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The Chaco War 1932-35: South America's Greatest Modern Conflict (Men-at-Arms)

Men-at-Arms

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The Chaco War 1932-35

South America's greatest modern conflict



A. de Quesada with P. Jowett • Illustrated by R. Bujeiro

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Synopsis

The Chaco War was massive territorial war between Bolivia and Paraguay, which cost almost a 100,000 lives. An old fashioned territorial dispute, the contested area was the Gran Chaco Boreal, a 100,000-square mile region of swamp, jungle and pampas with isolated fortified towns. The wilderness terrain made operations difficult and costly as the war see-sawed between the two sides. Bolivian troops, under the command of a German general, Hans von Kundt, had early successes, but these stalled in the face of a massive mobilization programme by the Paraguayans which saw their force increase in size ten-fold to 60,000 men. This book sheds light on a vicious territorial war that waged in the jungles and swamps of the Gran Chaco and is illustrated with rare photographs and especially commissioned artwork.

Book Information

File Size: 13546 KB

Print Length: 48 pages

Publisher: Osprey Publishing; 1 edition (November 20, 2011)

Publication Date: November 20, 2011

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B01DPPQ1TU

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #403,052 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #5 in Books

> History > Americas > South America > Paraguay #124 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks >

History > Americas > Latin America > South America #176 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks >

History > Historical Study > Reference

Customer Reviews

Of Osprey's 1500 titles, some are superb; some are so grotesquely inaccurate they make one wonder if Osprey employs editors. Most are in between, and this volume is no exception - a solid 3-star. The text is undistinguished, has typos and sometimes doesn't clearly present the sequence of events. Much of the weapons data is just plain wrong - for example, the standard caliber of both

sides was 7.65x53mm, though others were used (Erroneous wpns data is common in Ospreys) - and the bibliography omits the 3 most important sources in English - Zook, Farcau, and Estigarribia. On the other hand, the concise introduction is good, and the b&w photos are excellent. The book's greatest asset is its availability. Otherwise, a student will have to depend on a major library; a summary might be helpful. The standard account in English, and for many years the only one, is David H. Zook's *Conduct of the Chaco War* (1960). It divides each chapter between events on the battlefield and the concurrent political developments. Zook is fair and balanced but describes the war mainly from the Paraguayan point of view. His book's greatest asset is 2 dozen maps, worth photocopying. Bruce Fracau lived in Bolivia and used mainly Bolivian sources. His *The Chaco War* (1996) is fair, but told mainly from Bolivia's perspective. Farcau concentrates on battlefield events and is sometimes hard to follow. The book has only one map, a small b&w reproduction of a large map, originally in color, from a 1991 article by the same author in *Command Magazine*. This article is good if it can be obtained; I cannot evaluate the war game based on it. The 3rd general history is *The Green Hell* (2007) by Adrian English. It strives for comprehensiveness, but is the least readable of the 3.

Everyone interested in this subject absolutely should own this book! Anyone who is familiar with Osprey's *Men-at-Arms* series knows exactly what this book looks and reads like. These are general overviews with a high percentage of the book dedicated to lots of small b&w photographs and a few pages of large full-color artistic plates. This short book is 48 pages, with 8 pages of color plates and 4 pages of plate commentaries. There is a 1-page index and short 1-page bibliography, that lists only 2 books written in English and the rest written in Spanish. The book is divided into the following sections: Introduction, Paraguayan Forces (including a section on the Navy), Bolivian Forces, Military Operations (which breaks the war into 3 phases: 7/32-12/33, 1/34-12/34, and 12/34-6/35, with a 1/2-page insert on the Mennonite Colonies), Weapons (broken out by Infantry, Artillery, and Armored vehicles), Air War (divided into Combat operations, General air support, Naval air operations, and Wartime procurement), and Foreign Involvement. This is probably the single best book in English that is both readily available and inexpensive. It may not be very deep but it is very broad, covering pretty much every significant aspect of the war except for the home fronts. That alone makes it a must buy for anyone interested in this fascinating conflict. All of the other primary books in English are either out of print (e.g., Zook), very expensive (e.g., English's recent *The Green Hell* or Farcau's book from the 1990s), or limited to a single aspect of the conflict (e.g., Hagendorn & Sapienza's *Aircraft of the Chaco War*). Other than this book, the material on Wikipedia

is the rest of the best readily available in English.

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