

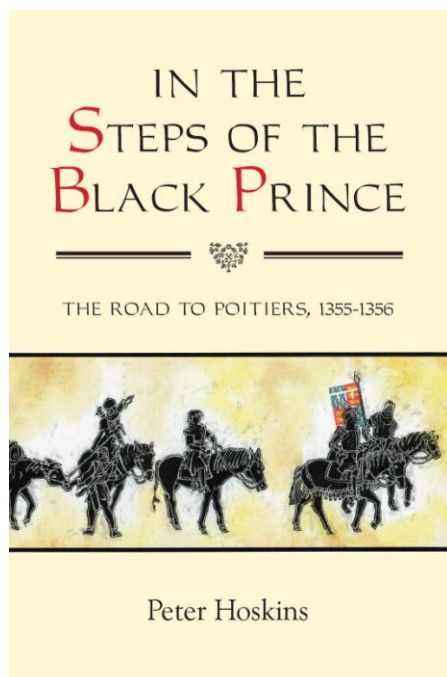
“In the Steps of The Black Prince: The Road to Poitiers 1355-56”

By Peter Hoskins. Boydell Press. Hb 2011 (£50) 257pp.

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Reviewed By Rob Morgan

Another first-rate Boydell title, and one made for the medieval solo wargamer! Written in the form of an historical travelogue, by the author who tramped the route taken by the two great *chevauchee* or raids, against the French in those years, and who instills in the reader a sense of struggle, of endeavour and daring on every step of the small army's march. Beginning on October 5th when the Prince rode out of Bordeaux in a great arc, with encounters, small battles and sieges galore, to his Christmas return, having ravaged the Languedoc completely. Then the substantial preparations of the first half of 1356, and the decisive Poitiers raid, and the return victorious to Bordeaux with the French King Jean II as prisoner. Splendid reading!



I can think of few accounts of medieval warfare which read as well as this one. The day-by-day movement of the Prince's men and of the numerous enemy forces arrayed against him are given in perfect detail. It's possible for instance, using a very good on-the-ground account of the itinerary to take and play out a single day of the campaign. Say Sunday 22nd November 1355, when at Aurimont on the River Gimone 60 lances and a group of mounted archers took on 400 French men-at-arms, driving them out of the town and capturing many in a spirited action.

It's a dream of a book. Yes, Poitiers the 'big' battle looms large as it must do, but the stormings, the 'mini-sieges,' the ambushes and the brief encounters and pursuits in the field, and they were not all one-sided, make this an immensely valuable book for the solo wargamer. A raid game of this type, on map and table-top, makes for a perfect solo scenario, with quick-appearing opposing forces of different strengths, the effect of the elements, supply problems and, in this case, frequently unexpected river crossings, and must-be-captured small fortified towns and castles.

The manouvering before Poitiers -- the most decisive battle of the Black Prince's career -- the shortage of water for the Anglo-Gascons, and the complexities of the battlefield, this was no Agincourt, are dealt with well. The leisurely ride back to Bordeaux seems almost an anti-climax, but had its encounters too.



A good read, full of ideas and action, and one for the medieval solo wargamer to consider perhaps alongside Richard Barber's biography of the Prince or Hewitt's well known account of the expedition.

The raid could, I feel be transposed, given the limited speed of the army's march, to a later period, the Renaissance or even into the 19 century perhaps?