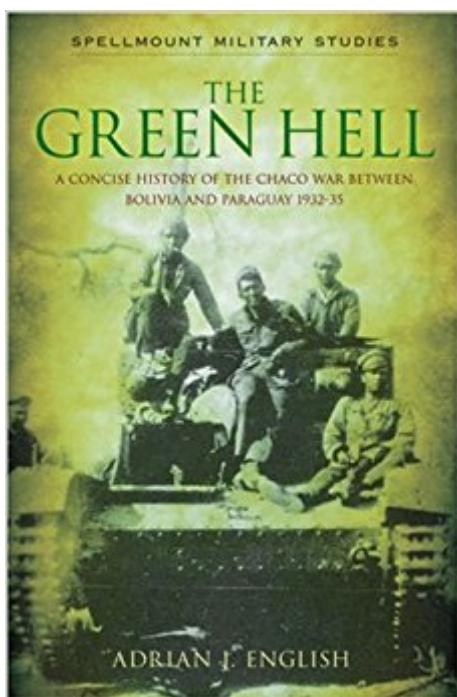


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The Green Hell: A Concise History Of The Chaco War Between Bolivia And Paraguay 1932-35 (Spellmount Military Studies)



Synopsis

Second in the Spellmount Military Studies series is one of few works in English on this largely forgotten war. It reveals the unconventional tactics that allowed the poorly equipped Paraguayans to overcome Bolivia's European-style standing army, which fought with tanks and bomber planes. The conflict embodied the changes that would take place in 20th-century warfare and hastened the demise of the League of Nations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Andrew Hilton is a Chartered Surveyor who travels extensively, especially within Africa, in connection with his work with international economic development programmes. He is a graduate of Birkbeck College, London, in Field Archaeology, and has a keen interest in military and oral history. He has been researching this remarkable story for the past decade.

An excellent book written about the little known Chaco War that took place between 1932 & 1935, deep in the heart of South America. The conflict was officially between Bolivia & Paraguay, however it seems that there was significant intervention by other countries, not only Argentina & Chile, but Fascist Germany, Italy & Spain and Britain & USA as well as White Russians! There is even a possibility that Ernst Rohm, leader of the notorious Sturmabteilung (SA) which assisted getting Hitler to power before falling from grace big-time may have been there.

This is one of those books that does a great job of describing events that are, regrettably, of little interest to the English-speaking general public. The book is wonderful read for military historians interested in the lesser known conflicts of the world. The book is filled with detailed information about the several battles that took place during the conflict. There is a good bibliography, for those who read Spanish. The appendices are full of details regarding the arms used throughout the conflict. Where one can get a little lost is in the detailed description of the units engaged in the battles. The book is a good read and I would recommend for the military history or modeling enthusiast.

It is hard to get good information in English on the Chaco War, so we are at the mercy of the few published authors. This decent book comes across too often as being amateur history done decently rather than good history done well. This book isn't really worth the prices being charged (which are far higher than the UK 14.99 pound list price). And this is a rather quick-to-read book. The primary text, with easy-to-read big letters and lots of white space on thick high-grade paper, is just 172 pages long, divided into 18 short chapters: The Actors and the Stage, The Roots of Discord, Preparations for Conflict, The Dispute Escalates, The Road to War, The Opposing Forces, 7 on Paraguayan or Bolivian Offensives/Counter-Offensives, The War in the Air, The Closing Phase, Armistice and Peace Treaty, Summary, and Epilogue. This main text is preceded by a Forward, Acknowledgements, and a good 4-page Chronology, and followed by 10 Appendices, a 4-page Bibliography, and a 6-page Index. There are two big failings of text. First, there are NO footnotes or chapter endnotes. The text completely fails to cite sources throughout, so the reader can't verify any fact or assertions. Second, when he mentions Army Corps or Divisions he routinely immediately fills up the page with all of the component units, which bogs down the reader. He should've used a footnote or endnote to list the constituent units. While his discussion of tactics is usually rather primitive (mainly just stating that a unit went somewhere or engaged another unit), he does do a good job of pointing out how weather (heat and rain), transportation (roads, RR, air and naval--for the Paraguayans), and logistics (trucks to bring in water and food) were absolutely critical toward understanding this conflict and how the Paraguayans were able to win. The Bibliography is mostly of works in Spanish. As regards English, there are only 5 books and a few articles. Oddly, in the main text he mentions a book written in English by an American participant, Philip de Ronde, titled "Paraguay-The Heroism of a Small Nation", but this isn't listed in the Bibliography. He also only lists one English work on the Chaco Peace Conference and League of Nations (M. La Foy, 1941), even though there have been many published over the years both in the 1930s and after (e.g.,

Rout, 1970). There is a great 32-page section of b&w photos, that compliment a good number of photos (often of people) spread throughout the text. The appendices are good for equipment, esp. air and navy, and decent for units. The third major failing is in regard to the woeful maps. There is one small overall campaign map on p. 12, but it has only the largest places or most important battles. I often had to use the one big map from the Osprey Men-at Arms "The Chaco War, 1932-1935" to make better, but still very incomplete, sense of places. There are a decent number of small hand-drawn maps, but they are often not very informative. Surprisingly some major battles have no maps or there are maps of actions that are barely discussed in the text! The author isn't consistent in his use of measurements. He normally uses metric but sometimes uses non-metric. Only a few of his hand-drawn maps show the scale and none is labelled with direction North (though they tend to be oriented in that direction). While as an American I think the UK author tries to be fair to the respective parties, the work does feel like it leans a bit more toward Paraguayan sources and perspective. But sometimes I was just mystified. For example, he discusses Gen. Estigarribia's short post-war presidency but fails to mention that he assumed dictatorial powers! This ends up being a decent but very concise history. We still await a comprehensive first-rate English book that truly integrates good text, nice pictures, and the necessary number of adequately detailed quality maps!

What an interesting subject and what a bland book. The well designed cover and the great photos created excitement to read a good history of this little known, but important part of history. It's just that the writer did not know how to write it. The chapters concerning the actual conflict are simply filled with units types, numbers and movements. It is like reading an unending telegram. There is barely any meat to the subject and literally no fat. What a disappointment!

I have lived in the region, and also read the many books on the Bolivian and Paraguayan side. I met with some of the veterans and listened to their stories, so I had high hopes for this book. It became obvious that most of the story came from the Paraguayan side...the names of the places in Bolivia had the Paraguayan Guarani spelling in them, from the start to the finish. The coverage of the Air War was also disappointing...the Bolivian Air Force mounted a much bigger campaign and had the only "ace" of the war, yet his only mention is when he was shot down, other than that, it is all about Paraguay's Air Force. The book could have done with more than the original hand written maps given to the author...I could follow it because I have been to the region, but anybody else would not have a clue what the movements meant nor the significance of it.

This book is not a broad general study of the Chaco War. Rather it is a detailed two pronged study. The first is an analysis of the diplomacy leading up to and continuing during the war. Particularly, the war's impact on the League of Nations. The second prong is a very detailed tactical analysis of the war. This portion of the book will only appeal to those readers with a strong interest in how battles are fought. Therefore, I strongly recommend this book to only serious students of military history, war gamers and or anyone with a deep interest in the diplomacy of the inter-war period.

Sometimes a book can be filled with too much detail and lose control of the big picture. It fails to grab the readers attention and concentrates excessively on details of small troop units of whom we care little about or find absurdly hard to follow. Although not much has been written about this war there really is no reason to buy this plodding book.

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