

The Arab Legion
Osprey Men-at-Arms series No. 2 (1972)
Text by Peter Young; illustrations by Michael Roffe

Review by Rob Morgan

This was among the first Ospreys published, the date on my un-numbered copy is 1972, and in those days it cost a delightful £1.25, which I think would currently be about \$1.90 US, or thereabouts!

This is what Ospreys were originally about. Peter Young, joint founder of *The Sealed Knot* and author of several very competent wargames books and numerous articles, served as a regimental commander in the Arab Legion, and knew his subject intimately. This is a book written about an armed force which wargamers and historians wanted to know about. It was inspirational, but I have to say that the original, in terms of its art work, and nothing more than that, is beginning to look its age. Half of the colour plates are *parade* or ceremonial dress, of great value to the scale modeller, but far less to the table-top activist!

The book covers a subject the name of which was well known to the British military enthusiast, but not in this detail. The Arab Legion only existed from 1920 to 1956, but in that short span formed a significant *Lawrence* force which would have been recognisable to anyone who knew of the Great War in Palestine. Brigadier Young's description of the Legion's early days and the many skirmishes and *troubles* of the deserts make fascinating reading. The Legion participated in the campaign against Vichy in Syria and the Nazis in Iraq, and both of these campaigns make for excellent desert wargame scenarios.

The Legion fought the Jews, later the Israelis, in Jerusalem in 1948 at the end of the Palestine Mandate, and Young gives a very detailed account of the 10,000-strong Legion's combat in that city and at Latrun, and in several post-*truce* skirmishes.

The book gives pen portraits of the Legion's leaders as the years progressed, then goes on to deal with the components of the Arab Legion. Its infantry, along with its array of weapons, almost all British-supplied, is discussed by an expert; the Royal Armoured Corps of the Legion was a surprisingly complex structure, armed with Archer 17pdr S-P Guns, and Charioteer tanks, as well as armoured cars. The Legion's Royal Artillery, with 25pdr guns, and 17pdr and 6pdr a/t weapons, the renowned Royal Engineers, and even the multitude of support elements of the Legion are covered in detail.

The Arab Legion had its own air force, including Auster air observation planes and later Vampire jets. The fact that there was an Arab Legion Flotilla, operating high speed launches and WWII landing craft with turrets - there was even a 25pdr on a catamaran, all under the command of a British Royal Marine officer who rejoiced in the title of 'Dead Sea Lord'.

The Arab Legion controlled the camel-mounted elite desert patrol, and the police, of course, operating frequently out of Crusader-era forts, these too are dealt with in an accurate and thorough manner. Peter Young ended his account, which was enthusiastically received in military publications, with information on the training and the rank system of the Legion.

It's still an excellent and an all too frequently overlooked title. Young gave an excellent, and interesting comment: 'Man for man, the Arab Legion was the best of all the Arab armies.' Worth remembering.

As far as wargamers are concerned, making an Arab Legion in 6mm is relatively easy, the Irregular Miniatures and Skytrex ranges will suit beautifully, even down to the camels. Raventhorpe Miniatures, in 25mm have a couple of very good Transjordanian Frontier Force infantrymen for the Syria and Iraq campaigns, add them to Matchbox LRDG Chevrolets and use a few of the same company's camel corps figures for a 'flying column.' Take a look at Raventhorpe's 'universal' range too.

In 15mm, well, the reliable 'Peter Pig' comes up with some answers. No specific named figures of course, but utilising their British WWII Range Infantry and changing the heads for the Tuareg, or PLO will suit nicely. For camel corps, there are some suitably kitted Sudanese Women (Pack 48) in their 19th century Sudan range of figures, with rifles and some added kit - these will do. Kneeling camels from the same range - Pack 45. Don't turn your nose up at Pack 59, Brits in Arab dress either. Useful.

For camelry mounted, then Pack 22, 'scouts,' and with a little alteration, adding rifles, changing heads, then Pack 15, 'camel command,' and Packs 13 and 14, 'with spears' do well. The British Camel Corps figures, are too kitted up, but might just do for 1940; they'd need more work though. AFVs, you'll have to hunt around for, Marmon Herrington armoured cars, Archers and Charioteers. Though the Chevrolet, light British lorries and 3-tonners, as well as the 6pdrs and 25pdrs are easy enough, Peter Pig again. MGs and mortars as for the British army, of course.

The Auster light aircraft if you need it, from Airfix, and the landing craft, the US-made infantry version with turret can be knocked up from the Airfix D-Day kit.

Simple!

