimmed charisma. Yet, his drive to impose a continent-wide boycott of British imports led to widening war.



The essence of Napoleon's unconventional tactics during the Napoleonic Wars was to obliterate the opposing army, rather than seize territory and strategic positions. His land victories were so crushing that they undermined European power politics.

On the battlefield, and at Waterloo, Napoleon's tactics were designed to throw the enemy off balance by drawing the fighting to one wing, then punching with the maximum force of artillery, heavy cavalry, and infantry columns, at a point where the enemy line had weakened.

By contrast, Wellington was a meticulous planner and strict disciplinarian; a man focused on doing his duty with no interest in the limelight. On the offensive, Wellington was a harsh disciplinarian and his marches were meticulously organised. He always made it a priority to conserve his forces and maintain supplies.

Wellington had planned to fight a defensive battle at Waterloo. He had fewer troops and was dependent on the Prussians fighting with him. But he'd succeeded in beating Napoleon's army before.

In the Peninsular War, Wellington had beaten Napoleon's armies in Portugal and Spain. He'd correctly judged that it would be impossible for the French to concentrate sufficient troops to crush his Anglo-Portuguese forces whilst simultaneously coping with pressure from Spanish guerrillas and regulars.

Wellington was always ready to concede ground to keep his army intact. At Waterloo, he was cautious because he knew he was outnumbered and had to survive until the Prussians arrived.

THE MOOT ROUTE



aced with Napoleon's diversionary manoeuvres, designed to split his forces in half and open up the opportunity for a frontal assault straight up the Allied middle, Wellington stood by his strategy.

He kept 18,000 men in reserve and deliberately concealed the bulk of his troops on the far side of the ridge at Mont St Jean.

Even after four failed attempts to break Wellington's highly disciplined troops, Napoleon didn't change his tactics. Eventually, his combined infantry, cavalry and artillery did force their way into the allied line.

Wellington ordered his men to pull back 100ft, so they were out of range of the French guns. This worked. Marshal Ney, one of Napoleon's military commanders, thought they were retreating and ordered a brigade of French cavalry to attack. He then recklessly took 4,000 cavalymen forward without support.

If Napoleon had sent his Imperial Guard in at this point, Wellington could well have lost the battle.

But he'd become aware of the approach of the Prussians and so refused to commit them.

The result was that Napoleon, the flamboyant attacker, lost. And Wellington, the careful man of detail who understood the importance of discipline and holding back, won. But only just.

Today, should we hope for a Napoleon or a Wellington? What do you think?



Addendum

By the way; after the battle Napoleon returned to Paris and, on 22nd June, abdicated for the second time before surrendering to the British. He was taken to the South Atlantic island of St Helena where he died on 5th May 1821.

Waterloo was Wellington's last battle. In 1828, he became Prime Minister.

After Waterloo, France was forced to pay damages to Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia. These countries met at the Congress of Vienna to settle the future of Europe. Their talks led to the creation of a neutral, buffer state, where they promised to maintain peace.

In 1830, this state became independent and from then on was known as Belgium. Today Belgium hosts the headquarters of the EU. Where, over the last three years, the peace has been somewhat disturbed.
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