"**A Field in Belgium**"
by Steven Campbell

The Napoleonic Era influenced the lives of mill-ions across Europe and around the world. Whilst not a Freemason himself, Napoleon Bonaparte was known as a friend of Masonry. Throughout this early 19th century period, three Freemasons did play an intricate role in the events which would culminate on a field in Belgium.

The Players Upon the Field

Arthur Wellesley, The "Iron Duke" of Wellington

Brother Wellesley was the son of an upper middle class Irish family. Graduating from Eaton and a French military academy, he purchased his first officer's commission in the British Army at age 16. At 24 he was a Lt. Colonel and a member of the Irish Parliament. Young Wellesley was said to be intelligent, strong-willed and very ambitious. Through his brother, Lord Mornington's, assignment to the Governorship of Bengal (India), Arthur's opportunity for advancement increased. In leading British forces against French-influenced Indian troops, he proved quite successful. His masterpiece victory at Assaye resulted in his promotion to Major-General at the age of 33. He was elected to the British Parliament and served as Ireland's Chief Secretary.

In 1807 his political career closed as his military duties "revved up." He defeated a Danish force allied with the French and then led the British Army against the French and Spanish forces in Portugal. For five years, through pragmatic ebbs and flows, he summarily defeated the forces of Napoleon. Out-generaled, defeated and dismayed, the French withdrew. In 1814 Brother Wellesley was named the Duke of Wellington. Within months he carried the war into France. He and Napoleon had never met as the French Emperor abdicated and began his first exile.

The third month of 1815 found Napoleon back on the throne of France and peace in Europe was shattered as his enemies, to include Britain, summoned their forces to defeat him once again. For the first time, Brother Wellington and Napoleon would meet upon a field in Belgium.

Initially, Napoleon's "old magic" worked and he defeated the Prussian Army and scattered Wellington's force. Seeking to destroy Wellington, Napoleon split his army, affording the British time to regroup. On Sunday, June 18, Wellington positioned his army defensively upon ground near the crossroads village of Waterloo. Wellington was able to hold off Napoleon's "Grande Armee" until the Prussian Army arrived, and jointly they soundly defeated the French. Three days later, Napoleon would formally surrender.

Brother Wellington went on to a further illustrious career as Britain's Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief for life of the British Army. Not always active in Free-masonry, Brother Wellington left this world in 1852 heralded to this day as Britain's greatest general.

Gebhard von Blucher

Gebhard von Blucher enlisted in the Swedish Cavalry at age 14. Captured by the Prussians (the dominant German state) he joined their ranks to fight against the French as the Napoleonic Wars began. Overwhelmed by French forces, Brother Blucher withdrew from command. It was not until Napoleon's devastating defeat in Russia in 1812 that he returned to military service. Upon the end of three campaigns against the French, he was promoted to Field Marshal of the Prussian Army. His forces played a vital role in Napoleon's defeat and abdication in 1814.

When Napoleon escaped his imprisonment and returned to power in France, the British, Prussian, Russian and Dutch armies mobilized immediately. Knowing he would have to defeat these armies, Napoleon first en-countered Brother Blucher's force at Ligny. Though soundly thrashed by the French, the Prussians "escaped" with Blucher, telling Brother Wellington he would come to his aid at Waterloo as soon as he could regroup his army. Moving on to Waterloo, Napoleon came close to defeating Wellington until the arrival of 63 year old Blucher's Prussian force. Ordering that "no prisoners were to be taken" the black uniformed Prussians crushed the French resistance and, coupled with the British, routed the French. Napoleon's grip on Europe was ended. Brother Blucher's ability to relate to and understand his men coupled with his integrity, bravery and honesty made him an ally who could be counted upon.

Michel Ney, "The Bravest of the Brave"

The son of a barrel maker was 18 when he enlisted as a French cavalry trooper. Known as "Ginger" for his red hair and volatile temper, Brother Ney was promoted to General at 27. Taking part in major campaigns under Napoleon, he was promoted to a Marshal of France in 1804. In the campaign against Wellington in Spain he was bested, as were each of Napoleon's commanders. At the conclusion of Napoleon's catastrophic invasion into Russia, Brother Ney commanded the French rear guard and was deemed "the bravest of the brave". Wounded six times, he served his Emperor until his defeat and abdication in 1814. When King Louis XVIII was restored to the French throne, Brother Ney continued to serve his country. In March of 1815, he was ordered to capture Napoleon on his return from exile. He proclaimed that he would "bring him back in an iron cage". Finding Napoleon on the march with a small force, loyalty won him over and he joined Napoleon. The King fled and Napoleon began his campaign to restore his power.

Upon the French invasion into Belgium, Ney's force scattered the Prussian Army. Leading the French to Waterloo he effectively led them against Brother Wellington's British force. Brother Ney personally led several French cavalry charges resulting in his having four horses shot out from under him. With the arrival of the Prussian Army upon the field, further French efforts faltered. Napoleon left the battle, ending his design to return to power. Arriving in Paris, Brother Ney was arrested and imprisoned by the restored King of France (who it is interesting to note did not possess a favorable view of Freemasons as Napoleon did). Ney, veteran of 500 battles, who never fought against his own country, was tried and convicted of treason and on Dec. 7, 1815, was shot purportedly giving the order to the firing squad himself. Brother Ney was a member of Nine Siaters Lodge in Paris, the same Lodge Benjamin Franklin attended.

(Sidebar: It has been said that the ever popular Ney was not shot and that his exe-cution was "faked" with the aid of fellow Mason the Duke of Wellington, and that he fled to the United States, assuming the name of Peter Stuart Ney. He supposedly immigrated to North Carolina and taught school in North Carolina and South Carolina. He has even been "tied into" designing the Davidson College seal at the age of 71.

This lore has not been scientifically proven how-ever; swearing upon his deathbed at 77, Peter Stuart Ney swore he was Napoleon's Marshal. He was buried at Third Creek Presbyterian Church in Rowan County, NC, in 1846.)

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769 - 1821)

Though not a Freemason, during his accession to military fame and fortune, the Emperor of France was known to be friendly to the Craft. For many years Free-masons had been persecuted throughout Europe. Whilst he did not join the Craft, several of his supporters and high ranking subordinate officers were Freemasons. It is reported that during his 52 years, Napoleon held high esteem for the values of Freemasonry and, with all of the pros and cons of his reign, persecution of Masons ceased.

The Emperor's End at Waterloo

Napoleon's first exile to Elba lasted less than a year. Upon his return to France, the King fled and the allied nations of Britain, Holland, Prussia and Russia declared him an outlaw. Realizing he would have to defeat these nations' armies before they could concentrate their forces, Napoleon invaded Belgium where he defeated Brother Blucher's Prussian force and scattered Brother Wellington's British force. Establishing a solid defensive position at the crossroads village of Waterloo, Wellington awaited the French attack. On Sunday morning at 11:35 a.m., June 18th, 1815, the battle which would determine Napoleon's and Europe's fate began. Initially the French were successful; however between 6 and 8 p.m. Brother Blucher's Prussian forces arrived and in uniting with the British, soundly defeated Napoleon's army. After the full day of battle, Brothers Blucher and Wellington met at a local tavern to celebrate their victory over "The Great Thief of Europe." Mean-while Brother Ney retreated from the field, as did Napoleon, the protector of Masons. His final exile to St. Helena would herald the end of the Napoleonic Era.