

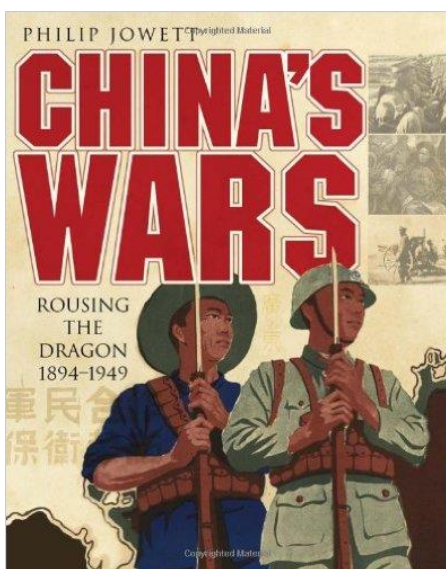
China's Wars: Rousing the Dragon 1894-1949

Osprey Hardback (2013)

By Philip Jowett

Review by Rob Morgan

Recently, I reviewed the Osprey Men-at-Arms on the 20th-century wars in China, but this enormous book isn't an Osprey as we know them. Hardback, 400+ pages in all, and lavishly illustrated, this is more than competent guide to the permanent state of conflict which engulfed the world's largest country for more than half a century. The reason I'm reviewing it here is that in the UK, The Works bargain bookshop chain is selling the normally £25 (marked at \$40 US) for a mere £8, and this is the bargain of the year!



In seven comprehensive chapters, Jowett covers the Sino-Japanese War, the Boxer Rebellion, the modernization of the Chinese army, the developments in the navy, such as they were, and covers smaller, less-well known conflicts, such as the Anti-Qing Revolts of the new century's first decade. The immensely important Warlord period takes up a good part of the core of the book, and indeed, Jowett provides enough solid detail, backed by maps, photographs and text information generally, for any wargamer's requirements.

It seems unnecessary to list or consider in any detail the material on such bitter conflicts as The First Chihli-Fengtien War, or The Kuo Sung-Ling Rebellion, as the author tells it all! This really is a complete book, and added to the Osprey's colour plates will give almost a complete picture of an astonishing series of wars involving millions of people! He deals in short note form with matters such as the use of armoured trains, aircraft in Chinese wars, and there were many of these, and even individual and little known units. The rise of the Kuomintang continues the story, and there's a short aside to deal with the Sino-Soviet War of 1929, which saw the first tank v. tank encounters in Asia.

War cascades upon war in this chronology, and the rise of the Communists and The Long March is very well described, along with the many rebellions and risings which continued to trouble China before the full-scale war with Japan began in 1937. Jowett acquits himself very well in his account of the war and is competent enough to deal with Chinese Puppet Armies, with the enormous campaigns of 1938, and with the composition of the Japanese forces, some 50+ divisions, compared to their innumerable opponents.

The book moves on to the Second World War in the Far East, a conflict which began long before Pearl Harbor, and he provides details of active Chinese forces, such as their Expeditionary Corps in Burma, and the astonishing nationalist guerrilla strategy (a wargame of epic proportions there!) and the parallel Communist guerrillas, who were no less effective. Usefully, Jowett dips into the complex and ineffective Japanese anti-guerrilla strategy, and the huge 300,000 (!) Nanking Puppet Army of 1940-45 which played a role in this brutal war.

The US and Allied Missions activity is briefly dealt with, and the final section deals with the Civil War which followed Japan's defeat, and the falling apart of Nationalist China, ending with the 1950 fall of Hainan.

As a book on China at war, this is an exceptional publication. In particular the information provided on the weapons and equipment of individual armies, from armour and artillery to machine guns, mortars and rifles is sound, reliable and valuable. There are dozens of photographs to back the information up, most I suspect totally unknown to the modern wargamer. As an opportunity to create a huge number of scenarios over decades, this cannot be beaten, and must be highly recommended.

If there's something I'd like to have seen, it would be a little more detail on Manchukuo, Japan's northern puppet state, and the book could have been better ended with the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950, the battle of Chanodo, and the guerrilla war which followed. Though as Jowett rightly says, only Mao's decision to support the North Koreans in 1950 allowed Nationalist Taiwan to survive; it was about to be crushed, and there's definitely an alternative wargame campaign in that!

A superb book, one which will I think give the opportunity to create some small and largely infantry forces for skirmishes and maybe a few larger groups for raids and in many cases these could be quite colourful. Ten out of ten!