

## **Armies of the German Peasants' War 1524-1526**

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Text by Douglas Miller; colour plates by Angus McBride

Review by Rob Morgan

This is an unusual title for any range of wargames-related publications, and indeed an unusual and though òminorö war, one which nevertheless devastated large parts of Germany and echoed the later Thirty Years War in terms of its ferocity.

Peasant rebellions are an historic fact of course, and the book opens with an account of the many sporadic uprisings, such as the òPoor Conrads,ö usually brutally suppressed, and of the 1524 Stuhlingen rising, which led to a rapid series of connected uprisings across Germany. The book deals very well indeed with the organisation of the peasant armies, some quite small, like that of Hersfeld in Thuringia, only 4,000 strong. Others were much larger -- Brisgau-Ortenau had 12,000 men under arms. Even the leaders and commanders of the Peasant troops are known and recorded in most cases. The campaign is set out chronologically, from the outset to the final defeat in the Tyrol in the Spring of 1526. There are campaign maps, and also decently composed maps of individual battles, a gift for the inspired wargamer!

The Peasant armies were of course nothing of the sort. This was no òpitchfork rebellionö but a savage war, though brief, fought between the armies of the rulers of the states, and a collection of rebels from towns and countryside, to which were allied miners, disaffected knights and soldiery, and mercenaries, including landsknechts in a series of major battles. The rebels were armed with everything from flails to a sophisticated and perhaps surprising ordnance park, including guns such as Falconets and handguns. They were a colourful and vigorous force, employing wagon forts on occasion.

The enemy was the Emperor Charles V, who at the outbreak of the rebellions, was tied up in Italy; the battle of Pavia kept him fairly busy in 1525. So it was the Swabian League, a collection of towns and Imperial cities, Ulm, Augsburg, Ravensburg and a score of others (the League was a very loose confederation), which fought the Peasants and their allies. The standing contingents of this organisation were small. Nuremberg, for example, had only 18 horse and 150 foot, so it was rapid recruitment and mercenaries which fought for the League. The book's account of the campaigns in several regions, in which Peasant armies manouvered and contrived to outflank and outwit their eventually heavier and more professional opponents are neatly put for the wargamer, and the illustrations in the text will for the most part be new to the reader.

McBride's colour plates are superb. No uniformed troops these, but a wide range of contemporary and old clothing, arms and armour saw service in the field, as might be expected; the banners of the Peasants are more than attractive, they provide an opportunity for the painting skills of the modeller which is rare indeed. The Swabian League banners are better known, I think. That of the League is a simple St. George's type cross -- red on a white field. A well written and very well recommended Osprey.

As for the table top, in terms of the larger encounters, this is a war better fought in 6mm scale, I think, and would suggest a glance at the Renaissance range of figures produced by the excellent Irregular Miniatures here in the UK, enough there to provide everything you need for say the major Battle of Leipheim in April 1525, but in 15mm or 25mm scale you'd have to look around the manufacturers and mix and match them. In the larger scales, the peasants will be more difficult to acquire, and it will be back to the medieval period in some cases. Worth the effort though.

