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Reider Payne, *War and Diplomacy in the Napoleonic Era: Sir Charles Stewart, Castlereagh, and the Balance of Power in Europe*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. xi + 262 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$120 U.S. (hb). ISBN HB 978-1-7883-1512-8.

Reviewed by William Nester, St. John's University.

Sir Charles Stewart may be among Britain's less well-known greatest warriors and worst diplomats. He fought valiantly in the Low Countries, Portugal, Spain, and Germany, then provoked controversies as a diplomat in various postings including the Congress of Vienna. He was the younger half-brother of Robert Stewart, Lord Castlereagh, and the son of Robert Stewart, the first baron then marquis of Londonderry. He attended Eton and St. John's College of Cambridge University. He talked his father into letting him drop out of Cambridge and purchasing him an ensign's commission, followed by a rapid succession of ranks until he was made lieutenant colonel of a dragoon regiment at age nineteen in 1797. King George III made Stewart a full colonel and his aide de camp in 1803.

Stewart's courage in battle was unquestioned. He led from the front and suffered numerous wounds including a ball that smashed through his face just below his eye, cut through his nose, and exited the other side. Yet at times he drove his men and horses to unnecessary exhaustion or worse. Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, dismissed Stewart as "an intriguer" who "used to harass the cavalry to death by constant patrols and reconnaissances" (p. 1)

Stewart owed his diplomatic career to his older brother, lord Castlereagh, who was foreign secretary and leader of the House of Commons from 1812 to 1822. The two men contrasted in character and personality, with Castlereagh introverted, faithful to his wife, and scrupulous in money matters, while Stewart was extroverted, provocative, and a spendthrift, binge-drinker, and philanderer. Yet they were devoted to each other.

Most of Stewart's colleagues despised him. Lord Aberdeen dismissed him as "shatter-brained, obstinate, and wrong-headed" (p. 82). One observer at the Congress of Vienna described him as a narcissist rather than a diplomat, as he "wanders listlessly from one room to another. He is simply anxious to be seen, and they have bestowed on him the sobriquet of 'the golden peacock'" (p. 93). Prussian Count Nostitz condemned him as "an insolent Englishman who seems out to kick everyone in the teeth" (p. 100). Stewart actually provoked a food fight by flinging baked potatoes at Earl Clanwilliam during a banquet at the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle. Throughout his diplomatic career, he quickly spent whatever expenses the government allocated him, then racked up huge debts on elaborate balls and gifts for his mistresses. His gruesome disfigurements

from battle wounds did not repel most women from his advances. He was an incessant womanizer and also twice married to women from extremely rich titled families.

At times, espionage was also among Stewart's duties. The Prince of Wales, who would become George IV, tapped him to spy on Caroline, his estranged wife, and secretly document her numerous infidelities as she made her grand European tour so he could have grounds for divorce. He eventually presented his divorce petition to the House of Lords, but it failed to pass and he was stuck with her.

Author Reider Payne presents a detailed portrait of Stewart's diplomatic career but mostly sketches his military and writing careers. He devotes a line to his first campaign that took place in the Low Countries and two lines to his participation in the Quiberon Bay expedition. He sums up his military career from 1794 to 1807 in just four and a half pages. He does devote two short chapters to Stewart's service under first General John Moore then Wellington, in the Peninsula where he was promoted to brigadier general and commanded a cavalry brigade. Four chapters address Stewart's stints as a liaison officer with various allied armies in Germany in 1813 and France in 1814. Stewart was with the entourage of Russian Tsar Alexander and German King Frederick William when they triumphantly entered Paris on March 31, 1814. Likewise, Payne mentions, but does not analyze, Stewart's published reports and books including memoirs of his military campaigns. Had Payne explored Stewart's military and literary career as thoroughly as he did his diplomatic career, this would have been an excellent biography. Nonetheless, this is a very good biography of a controversial, colorful, Zelig-like character during the ages of the French Revolution, Napoleon, and the Restoration.

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