

British Commando 1940-45
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Text by Angus Kostam; illustrations by Graham Turner
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Comments:

It's really quite surprising to find that there are only a couple of Osprey books which are dedicated to the WWII British Commandos. It is a subject that has been touched on elsewhere,



and Elites 64 and 142 cover No. 10 Commando (Inter-Allied) and Army Commandos, but this Warrior book is long overdue when one reflects on the number of titles that Osprey have devoted to the special forces of other nations in World War II. The introduction sets the context within the first sentence "The British Commandos were created in response to a disaster." Following Dunkirk, Churchill issued an edict to find a way to raid and harry the now-nearby enemy coast as an antidote to slipping into a purely defensive mentality. Thousands volunteered for unspecified hazardous activities and -- after a few misjudged early active deployments -- the selected men were honed into a highly effective force that was deployed to all regions of combat and also spawned specialist subgroups such as the SBS and SAS. Initially, the commandos were drawn from the army, but a Royal Marine commando was also formed and, slightly ironically, became the only such regiment to be retained at the end of the war.

The sections on training and recruitment provide all the information required to get correctly sized wargame representations, and also give a clear insight into the way commando troops

differed from the regular army. In training, it was reckoned that 4% was all the proportion of time the troops needed for activities such as drill -- and though they were expected to be smart and hygienic, far more emphasis was put on early morning swims, long distance marches, weapons training and, a little surprisingly, organised sunbathing -- this last promoted as health giving and also as training on how to relax to order! The need for a more hands-on training regime is emphasized by plates A and C which show some of the equipment the commandos were required to be familiar, and proficient, with: the SMLE rifle, Thompson SMGs, Sten guns, Vickers "K" gun, mortars, grenades, fighting knives alongside non-lethal equipment, such as a range of small boats.

The chapters on Conditions of Service and Belief and Belonging give a clear insight into how an *esprit de corps* was encouraged within those selected to be commandos. This was in part drawn from their higher than normal active service ó tied into a novel post-raid assessment process and the use of lessons learnt to develop tactics for future actions. Angus Konstam makes the point that it was never the trappings ó special berets for example ó that made the commandos arguably the most professional unit in the British Army: it was more that they trained hard, were used frequently, and those who did not make the cut were returned to their original regiments leaving only a core of those self-selected through achievement. These chapters are backed up by a pair covering active service experience ó On Campaign follows some of the early deployments, which were somewhat chaotic and on occasion ó such as the rearguard action on Crete in 1941 ó ended very badly.

Experience of Battle elaborates on this theme to give short histories of some of the most famous raids ó including Dieppe, naturally ó that the commandos were engaged in. There's a lot of detail here that would be ideal for playing as small skirmishes ó particularly useful for the solo gamer as the Axis forces were often in the position of a static and surprised defender. The description of the then Captain Peter Young's experiences on the Vaagso raid sounds almost like a house-to-house clearance game with the defenders represented by random deployment cards ó this house is empty, run to the next, kick open the door: German preparing to throw a grenade, duck back ó get shot at by sniper from across the street!

Graham Turner's plates capture the spirit of the text well ó excellent illustrations of equipment and dramatic recreations of training activities and raids in progress, and in Plate G a very evocative image of commandos catching their breath during a route march in Sicily. There are many good black-and-white photographs ó some very crisp ones from training and some rather more blurred taken in the field. This all helps to illustrate the text, which through good pacing and plenty of real recollections from those involved, provides a real page turning story that is an informative delight to read. Highly inspiring, and well worth getting hold of.