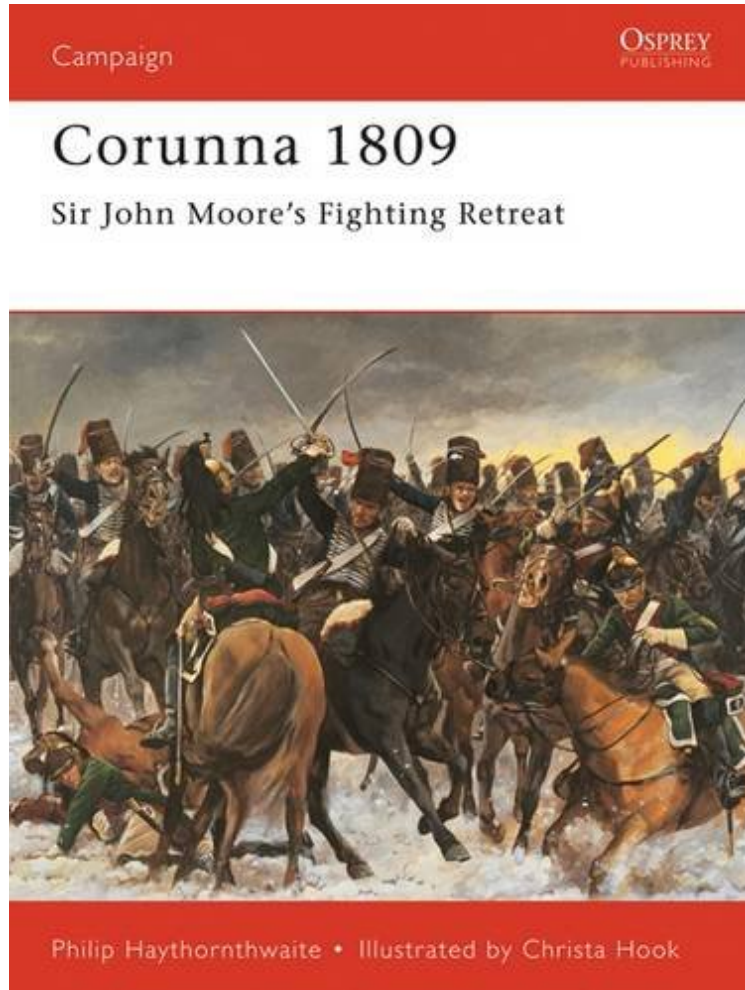


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Philip Haythornthwaite

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Philip Haythornthwaite : Corunna 1809: Sir John Moore's Fighting Retreat (Campaign) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Corunna 1809: Sir John Moore's Fighting Retreat (Campaign):

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful. A Thorough, Professional AccountBy R. A ForczykCorunna 1809 is a thorough, professional account of the famous British retreat in the winter of 1808/1809. Author Philip Haythornthwaite is an acknowledged expert on Napoleonic studies and he uses his considerable expertise to build a well-constructed narrative of this first major campaign in the drawn-out Peninsula War. The author follows the standard Osprey Campaign series format and succinctly summarizes the origins of the campaign, the opposing leaders and the opposing armies in the opening chapters. Oddly, there is no separate section on opposing plans, as there normally is in Osprey titles, although this information is partly addressed in the main campaign narrative. Actually, the

