

# France 1940: German Infantryman versus British Infantryman

Osprey Combat series No. 14 (2015)

Text by David Greentree; illustrations by Adam Hook

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## Review by Jonathan Aird

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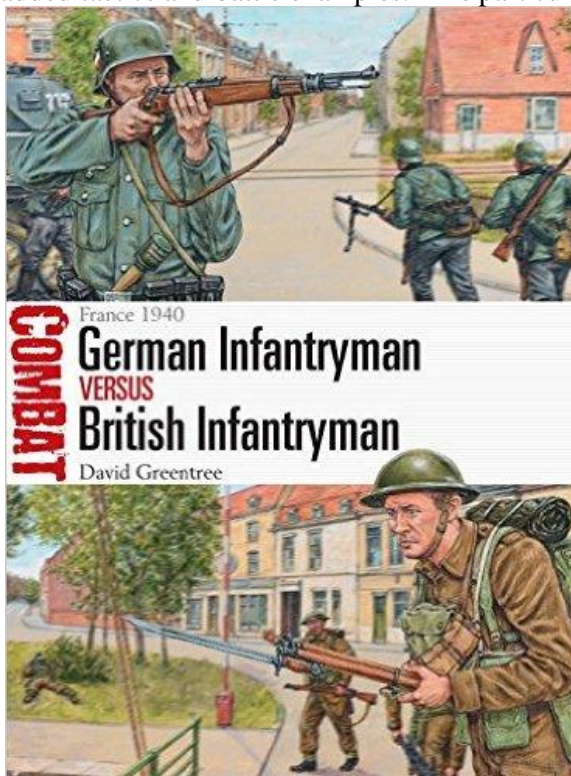
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The Combat series from Osprey nominally pitches one iconic troop type against their, usually equally iconic, opponent. For Ancients this can be a bit like a Warrior or Elite book with some added tactics and battle examples. This particular title is a bit different from that, as, although it



does concentrate on infantry actions, these have to be put into some sort of context which necessitates a much wider discussion of tanks and anti-tank guns and larger organisational structures than a platoon of infantry.

The specific situation of 1940 sees a British army in retreat to Dunkirk, whilst the battle-hardened German forces are riding on their last truly successful Blitzkrieg attack. These differences are brought out graphically in a pair of pictures in the Introduction to the book ó in one a pair of British Infantrymen in a trench play up to the ôjolly Tommyö stereotype, whilst their German equivalent is shown with field modifications to his kit that enable him to carry more ammunition ó dusty and weary he may be but the stick grenade stuck in his belt indicates he's ready for whatever's coming. This is accompanied with a period quote from a British officer giving the impression of envy of his opponent's equipment and lack of unnecessary and

burdening equipment.

The discussion of the opposing sides brings out the clear differences in approach and attitude of the two armies ó the German army put a premium on real experience, and promotions reflected this ó whereas in the British army, whilst there may have been plenty of motivation within the

new recruits and the drafts of more experienced Territorial Army (TA) troops, there was a lack of recent experience beyond that supplied through training. There is a good section on equipment and the two doctrines of interoperability of infantry with armour support ó pointing out that the German policy which looked good in training was wont to fail in practice due to variable availability of the heavier armour and support guns that in theory should have been supporting attacks. The British if anything had it worse ó with a lack of automatic weapons, and lightly armed and armoured tanks that reflected a 1930s decision to support manoeuvrability over attacking power. The new cruiser and Matilda II infantry tanks were doing something to address this shortfall ó but they were still too few in number.

Having addressed the major differences between the opposing troops, David Greentree then takes the reader through three battles ó Arras (21<sup>st</sup> May 1940), Calais (24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> May 1940) and Merville (27<sup>th</sup> May 1940) showing that this was a week of rapid changes in fortunes. There are good maps of the areas the actions were fought over, and plenty of individual experiences quoted to give colour to the battle narratives. Most useful for the wargamer though are some double-page illustrations of street fighting ó in the Calais chapter there is the view from a British roadblock defence as German infantry with light armour support enter the road, whilst the Merville chapter has the opposing views down an as yet undamaged street with British infantry deploying to support an anti-tank gun whilst the opposite view shows German infantry sheltering behind a Panzer II as they consider their next move. These are incredibly inspiring images for a recreation on the table top!

There is a closing summary section on õlessons learntõ ó the Germans main takeaway from these, and similar, engagements was that õPanzers are not suitable for combat in woods and cities.õ Whilst the British had a much longer list of lessons to learn, in Greentree's opinion they were not overly successful at doing so in the months immediately following the fall of France. The book is a great read ó constantly interesting and evenly balanced with praise and criticism dealt out to both sides pretty equally. As well as the colour illustrations mentioned above, there are also dozens of excellent photographs ó very well chosen ó that round out an excellent Osprey that's bound to be of interest to the WWII gamer.