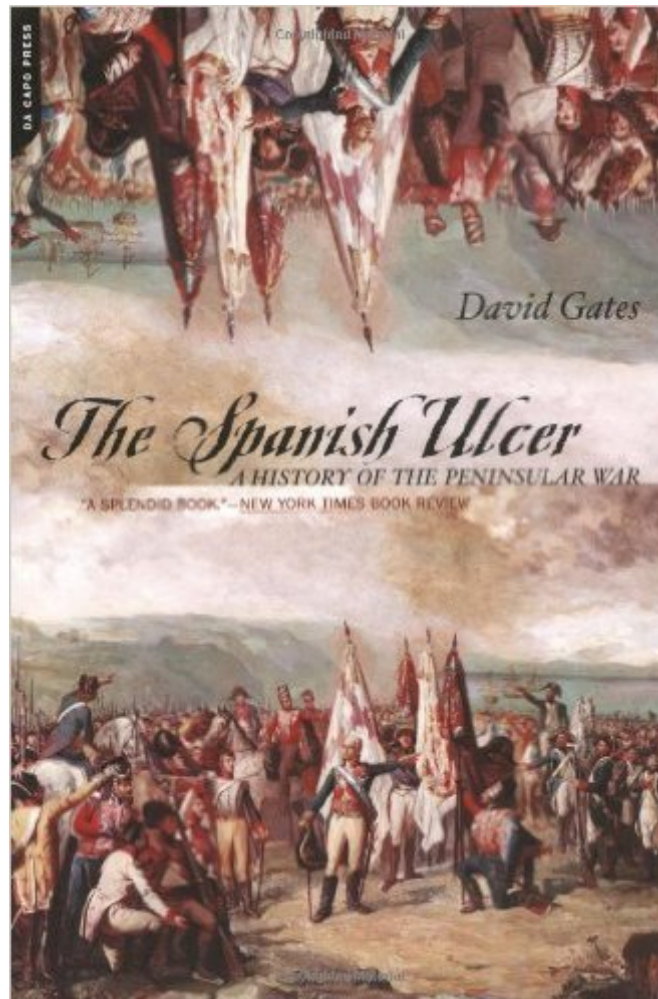


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The Spanish Ulcer: A History Of The Peninsular War



Synopsis

The Peninsular War in Spain and Portugal was the most bitterly fought contest of nineteenth-century Europe. From 1808 to 1814, Spanish regulars and guerrillas, along with British forces led by Sir John Moore and the duke of Wellington, battled Napoleon's troops across the length and breadth of the Iberian Peninsula. Napoleon considered the war so insignificant that he rarely bothered to bring to it his military genius, relying instead on his marshals and simultaneously launching his disastrous Russian campaign of 1812. Yet the Peninsular War was to end with total defeat for the French, and in 1813 Wellington's army crossed the Pyrenees into mainland France. What Napoleon had called "the Spanish ulcer" ultimately helped bring down the French empire. Michael Howard of Oxford University hailed this book as "a major achievement...the first brief and balanced account of the war to have appeared within our generation." Illustrated with over a hundred maps and fifty contemporary drawings and paintings, this is a richly detailed history of a crucial period in history that resonates powerfully to this day; and figures prominently in Bernard Cornwell's internationally acclaimed novels of the Napoleonic era.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Most 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.

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