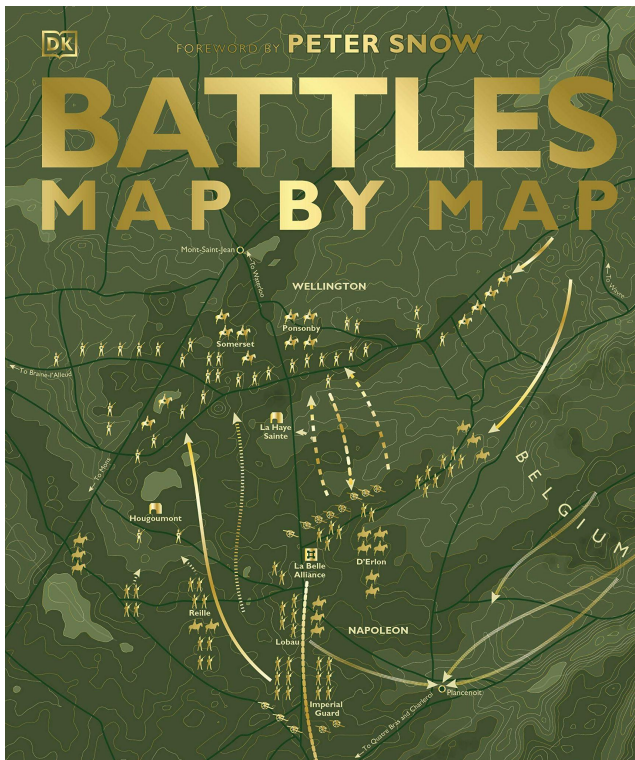


Battles Map by Map

by DK, Foreword by Peter Snow

Review by Rob Morgan

Guess what Santa left for me? No, not socks, well I did get a pile of those, but a copy of the new hardback DK book, 'Battles Map by Map', produced by a team led by Professor Sabin of King's College, London. It has a foreword by Peter Snow and Snow's name features large on the cover. This is a substantial volume of 288 pages, well produced and sumptuously illustrated in full colour. Though I found the book interesting, and it's one I will dip into fairly frequently, I should say at the outset that I wouldn't have bought it for myself, not merely because the cover price is £30, but also, this is very much a coffee table sort of book. It covers, briefly (sometimes very briefly indeed!) encounters, note that term, in warfare from Kadesh in 1285 BC onwards, through the centuries and millennia, to Iraq 2003. To my mind as an historian, and as a wargamer, this is far too great a sweep to be adequately dealt with in any single volume. But it is an introduction, a fair one at that, and it has many splendid maps, and maps are what the book is all about.



'Battles Map by Map' is divided into five chronological sections: before 1000AD (17 battles), from 1000-1500AD (19 battles), 1500-1700AD (14 battles), 1700-1900AD (27 battles), and from 1900 to the present day (28 battles). I should say that though most of what's covered in the book, around a hundred in all, are indeed battles, Waterloo and Gettysburg, for example, there are plenty of sieges, from Malta to Dien Bien Phu, and several campaigns, such as Desert Storm and Yom Kippur. Sadly, little naval warfare is to be found in these pages, apart from the usual suspects, Trafalgar, Actium, Lepanto and so on.

These articles are interspersed with short illustrated essays on matters ranging from 'Alexander the Great's Army', to

'Chemical Warfare' and 'Smart Weapons'. These pieces, some twenty of them, are delightful. The same can be said of most of the battle and siege accounts. Several of them, across the periods, are not at all well known and will prove valuable additions to readily available wargame history. The writing team has avoided the pitfall of ripping out a selection of battles from the English and the American Civil Wars, fortunately, and even the Napoleonic era is

dealt with in a competently short way. I found few faults with the text, though maps for some encounters, Adowa 1896 and Amiens 1918, for example, are just plain maps, little else.

The book has, to my mind, only one significant fault. At the end of each historical section there is what's referred to as a 'Directory'. Short comments on battles and sieges, sometimes less than five hundred words and a photograph, omitted from the detailed text. I wondered why? Why Poitiers (1356), Vicksburg (1863) and Monte Cassino (1944), among twenty five or so others, were chosen for this abbreviated treatment? Indeed it seemed remarkable to consider any attempt at describing Operation Barbarossa (1941) – of all possible campaign maps one of the best possible choices – in around a hundred and fifty words and no map? There is a glossary, useful for the novice reader, but sadly, no further reading list which would have been a very useful bonus.

On the whole, well, maybe 6 or 7 out of 10.

What did you get for Christmas?