

World War II Croatian Legionaries
Osprey Men-at-Arms series No. 508 (2016)
By Vladimir Brnardic; illustrations by Viseslav Aralica
£10.99 / \$18

Review by Jonathan Aird

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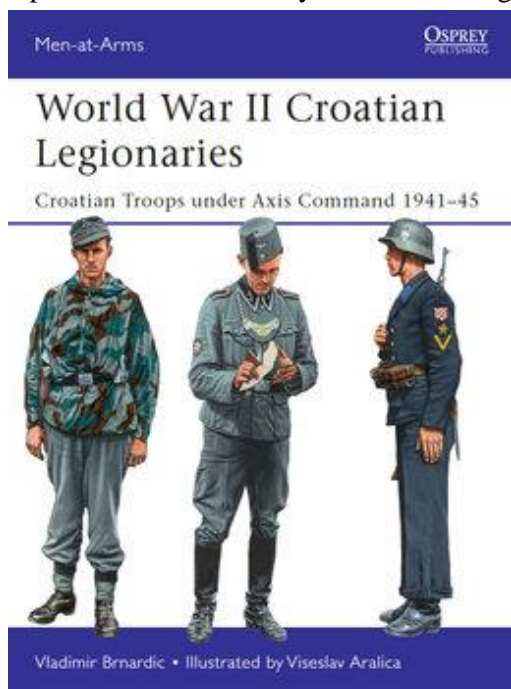
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Comments:

April 1941 saw Germany invade the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and also saw the formation of the



Independent State of Croatia (ISC) -- a breakaway Nazi puppet state. With a population predominantly Croat and Catholic, it also contained minority populations of Orthodox Serbs and Muslims. The ISC was an enthusiastic provider of troops to Germany and a somewhat begrudging assister of the Italian war machine. Over the next four years, some 200,000 Croats would fight for their fascist allies. This book provides a concise history of the units raised as diverse as the Croatian Air Force Legion, the Croatian Naval Legion (which started life with armed motorised trawlers and ended up with 100-ton submarine chasers), and various Waffen SS units. Most of these troops found themselves directed to the Eastern front, where their various exploits are given as much like many other similar German units. As the plates show, in German service the ISC troops generally wore outdated German uniforms, in Italian service they wore Italian uniforms. The only major difference is found in the Muslim-recruited SS divisions who were distinguished by the wearing of the fez.

The unit histories when out of their homelands offer plenty of wargaming inspiration, however it is an unavoidable fact that when deployed in the anti-partisan role at home the SS divisions committed atrocities against the civilian populations. It's also interesting to note that the Muslim units became progressively non-Muslim when numbers had to be replenished as towards the end of the war many of the rank and file deserted to defend their homes in the face of the Russian advance.

This concise volume gives enough information on unit histories, numbers and equipment to allow Croatian Legionnaires to be accurately deployed on the wargame table ó although the lack of quality equipment would doubtless deter many from doing so. The Italian-Croatian Legion, for example, although a light motorised battalion, boasted just three staff cars, six motorcycles, 44 lorries -- and 108 horses. These latter were, it is reported, very useful in the harsh environments the Italian-Croatian Legion found itself in. As photographs prove, they were also equipped with a mix of Italian and captured Russian equipment ó Russian SMGs seemed to have been favoured by the NCOs, presumably indicating their superiority to the Italian-supplied examples.