


“SIGN HERE”

ITALIAN CONDOTTA ARMIES FOR LION RAMPANT

 By Daniel Mersey. Photographs courtesy of Foundry, figures from their 28mm Condottieri range.

Author of the Osprey rules *Lion Rampant*, Dan Mersey presents a brief history of these fascinating mercenary forces. He also provides details of how to use these professional soldiers with his rules, suggests sources for figures and even presents a method to ‘bid’ for suitably varied Retinues for tabletop usage!

Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century Italy was a mercenary’s dream: rather than one unified country, medieval Italy was a collection of wealthy, independent city states each of which contracted mercenary armies to protect and expand its political and economic interests. The leaders of these mercenary bands, and the mounted knights they led, were known as *condottiere* (literally, “contractor”; plural, *condottieri*), who signed a *condotta* (“contract”) tying them to serve one city for a defined period of time.

This period is also a wargamer’s dream: many and varied medieval troop types, eye-catching banners and heraldry, mix-and-match units that can be part of one army this week and a different army the next, and the ability to build one larger collection of figures to field en masse or break up into opposing forces for smaller battles. Added to that, there are plenty of available ranges from figure manufacturers in all of the mainstream scales, and the ever-present lure of an affordable army in 28mm plastic built from Perry Miniatures.

The north of Italy was dominated by three great economic city states: Venice, Milan, and Florence. These three cities were often at war with one another and with their lesser neighbours; from time to time they also came into conflict with non-Italian powers. In the south, the kingdom of Naples was pre-eminent, and alongside these powerhouses nestled smaller states. All of these cities raised their armies via the *condotta*, although the types of troops and tactics used would vary from state to state and individual *condottiere* to individual *condottiere*.

Hired by cities for a set period of time, *condotta* troops would do the dirty work required of them: not just fighting major battles against other city states, but more commonly smaller policing or punitive actions, and garrisoning



the towns held under their employer's influence. When a city hired mercenaries, its rivals would do the same, effectively creating an arms race and making earlier communal militias near redundant as a major fighting force. What sense existed in using an inexperienced militia or feudal muster to protect one's wealth and economy, when a standing army of veterans could be contracted? (Florence remained an exception for quite some time, militarily lagging behind her rivals for much of the period.)

Before the rise of the mercenary armies, Italian states had raised militias to defend themselves; political power being what it is, the ruling families of these states came to the conclusion that external contractors were a safer alternative: at any rate, employing these mercenaries was better than arming and equipping the (potentially disgruntled) local populace and one's immediate political rivals. The Fourteenth Century saw the rise of free companies, army-sized bands of veterans from the continent's many wars (including the Hundred Years' War) including both local Italians and foreign mercenaries from across the continent: well-known free companies included The Company of St George, The Great Company, and The White Company (famously led, for a time, by the English mercenary Sir John Hawkwood).

The free companies were gradually replaced by the condottieri: independent captains who signed their own contract with a city state and either came ready-prepared with their own retinue or sub-contracted lesser captains to join them. The best of the condottieri were shrewd businessmen as well as fine military leaders - they negotiated contracts and their terms of employment, and were responsible for keeping their mercenary employees under control.

By the end of the Fifteenth Century, external pressures began to impact more significantly on the Italian city states. Encounters with Swiss and Imperial armies, and especially with a powerful French force at Fornovo in 1495, saw the city states confronted by larger, national armies who began to equip themselves with an increasing number of firearms. In the Great Italian Wars of the Sixteenth Century, the splendid armoured knight fought on, but was gradually superseded by gun - and pike-armed armies.

The following books are good stepping off points to finding out more about the medieval Italian mercenary experience:

- Edward Crockett, *Condottiere*, Polygon, 2006.
- Ian Heath, *Armies of the Middle Ages Volume 1*, Wargames Research Group, 1982.



- Michael Mallett, *Mercenaries and their Masters*, Pen & Sword, 2009.
- David Murphy, *Condottiere 1300-1500* (Warrior 115), Osprey Publishing, 2007.
- David Nicolle, *Italian Medieval Armies 1300 - 1500* (Men At Arms 136), Osprey Publishing, 1983.

