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The Last Ironsides. The English Expedition to Portugal 1662-1668: by Jonathan Riley. HB, 222pp. 7pp colour photos, numerous b/w maps, photos and prints. £25. ISBN 978.1.909982.20.8. Helion &Co Ltd, 2014. (£6.99 from the Naval & Military Press)

As another part of the story of Charles II and Tangier (*FORTS* 41 and 42), this book tells the tale of what the King had to give in return for his acquisition of Tangier and Bombay as well as trading privileges, when he married Catherine Braganza of Portugal. The country had gained effective independence from Spain in 1640 after being under Spanish rule since 1580 but Spain refused to accept it so for the following twenty years had continued with border raids and expeditions aimed at regaining Portugal. As part of the marriage settlement the Portuguese asked Charles to supply a force to assist their resistance to Spain. The king was only too glad to find a home for a lot of Cromwell's soldiers and redundant Royalist cavalry, and a force of 3,500 cheerfully and willingly went off to fight. The English soldiers earned a dearly bought reputation as highly professional, committed and brave soldiers who along with their likewise effective French brothers-in-arms were instrumental to the success in driving out the Spanish, after several major engagements and sieges, the Army being led by the, charismatic French Marshal Frederick Herman, Duke of Schomberg. The Portuguese government and aristocracy proved to be totally unreliable, indecisive and ineffective (by 1668 the English were 11 months in arrears of pay). Several fierce battles and sieges are described, the first being the complete rout of the Spanish at the Battle of Ameixial (1663) followed by the short sharp siege to regain Évora.

The siege of Valencia de Alcantara by the Portuguese was the opening gambit of the following year, where again the English distinguished themselves at huge cost storming a well-defended breach - the shape of things to come 148 years later at Badajoz. In 1664 the Allies went on the offensive and took the Spanish town of Valencia de Alcantara and followed up with a crushing victory at Montes Claros in 1665 after the Allies had demonstrated the great value of a well defended fortress, Vila Vicosa buying time for a relief force to gather. This time the victory was followed up by two incursions into Spain and in 1666 by another. With the Treaty of Lisbon in 1668 Portugal's independence was accepted, by which time of the original 3,500 soldiers just 1,000 were left standing - and 400 of those were sent to Tangier, essentially a death sentence. It's a riveting story, very well told and eminently readable.

The immense logistical problems of moving and sustaining an army in battle, at siege and in quarters are sharply detailed giving a clear impression of the difficulties of large scale military operations at the time - the quantity of food (particularly horse fodder) and gunpowder required to provision an army is enormous, especially with regard to the means of moving them on the available roads. The climate confined military campaigns to the spring and autumn, such short seasons often preventing a decisive follow-up to a victorious battle or siege.

The book is well illustrated with maps, plans, contemporary prints and present-day photos.

Charles Blackwood ■