

Chinese Civil War Armies 1911-49
Osprey Men-At-Arms series No. 306 (1997)
Text by Phil Jowett; color plates by Stephen Andrew

I am a very infrequent purchaser of Ospreys these days, but this title is, I think, excellent value. If you consider warfare in the Far East for the first half of the 20th century, it was very much infantry warfare. Yes, there was some armour, trains and light AFVs, ranging from the Japanese õWhippetsö of the 1920s, to the Renault 17ø of the warlords and the amazing collection of AFVs of the Kuomintang, CV33s and SDKfz 222s. But artillery, cavalry and especially aircraft played very much subsidiary roles to the foot soldier. A caption in the book describes troops pictured as a õrag tag bunch.ö This is what makes the period such an interesting, inexpensive alternative!

The book is delightful, and for its quantity of text, well-written and wide-ranging. The years from the Sun-Yat-Sen Republic of 1911 to the victory of Mao in 1949 (and beyond that!) were years of conflict and constant war. Phil Jowett begins with the Imperial Army, and that of the Republic, largely and arguably the same troops. The Warlord Era is briefly but intriguingly described, and though for some soldiery and some equipment, such as the 100 aircraft of the Warlord Chang Tso-lin, photos are rare or non-existent, the table-top potential is immense. He mentions the contribution of the White Russians which was in the early 1920s critical in terms of providing elite units.

The author covers uniforms well, and also deals with the limited information on insignia and flags which I found fascinating. The short coverage of the Army of Manchukuo between 1937 and 1945 suggests that an Osprey title dealing merely with this substantial force -- it had air, naval and army units -- is long overdue. Of course, Phil Jowett has published "Rays of the Rising Sun" (Helion 2004), a two-volume series in which the first book deals with Japan's China and Manchukuo allies, a rather expensive 148-page title at £34.95. I haven't seen the planned second volume which dealt with the INLA and Southeast Asian allies.

The Puppet armies, and as many as 2 million men were under arms in pro-Japanese forces at one time, serving under half a dozen õpuppetö governments, all with flags and insignia, are covered, and again give a great deal of food for thought to the wargamer looking for something different.

The book ends with a short coverage of the victorious People's Liberation Army, a very substantial force with a huge amount of captured and indigenous weapons. The illustrations are attractive and do provide the opportunity to re-work, say, a pack of Airfix Japanese Infantry into some of the Chinese Puppet Reformed army soldiers, lightly equipped but useful opponents for the Long March guerrillas. The Airfix Foreign Legion pack provides a very good 20mm Puppet officer on horseback incidentally. Other options are, of course, from the Peter Pig range in 15mm, and from Tony Barr's ERM catalogue.

For its immense breadth, this is a neatly illustrated Osprey, the photographs are superb, a few completely unknown to me, and there is a decent useable campaign map, and highly recommended.

--Rob Morgan

