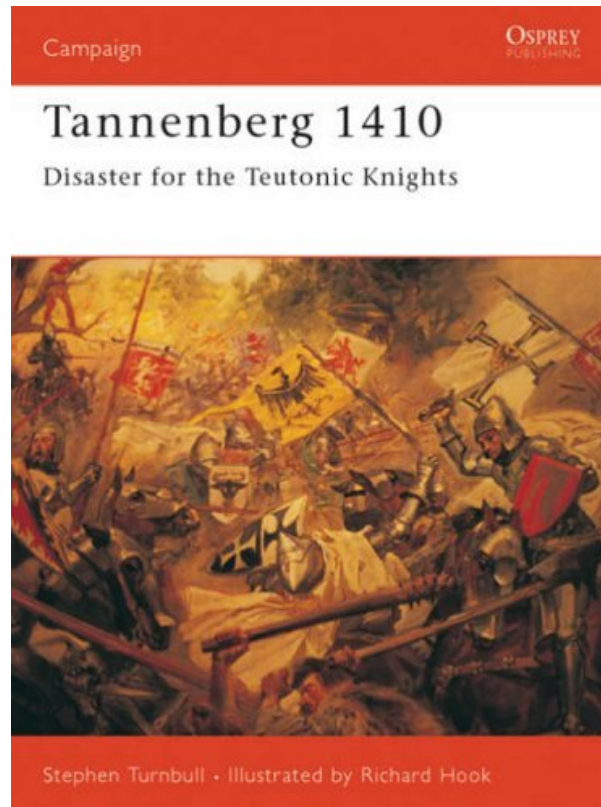


TANNENBERG 1410: DISASTER FOR THE TEUTONIC KNIGHTS (OSPREY CAMPAIGN)



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Tannenberg 1410

Disaster for the Teutonic Knights



Stephen Turnbull • Illustrated by Richard Hook

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Rich in Historical Imagery

By R. A Forczyk

Thankfully, Osprey turned its Campaign series volume #122, Tannenberg 1410, over to Stephen Turnbull, rather than its household medieval specialist, Dr. David Nicolle. Turnbull, who is well known for his earlier works on Japanese Samurai, is able to deliver passion and humanity into his historical narrative, unlike the erudite but dull Nicolle. While Tannenberg might not have been one of the most critical battles in history, it was the kind of battle that created legends and historical traditions that greatly influenced future German-Slav relations. Turnbull's telling of this classic battle between the Polish-Lithuanian allies and the German Teutonic knights is first rate.

Tannenberg 1410 follows the standard Osprey Campaign series progression from introduction, through chronology, opposing commanders, opposing armies and opposing plans. The campaign narrative itself is 49 pages long. The aftermath section is fairly long at 12 pages, since the war continued for decades after Tannenberg. Turnbull uses five 2-D maps (Eastern Europe 1386, castles of the Teutonic order, the Polish invasion of Prussia, Kauernick to Tannenberg, Eastern Europe 1466) and three 3-D Birds Eye View maps on the Battle of Tannenberg itself. The three battle scenes by artist Richard Hook are quite good: the confrontation at the Kauernick ford, the Lithuanian charge, and the death of the Grand Master. Turnbull also provides notes on sources used and a visit to the modern-day battlefield.

The Teutonic Knights are rich in imagery, clad in white tunics with black crosses, ravaging Eastern Europe with fire and sword for generations. Although the Order, as it was called, was primarily German in origin, Turnbull notes that the organization was open to "guest crusaders." Indeed, the future English King Henry IV went in 1392 and brought many archers with him. Although the crusades in Eastern Europe were cast as a religious struggle of Christian knights against Pagans, the real motives were land and power. Turnbull notes that this hidden agenda was revealed in 1386 when the "conversion of Lithuania removed any justification for the continuance of the Teutonic Knights' aggressive expansion into Lithuania under the banner of a 'crusade'. The Order, however, had no intention of giving up the struggle." The pogroms and land-grabs by the Order in Eastern Europe might be viewed as the first instance of a Lebensraum tradition. Unfortunately for the Order, the marriage of Jadwiga and Jagiello led to a formal military alliance in 1401 between Poland and Lithuania, creating a major Slav alliance. Turnbull mentions the critical role of diplomacy and money in securing allies or inhibiting foes (Muscovy, Hungary, Bohemia, Moldavia), which demonstrates the complexity of this conflict. In August 1409, the Teutonic Knights declared war on Poland after making spurious claims against Polish Christianity (due to the presence of small numbers of Tartars in southern Poland, the Order claimed that Polish and Lithuanian Christianity was a sham), thus beginning the idiotic German tradition of attacking stronger coalitions.