issue of opposing plans and objectives is critical for assessing the outcome of the Corunna campaign and Haythornthwaite's omission may have been intentional due to the controversial nature of the outcome. The British expeditionary force was dispatched to Lisbon under General Sir John Moore to support the Spanish in their effort to oppose French domination. Although the willingness of the Spanish to cooperate with the British and the size of the French invasion were poorly understood by the British, Moore marched his army deep into the Iberian hinterland. Nearing Madrid, Moore became aware that the French had crushed organized Spanish resistance and had occupied Madrid. A vast French army of over 200,000 troops under Napoleon was fast approaching the tiny 20,000 man British army. Moore elected to retreat to Corunna, pursued by the French corps of Marshal Soult and Ney. It was a bitter three-week retreat through winter snow and sleet, across extremely rugged and treacherous terrain. Haythornthwaite naturally focuses on the superb tactical skill of the British rearguard under Lord Paget, which inflicted several rebuffs upon the pursuing French. Yet tactical success was accompanied by a virtual disintegration of morale and discipline within the retreating British army. Over 5,000 British troops were lost in the retreat, many of whom were drunk on looted stores. Since this was the only occasion in the Napoleonic Wars where the French captured substantial numbers of British prisoners, a bit more attention could have been focused on this disintegration. Once Moore reached Corunna and was about to evacuate by sea, the Marshal Soult launched a last-minute attack on the British defenses south of the port. The result was tactically indecisive but Moore was killed in the brief battle. The Royal Navy evacuated the British troops the next day. Of course the real question on the battle is why Soult would launch a one-division probing attack against the British, particularly when he had a 5-1 or better superiority in artillery. A fixing attack on a withdrawing force makes sense, but why did the French not rely more heavily on their artillery advantage (Moore was killed by French artillery)? As the French failed to fix the British force, the battle was a tactical success for the British. However in strategic terms, the Corunna campaign was undoubtedly a British defeat since a British army had been forced to evacuate after losing 6,000 troops and achieving no real successes. British historians always like to portray hard-fought retreats and withdrawals like Corunna or Dunkirk as victories, and Haythornthwaite is no exception in this account. He suggests that Moore's fighting retreat diverted Napoleon from advancing on Lisbon and thereby gave the British time to regroup in Portugal. This is entirely specious. Napoleon left Spain because of the building crisis in central Europe, with Austria about to re-enter the war. It was the Hapsburg's, not Moore's tiny army, which diverted French attention. Had Austria not begun to mobilize in the winter of 1808/1809, it is quite possible that Napoleon might have remained longer in the Iberian Peninsula. Certainly larger French forces would have been available in the summer of 1809. It is even possible that the great clash between Napoleon and Wellington might have occurred in Portugal in mid-1809, but for the Hapsburgs. Corunna 1809 is an excellent account of this campaign, and the maps and artwork are superb. However, readers should be aware of the author's pro-British bias in evaluating the results of the campaign. When the dust settled, it was the French army that held Corunna, not the British.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Well-researched information on the origin of the campaign, opposing forces, commanders, strategy and the decisive battles

By Stephen P. Ford I have been very pleased with and impressed with the quality of Osprey publications. The Campaign series are focused on military campaigns from ancient times through the current era. I have found the books in the Osprey Campaign series to be a great source and frequently the only source for well-researched information on military campaigns especially in the ancient campaigns through early 20th century campaigns.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Another memory of Osprey Golden Age

By Maciej As I already wrote in another review ("Edgehill 1642"), can you still remember the time when Osprey would offer FOUR colour plates in a volume of Campaign? The time when every word, every picture, every map was checked, re-checked and polished until everything was perfect? And all of that for a lesser price than today? Well, it was not long ago, barely six years passed since they decided to do more rather than better. This book is another one of the very last made during this Golden Age. So, if you want to read a really great account of one of the most glorious fighting retreats in the history, buy it now, as long as it is still available. You will get a clear and passionating story about a march, a fight and a heroic death, and also great maps and illustrations. And - o miracle - four really beautiful colour plates by Christa Hook, who in this time still could draw! This is a treasure - go and get it! Just one warning - comparing it with some of more recent Osprey works can depress you. Because what they do now (even in the best of their books) is really one quality level below....

The retreat to Corunna is one of the epic campaigns of the Napoleonic Wars (1799-1815). Late in 1808 Sir John Moore found himself virtually alone with his small British army deep inside Spain. The armies of his Spanish allies had been overwhelmed and he faced a victorious French force under the Emperor Napoleon. He had little option but to order a retreat to the port of Corunna. This became the most arduous of trials with armies traversing mountainous terrain over appalling roads in the depths of winter. Somehow Moore held his outnumbered, exhausted men together as they struggled to reach safety. Finally at Corunna Moore's army turned to face its tormentors.

From the Publisher Highly visual guides to history's greatest conflicts, detailing the command strategies, tactics, and experiences of the opposing forces throughout each campaign, and concluding with a guide to the battlefields

today. About the Author Philip Haythornthwaite is an expert on the Napoleonic Wars with a worldwide reputation. He has written some 40 books, more than 20 for Osprey including *Warrior 22 Imperial Guardsman 1799–1815*, but still finds time to indulge himself in his other great passion – cricket.