

The Spanish Ulcer: A History of the Peninsular War

David Gates

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David Gates : The Spanish Ulcer: A History of the Peninsular War before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Spanish Ulcer: A History of the Peninsular War:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Mr Gates ulcerBy RayNot quite read the whole thing, but, as one who has read almost every other English language account of the 'Peninsular War' it has confirmed my pre-conceived opinion as to its contents.A very brief set of accounts that have emphasized the many parts played by the peoples that occupied that peninsula, the Spanish and the Portuguese of course.Mr Gates is very strong on adjectives but rather weak on facts when one considers how very many 'histories' are available to be used for getting at these facts.Once read completely I may return but there you are, the resident populations had many historians of their own who were not slow to go into print.This quick account adds little if anything but at least sits there.....make of it what you will!Ray Foster15 of 15 people found the following review helpful. A stunning work of Military HistoryBy SailoilMost military history books quickly become embedded in politics and economics, and in the process fail to complete their analysis of the military aspects of the history.In this book Gates has maintained his focus all the way through the book, on the Military campaigns. Any politics or economics are introduced only to explain logistical difficulties or broad trends in strategic direction.In most English focused histories Wellington is portrayed as some kind of superman who went out to Spain and roundly defeated one French army after another. Gates shows how far this is from the actual truth. He highlights the crucial role played by Peninsular forces, who fielded one army after another to keep the French busy. He demonstrates how the partisan guerilla war prevented the French from concentrating against Wellington to drive him out.At the same time he demonstrates just why Wellington was the

greatest soldier of his age. How he used intelligence and patience as his weapons. How he always selected his preferred battleground to gain maximum advantage against the French, who were after all, masterful foes. Wellington was the master of Soult, Ney and Massena, but not by much. He admitted that he would have lost if Napoleon had been there himself. Gates lavishes praise on the abilities of the French to survive in the harsh environment of the Peninsula, and at the same time extolls the mastery of the British use of naval support to outflank their gallic rivals. From an Irish perspective it is interesting to note the large number of Irish named Generals fighting for the Spanish, the English and the French. Blake, Clarke, O'Donnell, Lacy and O'Neill to name only a few. If I had any criticism of this book it would be on the way maps are presented. You always have to check which way is north. I prefer when North is the top of the page! Otherwise the large numbers of maps of all scales are a very useful tool in interpretation of the movements in the battles. Gates is also helpful in giving the reader a brief introduction to the tactics of Napoleonic armies, explaining the purpose of line, column and square, the flanking manoeuvre, use of the reverse slope, the use of Cavalry V Infantry etc. A really wonderful book!

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. For academics, military and war gamers, not for the casual reader. By William S. Grass. Gates' *Spanish Ulcer* is a one-volume history of the Peninsular War waged by France in Spain from 1808-1814. It covers all operations in this complicated conflict and contains a map every three or four pages. There is plenty here for the academic doing research, the professional military person learning the origins of guerilla, or 4th generation warfare, or the war gamer who wants to know the terrain and order of battle for a particular engagement. For the casual reader such as myself, however, the narrative is too dense and the descriptions of operations too detailed. I would have personally preferred an account that either focuses biographically on Wellington or the French marshals, or gives a smoother narrative of developments. Such was not Gates' goal, so I won't subtract any stars just because I chose the wrong book on the Peninsular War for myself. The *Spanish Ulcer* certainly deserves five stars for hitting the mark for those more specialized purposes.

By July 1807, following his spectacular victories over Austria, Prussia and Russia, Napoleon dominated most of Europe. The only significant gap in his continental system was the Iberian Peninsula. He therefore began a series of diplomatic and military moves aimed at forcing Spain and Portugal to toe the line, leading to a popular uprising against the French and the outbreak of war in May 1808. Napoleon considered the war in the Peninsula, which he ruefully called 'The Spanish Ulcer', so insignificant that he rarely bothered to bring to it his military genius, relying on his marshals instead, and simultaneously launching his disastrous Russian campaign of 1812. Yet the war was to end with total defeat for the French. In late 1813 Wellington's army crossed the Pyrenees into the mainland of France. This is the first major military history of the war for half a century. Combining scholarship with a vivid narrative, it reveals a war of unexpected savagery, of carnage at times so great as to be comparable to the First World War. But it was also a guerilla war, fought on beautiful but difficult terrain, where problems of supply loomed large. The British Navy, dominant at sea after Trafalgar, was able to provide crucial support to the hard-pressed, ill-equipped and often outnumbered forces fighting the French. Dr Gates' history can claim to be the first to provide a serious assessment of the opposing generals and their troops, as well as analysing in detail the social and political background. The Peninsular war is particularly rich in varied and remarkable campaigns, and his book will fascinate all those who enjoy reading military history.

From Publishers Weekly. In 1808, on the Iberian peninsula, Napoleon began a six-year war of attrition against Spain and its British and Portuguese allies. Expecting a quick victory, the French emperor instead found himself facing a strong foe (led by Britain's Duke of Wellington), including popular opposition in the form of guerrilla bands, and constant supply and communications problems. In this thorough military history, Gates, a university lecturer in Scotland, offers a battle-by-battle account of the war in its various theaters, with maps and other illustrations. His descriptions of the brutal fighting on barren terrain are clear and balanced, making this a valuable modern view of the conflict. He likens the "Spanish Ulcer," as the ultimately devastating defeat of Napoleon was called, to the present-day Soviet attempt to impose rule against the popular will in Afghanistan. History Book Club selection. Copyright 1986 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal. The Peninsular War of 1807-14, now aptly known as Napoleon's Vietnam, has long been the subject of serious military study. This new book by a dependable historian updates the extensive literature on the subject and condenses it into a useful and readable volume. There is little in the way of interpretation beyond the traditional anti-Napoleonic bias of British writers, but Gates presents a solid nuts-and-bolts overview of a complex and particularly nasty war. He is deft at reducing the mass of names, battles, and dates into an enticing narrative, and numerous maps make it easy to follow each siege and skirmish. This book will be valuable to academics and enjoyed by lay historians. History Book Club selection. Raymond L. Puffer, U.S. Air Force History Prog., Los Angeles. Copyright 1986 Reed Business Information, Inc. About the Author. Dr David Gates is Lecturer at the Centre for Defence Studies, University of Aberdeen, and the leading British scholar on the Napoleonic Wars.