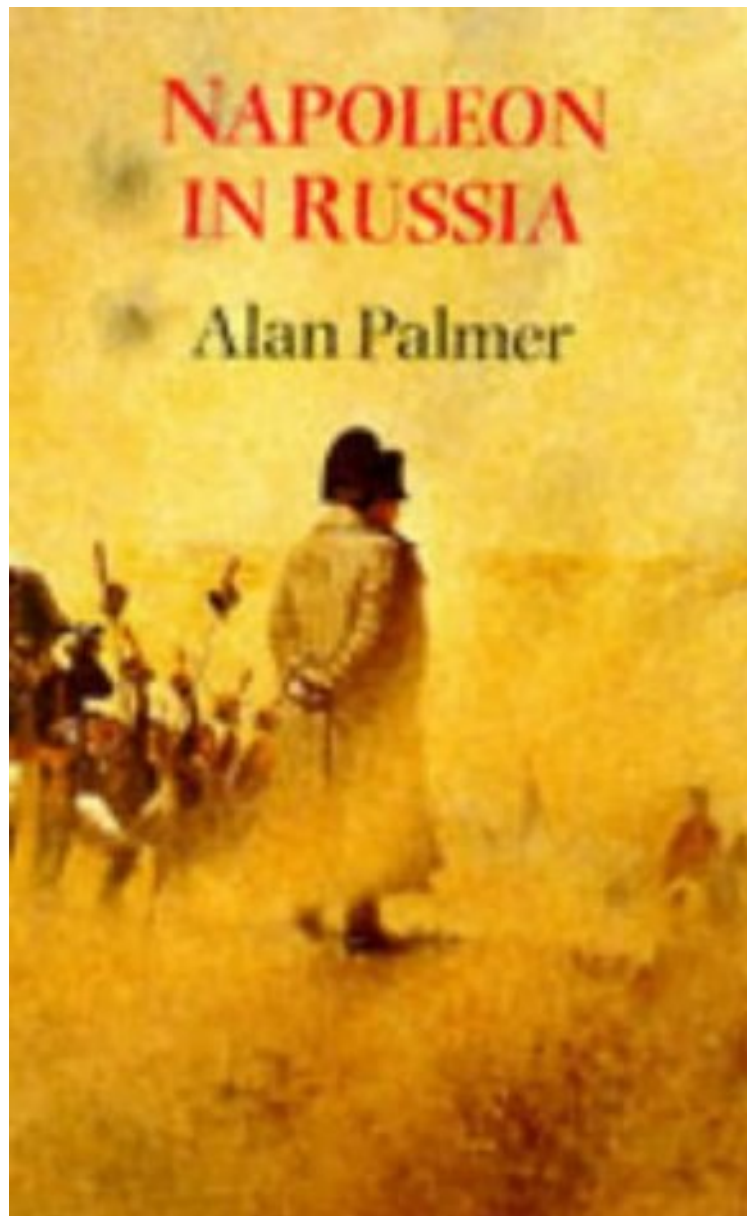


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Napoleon in Russia

Alan Palmer

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Alan Palmer : Napoleon in Russia before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Napoleon in Russia:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An Excellent Anaylsis of Napoleon's 1812 Russian DebacleBy PriamsdaughterSince I first learned that Napoleon lost a huge chunk of his army --without their ever firing a shot--

