

BOOK REVIEWS

Jonathon Riley, *The Last Ironsides, The English Expedition in Portugal 1662-1668*. Helion & Company, 2014. (222 pp.) ISBN 978-1-909982-20-8. £25 hardback.

Reviewed by Dr Miranda Malins

As one might expect from so distinguished a soldier and author as Lieutenant General and Doctor of history Jonathon Riley this is a meticulous account of a long overlooked military campaign. *The Last Ironsides* tells the story of the 2,000 foot and 1,000 cavalry — the last remnants of the New Model Army — who were dispatched to Portugal to help in its struggle for independence from Spain under the terms of the marriage treaty between the newly restored King Charles II and his bride Catherine of Braganza. This arrangement was an attractive one for the new king, as it helped him to dispose of a large number of parliamentarian soldiers who represented both a grave threat and a vast expense to the new regime.

The political composition of the troops sent to Portugal set the stage for an intriguing campaign as former Cromwellian ironsides were forced to serve alongside, and in some instances beneath, ‘professional royalist soldiers and Irish Catholics. This made for an intimidating fighting force rooted in Cromwellian discipline but suffused with internal tensions. On the battlefield, the English troops were praised by friend and foe alike – beyond the Portuguese, French and Germans they fought alongside — for their bravery and professionalism; in their own quarters, however, old rivalries provoked a number of disciplinary incidents which Riley brings to life through his close study of contemporary sources. Such tensions were not improved by the hard conditions the troops suffered in Portugal and the constant arrears of their pay; a casualty, in part, of misunderstandings between the Restoration regime and the Portuguese government as to who was responsible for the troops while they served in Portugal.

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The Portuguese expedition itself is an interesting yet understudied piece of military history. Portugal was in a precarious position in 1662, faced with the power of Spain at home and the Dutch abroad and having been deserted by its former ally, France. It needed a powerful ally and the intervention of England cemented an alliance which had existed since 1386 and which would continue for many centuries, culminating in Wellington's much better known campaigns against Napoleon in the Peninsular Wars. The two nations had been at war with each other briefly between 1652 and 1654 due to Portugal's royal government continuing to receive and recognise the Stuart princes and offering protection to the royalist fleet. However, a mutual fear of Spain overcame these hostilities and a treaty was signed between John IV and Oliver Cromwell in 1654. John IV maintained close links to the Protectorate, continuing under Richard Cromwell. However, as a careful statesman, he also kept good relations with Charles II — an approach that was later rewarded by the marriage of his daughter the Infanta Catherine of Braganza to the new king.

With the help of the English troops, Portugal's new international army waged a series of campaigns against the might of Spain. These encompassed long periods on the move punctuated by skirmishes, pitched battles — notably the Portuguese victory at the battle of Ameixial in 1663 — and some colourful sieges. While the Portuguese suffered some defeats, the contribution of the English and French troops in particular, together with the skilled leadership of the French Huguenot Lieutenant General Herman von Schomberg in overall command of the army, enabled them to triumph over their Spanish adversaries and win their independence. Schomberg himself thought highly of the ironsides under his command, considering 'the military men that had served under Cromwell... the best officers he had ever seen.'

Riley's military experience shines through this narrative in his eye for the details of the realities of campaigning, many of which remain the same today - the terrain, the weather, ensuring supply lines and maintaining momentum. He paints a vivid picture of how armies operate, using a strong sense of place and a keen storyteller's pace to keep the reader's interest. In his efforts at precision, Riley occasionally allows the narrative to veer off course into overly detailed bibliographical sections, but these rarely disrupt the story for long and his technical descriptions are consistently accessible.

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The reader also benefits from many interesting observations that emerge from the narrative, such as the fact that the use of foreign soldiers under contract was commonplace in this period. Many defeated royalist troops and fugitive Catholics served the King of Spain under contract after Parliament's victory in the civil wars, for example. Riley urges us to see these soldiers not as mercenaries but rather as hired professionals loaned from one state to another.

The Last Ironsides provides many such points that enhance not only our understanding of Restoration foreign policy but of seventeenth century warfare more generally. For civil war enthusiasts, and Cromwellian scholars in particular, it is heartening to learn of one last campaign by the New Model Army demonstrating its superior skill on the European stage. As one Portuguese minister observed in gratitude: 'the English had done more than could be expected of men, and he believed there were no soldiers in the world like them.'

Dr Miranda Malins completed a PhD on the advocates of Cromwellian kingship at the University of Cambridge in 2010 and now works as a solicitor at Norton Rose Fulbright LLP. She has also been a Trustee of the Cromwell Association since 2014.