

Attila the Hun
Osprey Command series No. 31 (2015)
By Nic Fields; illustrations by Steve Noon
£11.99 / \$18.95

Review by Jonathan Aird

Contents:

Introduction
The early years
The military life
The hour of destiny
Opposing Commanders
When war is done
Inside the mind
A life in words

Comments:

The Command series is one of Osprey's newer title strands, and it carries the strap line 'Leadership Strategy Conflict'. Previous titles have covered, amongst others, 19th and 20th century generals – for whom it is possible to more or less accurately trace their career from the moment of their birth to their greatest glories and beyond. Not so with Attila the Hun – and this is for me the biggest problem that Nic Fields has with this book. To his credit, the author makes no bones about his difficulties – the cover illustration is not a reliable image of Attila, and Attila is in any case a nickname – translating most likely as 'little father' – but this is the only name history has remembered. It is not known where Attila was born, or when. Exactly which tribe of Steppe people he belonged to is an unknown. His story before his rise to power is conjectural, and there is no evidence of how he became a leading warlord. All that we do know of him in any detail comes from his enemies, whose judgement may well be not impartial. There is some information on his campaigns in the AD440s but even the chronology of this is described by Nic Fields as 'always going to be problematical'.

Given all this, one does wonder why Osprey have decided to issue this title when there is so little by the way of solid facts. However – if the name on the front is to some extent ignored, what the volume does contain is a good primer on the nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes that threatened the later Roman Empire. There's a good summary of the military aspects of the period – ironically including a fairly detailed set of biographies of the men who would oppose Attila's hordes. Attila's youthful training, and the adoption of raiding tactics as a means of necessary tribal income and food supply, is well covered. There's a summary of the decisive battle of the era – the Catalaunian Fields AD451, but this is already far better covered by an existing Campaign title. There are descriptions of the opposing armies – but again there are Elite and Warrior titles which give a far higher level of detail – the sort of detail the wargamer reader is likely to be looking for.

As would be expected, the volume is profusely illustrated with photographs drawing on artifacts to illustrate arms and armour and remaining buildings, such as town walls, to illustrate siege tactics discussions. Additionally, there are many clear maps and three fine plates – one of Attila presiding over a feast, another sees him with his forces entering into the city of Aquileia

following the successful end of their three-month siege and perhaps best of all is the horde galloping into battle, filling the air with arrows, at the Catalaunian Fields. Overall, it is an interesting book that sheds a light on a surprisingly obscure period of history ó when one considers the lasting fame of Attila, it is strange to find how little is actually known of him. The conjectured life of the tribes on the steppes and the assumed lifestyle of their most famous son is fascinating. Nic Fields has a slightly lecturing style of writing ó and I did wonder at times if this was an adaptation of notes from a course he may have taught in his previous career as a university lecturer. In the final summation though, I can't help feeling that the wargamer would be better served by picking up Campaign 286 'The Catalaunian Fields AD451' in preference to this particular title.

