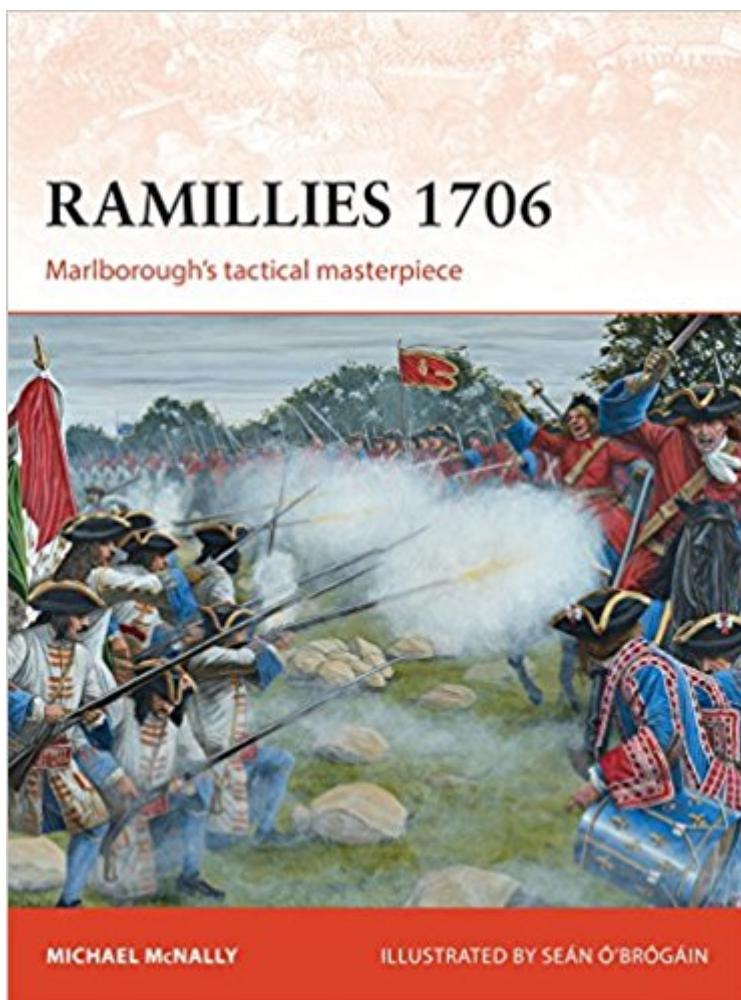


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Ramillies 1706: Marlborough's Tactical Masterpiece (Campaign)



Synopsis

Ramillies 1706 details one of the most important clashes in the War of the Spanish Succession, a battle that secure the Duke of Marlborough's place in history and helped determine the future of Europe. In 1706, as the War of Spanish Succession dragged on, France's Louis XIV was eager for peace, but he wanted it on his terms. Therefore, rather than standing on the defensive, French armies on all fronts swung over to the offensive. Marlborough decided to counter by launching a pre-emptive strike. The two sides met at Ramillies on May 23rd. Enjoying an almost parity in numbers the French took up position along a river line, anchoring each of their flanks on a marshy area, thereby surrendering the initiative to Marlborough, who proceeded to probe against both flanks. Using a series of deceptions and feints, Marlborough took advantage of a concealed re-entrant to reinforce his center which, at that time, was cannonading the French positions. Unaware of this, the French general Villeroi drastically weakened his center in order to reinforce the threatened sector. Seizing the opportunity, Marlborough launched an overwhelming attack on his own terms. In the wake of two massive cavalry charges, during one of which Marlborough was unhorsed and almost killed, the allied troops shattered the French, inflicting over 20,000 casualties--almost one third of the Franco-Hispano-Bavarian army--at a cost of less than 4,000 men, thus paving the way for allied forces to overturn the French position in Flanders, and in the process capturing several strategically important towns and cities including Brussels, Bruges, Louvain and Antwerp. In short, whilst Blenheim in 1704 had been a masterpiece of strategic maneuver that had wrong footed the Franco-Bavarian armies and removed the threat to Vienna, it was Marlborough's tactical intuition on the field of Ramillies that had led to perhaps his finest battlefield performance and paved the way for a campaign that would see much of Flanders come under Allied control.

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Customer Reviews

Mike McNally is an acknowledged expert on the Williamite War in Ireland and acted as a consultant in a recent study of President Barack Obama's Irish roots. Married, with three children, he is the author of best-selling studies of the pivotal battles of the Boyne and Aughrim and is currently studying the role of the Irish Brigade in French service from the Boyne to Fontenoy. The author of several books for Osprey, with his varied areas of interest he continues to research such diverse subjects as Irish military history, the campaigns of Marlborough and the German colonial campaigns during World War I. The author lives in Eitorf, Germany.