simply on the trek into Russia in the spring and summer of 1812, I wanted more information to understand why. I have read Caulaincourt's superb book "On Napoleon's Side in Russia" but needed the topic expanded. This book serves that purpose. Something failed Napoleon before and during that campaign--he simply could not fathom that his genius was capable of committing egregious--and fatal-- and astonishingly self-evident errors. 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. An epic tale brilliantly told By Avon Napoleonic Fellowship I recently re-read this old favourite, which I first read about 20 years ago. I remembered it as an engaging read that challenge some of the mythology about the campaign. I particularly remember that he discussed the burning of Moscow in some depth, trying to conclude just who was responsible. My recollection of the book was supported from the first page. Palmer tells the story of the Russian campaign in lucid and elegant prose and the book is an enjoyable and interesting read. I was impressed by his critical, yet objective approach. There is little judgmental language or value-laden statements, merely a presentation of information and quotes from some of the key actors actors to inform the reader--and tell a ripping yarn at the same time. Unlike many books about the Russian Campaign, this tome focusses more attention on the first half of the campaign (up to and including the capture of Moscow and the great fire). The first ten chapters cover this part of the epic story, with one devoted to Maloyaroslavets, three to the retreat and a concluding chapter ('Laurels and Legends'). Palmer presents a story of mistakes and lost opportunities, of uncharacteristic inaction and indecision by Napoleon, of a slow-moving attack and a wily, increasingly co-ordinated and determined retreat and defence. The pursuit of the retreating Russian armies reads like an exciting mystery-adventure. The mistakes made by Napoleon and his subordinates, especially Jérôme, and the missed opportunities at Drissa, Vitebsk and Smolensk are clearly evident to us in hindsight, and from the comfort of an armchair! Palmer does not merely critique the French, illustrating that both armies lacked a clear plan of campaign, were racked by squabbles amongst senior commanders, lack of trust, a lack of clear information, slow rates of march and the hardships of the advance/retreat, particularly the impact of the rain and heat. A key turning point was the 'need' (and demand) for a 'true' Russian commander to unite the armies and build on the patriotism, which lead Alexander to reluctantly appoint Kutuzov as C-in-C. The chapter on the Battle of Borodino describes the main phases of that terrible encounter. It includes an excellent, relatively simple map with the main features shown clearly. As with the rest of the book, Palmer's vivid account highlights the intensity of the struggle. He uses the battle to develop his thesis that it was an example of a change in Napoleonic warfare and a move to artillery dominance that would be so evident in WWI. I struggled with this selective use of evidence to try to develop a general thesis (not to mention that, like the European military of the mid-19th C, he omits to note the significance of the ACW), but it did not detract from the value of the book and the narrative of the battle. As is my all-too-common beef when reading and reviewing these books, the maps do not adequately support the text. While, as indicated by my praise of the one of the Battle of Borodino, those that are provided are clear and with reasonable detail (Campaign of 1812 (endpapers), Crossing the Niemen, Battle of Borodino, Burning of Moscow, Leaving Moscow and Crossing the Berezina), they are insufficient to follow the campaign in detail. Palmer's book features detailed accounts of aspects of the campaign that are too often glossed over by other authors. The meeting of the Russian commanders at Fili leading to the crucial decision to retreat beyond Moscow; the burning of Moscow (about which he presents and the burning of Moscow compelling evidence that Rostopchin was the perpetrator); events during French occupation; the battle of Maloyaroslavets (highlighting the performance of Dokhturov, Raevski and Eugène--which lead me to muse, "what if Eugène had been at Waterloo rather than Jérôme?!") and dramatic battles around the crossing of the Berezina. There are numerous insights and interesting observations in these sections and chapters. For example, Napoleon's decision to leave the army once safely in winter quarters, which he made early in the retreat, the losses in the retreat prior to snow fall, how half-starved French troops fought well at Viasma, but after battle part of Davout's corps broke and ran to protection with Ney's. These all add to the value of this book and, given that it was published in 1967, represent one of the first attempts--in popular writing in English--to dispel the myths that had been built around the campaign since 1812. So, my verdict has not changed much in 20 years. I still think it is an engaging read. I was particularly impressed that, like all good story-tellers, the author's view-point is not important--in fact we are left unsure as to his point of view--the book is about the story, the available evidence and is an attempt to present a 'factual' account. Another one that is highly recommended. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Napoleon and General Winter in Russia By Chris Martin It was a fine night in Dresden. With these simple words Alan Palmer begins a fascinating account of Napoleon's disastrous adventure into Russia that left nearly a half a million men dead, not to mention the widespread destitution of Polish and Russian territory and the burning of Minsk and Moscow. Palmer brings out the geo-politics behind this decision to invade but is best in his description of the battle of Borodino 'the most terrible of all my battles' Napoleon is quoted as saying. Many history tracts on Napoleon give a one sided account of Napoleon who towers over all his other generals in this narrative. However Palmer had access to Russian archives and describes the contradictions within the Russian commanders about a suitable defensive strategy until Kutuzov decides to stand before Moscow. Then we are treated to description of the rapid destruction of the French forces mainly through the efforts of 'General Winter'. Palmer brings in other first-hand accounts to present this most fascinating tale of what was to become the first steps in Napoleon's downfall.

Palmer presents an insightful study of the events which led to Napoleon's tortuous defeat in the Russian campaign of 1812, looking beyond the gruelling retreat from Moscow to examine the personalities, aims and leadership styles of those involved. '

About the Author Alan Palmer is an author and historian. His many critically acclaimed works include Alexander I: Tsar of War and Peace, Metternich, Councillor of Europe and The Decline and Fall of the Ottoman Empire. Among Alan Palmer's books are Napoleon in Russia, Metternich, Alexander I and Twilight of the Habsburgs.