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Risings and Rebellions 1919-39: Organisation, Warfare, Dress and Weapons. Interwar Colonial Campaigns in Africa, Asia, and the Americas (Armies of the Twentieth Century)

Edwin Herbert

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An earlier volume in this series covered Small Wars and Skirmishes 1902–18. The present volume extends coverage of such ‘small wars’ to the interwar years of 1919–39. After a hiatus during the Great War, when resources were diverted elsewhere, the earlier colonial incursions were followed in the 1920s and 1930s by a process of consolidation involving campaigns against emerging resistance movements, many of which owed their strength to religious fanaticism. Major nationalist leaders such as Abd el-Krim in Morocco and Omar al-Mukhtar in Libya emerged from 1920 onwards, and the spark provided by their resistance to foreign control lit the flame of post-1945 independence movements.

The title of this volume, Risings and Rebellions 1919–39, reflects the change in emphasis compared with the earlier colonial campaigns. Indeed, the sheer scale of such wars as the risings against the French and Spanish forces in Morocco and the Italian re-conquest of Libya takes them out of the category of ‘small wars’ altogether.

A book such as this cannot hope to cover all the civil disturbances, emergencies, outright revolts, insurrections, insurgencies, rebellions and campaigns of passive resistance that occurred against the colonial powers over a period of two decades. What it does attempt to do is to illustrate the main types of campaign involved, the organization of forces, the effects of new weaponry, and the tactics that the indigenous peoples used to counter the technology of the colonial invader, particularly by applying their local knowledge of some of the most difficult terrain in the world. In most cases at least one battle or skirmish is described in some detail in order to give a flavour of the significant factors involved. Sketch maps are provided to indicate the main campaigns and illustrations show the uniforms or tribal dress of the combatants.

Small wars and insurgencies did not, of course, end when Imperialism gave way to independence movements. They continued as incursions by more powerful neighboring states once the colonial powers had departed the scene (East Timor, Tibet, Western Sahara) or as civil wars, often arising from ethnic conflicts caused by the artificial boundaries created by the former colonial powers (Angola, Dar Fur, India/Pakistan, Indo-China, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan, Zaire). Nor is any end in sight – the lessons of history take a long time to learn, if indeed they are ever learnt.

The present volume includes appendices on weaponry and equipment, mechanized vehicles, communications, and the use of aircraft, armored cars and tanks in suppressing risings and rebellions. Each section of the text and the appendices is intended to be self-contained but concludes with a select bibliography in case readers wish to go back to original sources or to seek more detail on particular campaigns.

REVIEWS

“…provides an enormous amount of very valuable historical information and analysis on often quite obscure campaigns and military forces.”

The NYMAS Review, 09/2008

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