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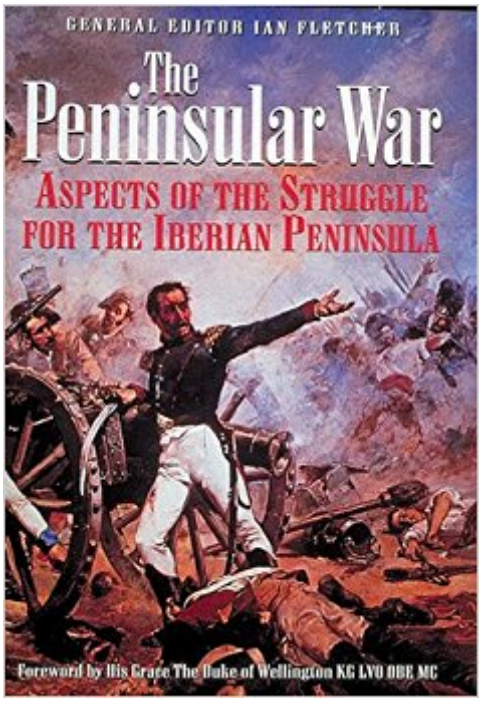

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Synopsis

A collection of penetrating essays by leading historians published to mark the 190th anniversary of the outbreak of the Peninsular War. Subjects include Siege Warfare, the French Experience, Napoleon’s German Troops and Wellington’s Allies. Ian Fletcher has edited a book that is required reading for all students of the Napoleonic period.

Book Information

Hardcover: 224 pages

Publisher: Spellmount Publishers (December 19, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1873376820

ISBN-13: 978-1873376829

Product Dimensions: 9.5 x 6.4 x 0.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.5 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #819,841 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #164 inÃ Â Books > History > Military > Napoleonic Wars #1911 inÃ Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Commentary & Opinion #2492 inÃ Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > European

Customer Reviews

This volume contains eleven essays by some well-known commentators on the Peninsular War, including Ian Fletcher (who edited the whole), David Chandler, Philip Haythornwaite, Paddy Griffith, Charles Esdaile, and others. The occasion for the compilation was the 190th anniversary of one starting date of the Peninsular War in 1808.The essays are of uneven but generally solid quality. A highlight is Haythorwaite’s "That Unlucky War", which provides a perspective on the French experience, especially in Spain. The French invasion and their heavy-handed occupation drew bloody retaliation from the Spanish population, to the extent that by 1813, battalion and squadron-sized formations were required to escort French messengers. David Chandler’s survey on sieges explains the specialized nomenclature of fortresses and siege warfare, and chronicles the major sieges of the war. Esdaile’s commentary on judging the true value of the guerilla war to the defeat of the French Armies is an update and defense of an earlier article in another publication. Esdaile asserts that the Spanish guerillas may have hampered the liberation of Spain as much as helped it, by drawing off manpower from the Spanish Army. In addition, he charges that too many of

the guerilla groups were no better than bandits. He acknowledges their value in pinning down large numbers of French troops for occupation duty but points out that the guerillas liberated very little Spanish territory.Other topics include short essays on fraternization between the British and French Armies, the handling of prisoners of war, and the rebirth of the Portuguese Army under British training and leadership.This volume will be of some interest to dedicated students of the Peninsular War in particular and of the Napoleonic Wars in general. The essays cover aspects of the struggle not given much coverage in other works.

Editor Ian Fletcher has assembled a wealth of talent including David Chandler, Paddy Griffiths, Charles Esdaile and others, to discuss a number of Peninsular topics to include POWs, the Portugese Army, the guerrillas, and siege warfare. I especially recommend my friend Jack Gill's chapter on Napoleon's German allies in Spain. Fletcher includes a bibliographic essay on Wellington's army as well as a nicely updated Peninsular bibliography. A handy little volume that should find its way into all Peninsular aficinado's libraries.

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