

War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History

Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present

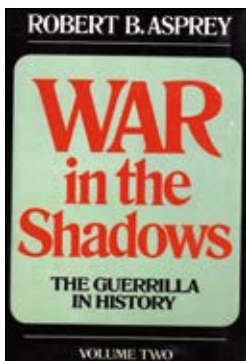
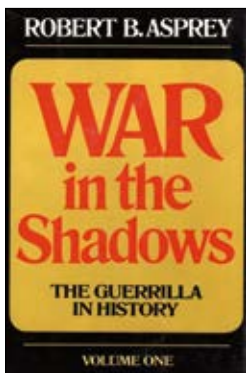
Robert B. Asprey. *War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History*. Two volumes. Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Company; 1975. 1496 pages. ASIN: B002JNCB1C.

War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History. Two Thousand Years of the Guerrilla at War From Ancient Persia to the Present. Revised and updated. New York: William Morrow and Company; 1994. 1322 pages. ISBN 0-688-12815-7.

Max Boot. *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare From Ancient Times to the Present*. New York: Liveright Publishing Company; 2013. 784 pages. ISBN-10: 0-87140-4249/ ISBN-13: 978-0-87140-424-4.

Reviews by COL Warner "Rocky" Farr

These two books, one quite old, one brand new, are just begging to be reviewed together!



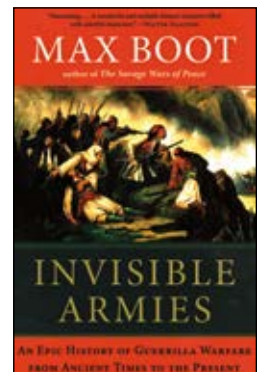
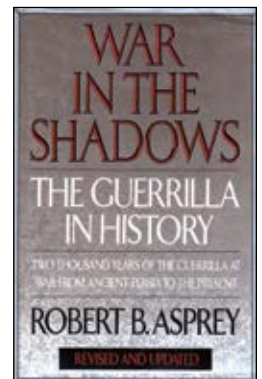
Asprey's book (the older) was the first premiere multivolume history of guerrilla warfare stretching from Alexander the Great's battles with Asiatic Scythians, through the Russian Revolution, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, and ending (in the 1975 1st edition, 2 volumes, 95 chapters, 1496 pages) with Vietnam. He later revised it, and in the 1994 version (2nd edition, 1 volume, 92 chapters, 1322 pages), he continues on to the Afghanistan of the 1990s. It is a finely written saga of 2000 years of guerrilla/terrorist warfare tactics, operations, and strategy. I own both versions (note the difference in total number of pages) and they can both be found online and in used book stores. The author died about 4 years ago, so they may start to get scarce. The book is more than a history; it is an

appraisal of historical events that point directly toward the author's contemporary experience of unconventional warfare (Vietnam).

Asprey was a former U.S. Marine Corps captain, a Fulbright scholar, and a veteran writer of military history

whose works include *Semper Fidelis: A History of the Marines in World War II* (The Free Press, 1980, 1991); *At Belleau Wood* (University of North Texas Press, 1996), and *The German High Command at War: Hindenburg and Ludendorff Conduct World War I* (Backinprint.com, 2005). This book shows a worldwide perspective and has a very comprehensive evaluation of the Vietnam conflict, which made the author persona non grata around the beltway for some time. He postulated that the U.S. military lost that war due to total ignorance of unconventional guerrilla warfare. When he revised the book 20+ years later, he held fast.

Any book of this scope is very broad yet very shallow to be able to survey the entire history of guerrilla warfare. He focused his first edition to explain the Vietnam conflict by placing it in proper historical context to reveal the mistakes made. He forms a huge wave of compelling evidence from guerrilla history to support the claims he makes in the final chapters on Vietnam. These chapters are a litany of incompetence, ignorance, stupidity, shortsighted policymakers, incompetent or fatally uncreative generals, and a flawed American understanding of unconventional warfare. After 2000 pages of his compelling



argument, it is impossible to disagree. It is a very well researched and argued point of view and is just as relevant and incisive today. This is the definitive work on guerrilla warfare. If you are a student of counterinsurgency, guerrilla warfare, unconventional warfare, or partisan warfare, you need this book.

Now for the new kid on the block, Max Boot. I have met Max a few times, mainly in theater, as he was a military advisor in Iraq and Afghanistan. He is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, and I consider him a renowned military historian. He authored *The Savage Wars of Peace* and *War Made New* (Basic Books, 2002). His new offering to the field is a nearly 800-page (1 volume, 64 chapters, 784 pages) survey of guerrilla warfare, a book frankly reminiscent of Asprey's books—that is not a bad thing. Boot begins with Alexander the Great discovering that nomads were harder to defeat than massive conventional armies and moves through the Jewish rebellion against the Romans on to the French-Indochina War and onward, far beyond Asprey's time cut off in 1975 or 1993, depending on Asprey's editions, to the post-9/11 battlefields of here and now. He fleshes out various great characters, the usual suspects like Che and Mao, but also Giuseppe Garibaldi, T. E. Lawrence, Ord Wingate, and one of my favorites: the "Quiet American" Edward Lansdale.

He structures this book to be read as a series of short histories on each period or battle, or it can be read straight through from beginning to end. I found the format to be reader friendly for someone who is going to read a few pages and come back for a few more the next day—my normal style. Bottom line upfront: this book is a masterpiece and will be a classic for all times. It combines vivid writing on complicated themes with penetrating analysis. This narrative of 30 centuries of

unconventional warfare is divided into eight parts. He analyzes episodes from antiquity to present-day and excels in many. In particular, the Spanish against Napoleon and the Assassins in Medieval Middle East are done well. He agrees with me that John Brown's attacks on slavery and the South's post-Civil War guerrilla warfare (they won) to undermine Reconstruction are two of the most historically neglected terrorist campaigns, which he covers well.

His conclusions are that guerrilla warfare is here to stay, that it is a form of combat native to all cultures, all the time, whenever "one side was too weak to face another in a battle." He also opines that "There's no reason that this method of warfare will be outdated anytime soon, rather there is cause to fear that it could assume terrifying proportions in the future," and this might happen, "should some group of insurgents obtain weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons." At the back of the book is a list of 12 implications about guerrilla warfare, entitled, "Twelve Articles, or the Lessons of Five Thousand Years." This is a handy list of quotable quotes. Also provided, as an appendix, is "The Invisible Armies Database." This is the most comprehensive database of guerrilla movements (starts in 1775) that I have seen. There are about 450 resistance movements listed.

The book is meticulously researched, with good maps, and well referenced. A book with this wide a scope, trying to handle nearly every guerrilla conflict, has its dangers, as the author has tried to do it in fewer pages than Asprey, but there is more history to cover. It is definitely the most comprehensive work in the last 50 years on one of the most important issues facing humanity, and it should be on your library shelf. Buy it with or right after you buy Asprey's books.