

Spanish Guerrillas in the Peninsular War 1808-1814

Osprey Elite series No. 108 (2004, 2013)

Text by Rene Chartrand; colour plates by Richard Hook

By Rob Morgan

I have to admit that it's a rarity these days for me to buy an Osprey title. Indeed, in recent years I've found a few creeping in that are pretty marginal in terms of both military (and naval!) history and wargaming, and some seem less than thoroughly researched, with odd typos and captions, even factual errors creeping in. My collection of the 'old' Ospreys, of course, is well used, and goes back as far as the early Seventies, when they were a true resource in a small world of research material. Now I tend to buy them from the remaindered stocks which appear quite often in discount book shops here in the UK. That's how I acquired a pile of the now defunct (and very expensive) *Osprey Magazine*, at a pound a throw, and how I bought, just a few days ago, the title I'll briefly review here.

The Ian Allen book and model shops are very well known, and the old Ian Allen titles remain legends in the world of model makers and wargamers. I recall paying 2/6d, for their paperback 'Battleships of WWI,' more than an Airfix kit cost in the Sixties. These shops are well worth looking in for bargains and, as I write, they are selling at less than half price around a dozen titles from the Osprey Men-at-Arms, Fortress, Vanguard and Elite series. In this I found myself an Osprey bargain for only £5.

The Elite title, 'Spanish Guerrillas in the Peninsular War 1808-1814,' Number 108 is by Rene Chartrand, with superb illustrations by Richard Hook. The format is standard for the edition, of course. I bought it because it has so much use in the solo and small-scale skirmish world of wargaming and, if I dare mention it, there was an article of mine on a solo game involving Peninsular War guerrillas in *Lone Warrior* back in Number 141, 'Fire and Retire,' based on C.S.Forester's excellent title 'Death to the French,' which would fit in nicely with reading this Osprey. You might try reading 'The Gun,' too, another of Forester's superb Peninsular tales, and one with a rather differently equipped guerrilla army!

In this particular title, not only does Chartrand provide a decent background to a war that few in Europe understood when it took place, but he vividly creates the rise and spread of what must have been a truly remarkable partisan movement. His account of the often larger than life characters who led these bands, many of which were numbered in the thousands, is very readable, and simply throws out wargaming ideas, page after page.

Of immense use is the short chapter on guerrilla tactics and countering them, which the French never really managed to do! I was very interested in the short notes and several illustrations of the French-raised and -led contra-guerrilla units, such as the Biscaya Company, and the Catalan Miquelets -- Spaniards and Basques who fought for French pay against their countrymen, and provide the potential for remarkable small-scale scenarios beloved of the solo gamer. The source of the drawings is American, the Anne S.K.Brown Military Collection at Brown University, Providence. Not a resource known to me, but a gold mine which I suspect an American reader may well have access to.

The brutality of this war is inescapable, and the book does deal efficiently with the campaigns and the struggles small and large of these bands of Spaniards, some with astonishing,

elaborate names and gaudy uniforms, when they could get them. On which point he looks at the relationship between the guerrilla forces and the British under Wellington; their great use was as harriers of supply trains and communications, and as intelligence gatherers, and aid in the form of clothing and weapons was sometimes generous and other times stingy. The impact of these patriotic men and astonishingly large numbers of women, was substantial, not in the field, but in the number of troops they held down, and the fragmentation they caused to Bonaparte's control over the country.

The end of the war, or rather the British move into Southern France, meant, in some cases, the end of the guerrilla bands, but of course more than a few continued in existence as brigands, and the wars of the Carlists and the creation of the Guardia Civil are touched on, as having something of a foundation in the bands that fought Bonaparte.

An excellent title, well worth examining.