John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough, is generally counted as one of Britain's great captains of warfare, along with the Duke of Wellington. Marlborough is perhaps best known for his victory at Blenheim in 1704. This Osprey Campaign Series entry highlights another of his victories, Ramillies in 1706. At Ramillies, Marlborough's allied army defeated a significant French army of Louis XIV, thanks to the Duke's superb tactical sense and a little luck. Authored by Michael McNally with illustrations by Sean OBrogain, "Ramillies 1706" provides a brief introduction to the War of the Spanish Succession and to the challenges of campaigning on the European Continent in the 18th Century. The format includes the standard set-up of opposing commanders, forces, and plans. The narrative of the battle itself is a little challenging to follow but very worthwhile, not least for how it highlights Marlborough's ability to adjust his battle plan as the fighting progressed. The text is nicely supported by a good selection of maps, diagrams of the battleground, photographs, and illustrations. Recommended as an introduction to one of the Duke of Marlborough's great victories.

Received promptly. Very pleased.

Excellent

The War of the Spanish Succession usually doesn't ring a bell for most readers, but Louis XIV is still pretty well known. In Ramillies 1706, Michael McNally gives us a succinct overview of one of the major French defeats in that war, where the English Duke of Marlborough led

a Dutch-British-German coalition army to defeat an equally mixed French-Bavarian army in southeastern Belgium. Marlborough had already racked up a reputation at Blenheim two years earlier, and Ramillies further cemented him in the annals of great generals. Overall, Ramillies 1706 in a fine addition to the series is well-written and colorful, although not always full of military insight or pertinent facts. For example, although French casualties are detailed, there is no mention of Anglo-Dutch casualties, though they must have been substantial. Nor could I really get a feel for the musket and pike tactics being employed. The battle narrative is essentially presented as: Marlborough conceives a fine operational plan, Marlborough's plans undermined by allies, Marlborough pushes on anyway and the French oblige by offering battle when they needn't have, Marlborough plans a tactical masterpiece and then with a few hiccups executes it and routs the French. I do find this method a bit too accepting of Marlborough the military genius and not enough dissection of his command decisions or methods. Marlborough wanted to fix the French left and center at Ramillies, then flank them on the right with his cavalry. When the French also put their cavalry on their right, the result was a large, protracted cavalry battle that only slowly swung toward Marlborough's favor. Frankly, I can't see anything terribly brilliant in a flanking movement and the result was in doubt for some time.

I'm not sure that Marlborough had a "Plan B" in case his flanking move didn't work out. The author does not put much effort into describing artillery in the battle, but he does mention that Marlborough had a significant superiority in this arm; given this, a longer artillery bombardment of the French cavalry might have broken them up and opened the way for the intended flanking movement. At the tactical level, fairly minor water obstacles some little more than drainage ditches played a large role in disrupting movement and formations. The French chose to defend behind a minor water obstacle, but it was unclear to me why Marlborough tried to move troops across some of these obstacles (which caused some disruption). Of course, the French commander lost the battle through poor decisions and Marlborough mounted a vigorous pursuit that routed the French field army and overran most of Belgium. All of this redounded to Marlborough's credit as an aggressive general, but the narrative seems to induce an air of inevitability that may be influenced by hindsight. Napoleon later commented that luck was an important part of generalship and Ramillies is a good case study where a plan came together as intended.

nice book

I liked this Osprey Campaign describing Marlborough's second major victory in Seven Years War. I was not familiar with this battle before and therefore I learned a lot from this book - even if of course I willingly admit that because of lack of space, it had to treat many elements superficially. The writing is clear and the events are described in good chronological order. The style makes the reading pleasant - even if in some moments it is easy to get lost in the number of names of unit commanders. The battle itself is well linked to the events which happened in earlier stages of the war and to those which followed - those latter being very serious and making 1706 indeed an 'annus mirabilis" for the allies and a particularly bad moment for France. Maps are clear and illustrations are good. There are three quite good colour plates by Sean O'Brogain: first fight on allies left wing, the fight for the village of Ramillies and the final fight near Autre-Eglise. There are also four smaller two-colours plates, showing some dramatic episodes - including one which teaches us that even the greatest warlords must sometimes abandon dignity and just run like heck...))) The one little thing that annoyed me just a little bit was the extravagant praise of Marlborough every two pages or so. There is no doubt that he commanded splendidly during all 1706 campaign, that his plan of battle at Ramillies was a brilliant thing and that he won as result a splendid victory. But still that doesn't justify such an exaggerated, almost religious adoration, as author shows - especially considering that part of French army was made of second rate garrison troops... This is however a very minor point, which doesn't change one little bit my five stars rating. For a short and therefore necessarily superficial study of this battle, this book is simply as good as it can get. I am very pleased with this purchase and recommend it with enthusiasm. ENJOY!

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