

## Review

**Weather and warfare: A climatic history of the 1798 rebellion** by John Tyrell. The Collins Press, Cork. 2001. 208 pp. Paperback £9.99. ISBN 1 898256 04 7

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This is at once both a fascinating and an infuriating book, where the author and publisher seem to have missed the first rule of writing - identify your target audience and address what you have to say to them. The problems started with the title, *Weather and warfare*. I expected a general treatment that discussed the subject in its widest terms. I was thinking that I might obtain a specialist's view of the battle of Austerlitz and similar events, but no; the real content was in the significantly de-emphasised subtitle. If the title had been *A climatic history of the Irish 1798 rebellion: A case-study of the impact of weather on warfare* then I might have started with a different frame of mind. Throughout the book I found myself asking two questions: is this aimed at the layman or the meteorological specialist, and is it intended for an Irish audience or a wider market? The rebellion of 1798 and its aftermath may be engraved in the Irish psyche, but it is relatively unknown elsewhere. A slightly expanded introduction, even with apologies to Irish readers for covering hallowed ground, would have helped.

Setting aside these initial misgivings, I found that the going soon got better. The historical narrative moved along like the weather systems that shaped the events. Even to a layman, the concept of hindcasting is interesting and the use of contemporary reports from a wide range of sources is remarkable. The whole process is enlightening and provides a new perspective on an attempt to establish nationhood that started with such promise. In spite of the many high points (in the book), frustration was never far below the surface. There are mistakes and inconsistencies. The map in Fig. 1.1 looks odd. The land masses are shaded, but there is no outline at the land-sea interface. It is only when one reaches Fig. 2.2 that it becomes clear that there appears to have been an omission and this particular example is repeated many times throughout the book. Lack of consistency is another source of annoyance. The author is assiduous in starting each month with weather data and then proceeding on a day-by-day discussion of events in the light of weather conditions. The data for May and June are in identical format. There is a complete and unexplained change for July. The mode of presentation for August lies somewhere in between. September's format is the same as for May and June, while no data are listed for October, which is perhaps understandable since most of the closing action was at sea.

In conclusion, one might be excused for thinking that I did not enjoy the book. On the contrary, I found it fascinating, a totally compulsive read. I only wish that the criticisms listed above had been made before the book was published. It would have reduced this review to two short sentences. I loved it. You should read it.