Tannenberg was one of the bigger battles of the Middle Ages, with about 27,000 Teutonic troops versus

39,000 Poles/Lithuanians. Turnbull corrects some misconceptions about the battle, such as his estimate that only about 250 Teutonic troops were heavily armed, mounted knights (203 were killed in the battle). Poland's army was feudal in nature, but had few foot soldiers, regulars or mercenaries. The Order placed great emphasis on field artillery to disrupt the enemy but wet weather rendered their cannon ineffective. Tannenberg was a catastrophic defeat for the Order with fewer than 1,500 Teutonic troops escaping. However, victory did not come cheaply, since the Poles-Lithuanians suffered 30% losses themselves. Turnbull notes that Tannenberg mortally wounded the Teutonic Order and that it was unusual that the battle that decided a long war should come almost right at the beginning of the conflict.

If Tannenberg teaches us any lessons, it is that final victory can be very elusive even after a decisive battle. The Poles and Lithuanians failed to aggressively pursue the shattered Teutonic remnants and allowed the hero, Heinrich von Plauen to rally survivors and hold on to key castles. The Order also used its extensive diplomatic contacts to gain foreign support and this resiliency even allowed limited counteroffensives. For over fifty years, the mortally wounded Order fought a last ditch struggle against Poland and Lithuania, until their lands were finally absorbed in 1466. Turnbull concludes that, "the German-speaking peoples did not forget this reversal of fortunes, and three centuries later the "Partition of Prussia" was used as a justification for the Partition of Poland."

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Osprey at its Superficial Best

By Marco Antonio Abarca

The popular image of Teutonic knights is of them crashing into a lake of ice as brave Russian peasants watch on. Such is the continuing power of Eisenstadt's "Prince Nevsky." In reality, the battle of Lake Peipus was a rather small affair in the general history of the Teutonic knights drive to the East. Popular culture aside, the most important campaign in Teutonic history is the one that reached its climax at the bloody battle of Tannenberg/Grunwald.

If you are looking for the definitive history of the Teutonic knights or even the Tannenberg Campaign this is not the book for you. Osprey's Campaign series limit themselves to around 95 pages and follow an illustration rich general formula. For this one, Osprey pulled their Japanese history expert from their stable of military history writers. Although he lacks any specialized knowledge of this history, Turnbull does a good job of going through the secondary sources and retelling a highly readable account of the campaign that led to the downfall of the Teutonic Order. Osprey Campaign Series books are what they are. It is just nice to read one that is well written.

11 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Interesting and Concise History

By Fred M. Blum

Tannenberg 1410: Disaster for the Teutonic Knights by Stephen Turnbull is a concise but interesting history of a little known part of European History that had little immediate importance, but significant long term effect. In 1410 the Teutonic Knights of Prussia invaded Polish territory with the intent of expanding their empire. The Poles, along with their Lithuanian allies and a contingent of Czech mercenaries were able to rout the Knights, killing their Grand Master. Because of indecisive moves the Polish/Lithuanian allies they were unable to take advantage of their decisive victory; however, the victory weakened the Knights to such an extent that they eventually became inconsequential in European affairs.

In 96 pages, following the standard Osprey format, Turnbull concisely discusses the above in a well thought out and written manner. The book is well written and interesting to read. It is highly recommended for anyone who wants a taste of this part of European history.

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