And trawl through the works of Niccolo Machiavelli, who presented a contemporary, unflattering view of the condottieri. Just be wary of opponents who have read *The Prince!*

CONDOTTA ARMIES IN LION RAMPANT

My *Lion Rampant* rules (published as part of the Osprey Wargames Series) are written for small engagements between retinues of tens of soldiers rather than hundreds of soldiers. Although the major, pitched battles of this period are well documented, many small clashes were fought: raiding and counter-raiding, collection of taxes and supplies, guarding convoys, and garrisoning towns and outposts. *Lion Rampant's* scenarios work well for such actions, representing the vast majority of work that the condottieri would be tasked with by their employers.

Despite being mercenary troops, there are no modifications I'd suggest for the battles fought on the tabletop: condotta armies were professional soldiers doing their job, and a badly performing employee is unlikely to be offered a new - and certainly not improved - contract. However, if you enjoy playing campaigns, it's worth bearing in mind that the condottieri

were sometimes accused, most famously by Niccolo Machiavelli, of fighting bloodless battles and generally letting opposing condottieri off lightly: this could be taken into consideration when assessing casualties post-game, and via *Lion Rampant's* Boasting system. These pre-game Boasts allow players to earn extra Glory (victory points) in addition to fulfilling the objective of a given scenario. The condottieri, as noted above, were very aware that their men were a major commodity and not pawns to be sacrificed in battle: an experienced mercenary was an asset to a condottiere and losses would need to be replaced quickly. Therefore, Boasts about minimizing casualties and having no units rout from the board are well suited to Italian condotta armies.

But for me, the most interesting aspect of mercenary condotta warfare, and the one that transfers most conveniently to wargaming, arises from the nature of their employment. Raising a city's army by contract, rather than just using the troops available locally, offers me three advantages that many other periods don't:

- The varied troop types and nationalities available within one city's army.
- Collecting the figures and units I want to, and being able to play with them all.
- Fielding many different combinations of units from just one smallish collection of figures.

Let's take a look at the sorts of mercenaries to be found in Italian condotta armies, and how they can be represented in *Lion Rampant* and other rulesets.

TROOPTYPES

Condotta forces were heavily biased towards fielding mounted, well-armoured men-at-arms. Squadrons were built from a basic three-man mounted unit (two men-at-arms and a lesser armoured page); this was known as a *lanza* ("lance"). By the mid Fifteenth Century, the size of the *lanza* had usually increased to five mounted men: one or two men-at-arms and the others more lightly equipped. In addition to the mounted condottieri, infantrymen were also hired and received a regular wage; these were known as *provisionati*. They undertook garrison and bodyguard duties, often replacing communal militias, but field armies were heavily reliant on mounted men-at-arms to do the fighting. Militias and knights under feudal service still appeared in some armies, especially in the Fourteenth Century, and on the tabletop their fighting ability and morale may vary from those of contracted mercenaries.

Liveries were worn by foot soldiers (a contract could sometimes be part paid in cloth), and the flags of city states accompanied armies into battle and decorated shields. These included Florence's red fleur de lys on a white background; Milan and Genoa's red cross on a white background; Parma and Verona's white cross on a red background; the papal state's white crossed keys on a red background; and the red and yellow halves of Naples.

There is a sample Condottieri retinue in the *Lion Rampant* rulebook, which consists of:

- 2 units of Mounted Men-at-Arms @ 12 points
- 1 unit of Foot Serjeants @ 4 points
- 2 units of Crossbowmen @ 8 points



However, this is just a starting point, one of many variations that you could field as a condotta retinue - especially given the level of abstraction within the rules' troop types. In the rulebook, the Burgundian, Feudal Garrison, Free Company, French, German, or Italian could also make for good condotta retinues ... as well as one of your own construction.

The troop types shown in the tables could be found in condotta armies,

and the exact make-up of any force would depend on the geographical and economic situation of the hiring city. The year would also make a difference to the troops available - for example, earlier Italian mercenary armies (more correctly termed free companies than condottieri) often included many veterans of the Hundred Years War, and cities on the eastern extremities of Italy were more likely to employ light cavalry from the Balkans and Turkey.

Unit type	Lion Rampant	Other rules	Notes
Men-at-Arms/Knights	Mounted Men-at-Arms, optionally upgraded to Drilled. They may also dismount as Foot Men-at-Arms.	Mounted knights/heavy cavalry (dismount as heavy infantry).	All retinues should contain at least one of these units. Drilled units represent the professional nature of many of the condotta knights; if all players agree, I recommend changing the retinue composition rules to allow two units of Drilled Mounted Men-at-Arms rather than the one allowed under the retinue construction rules as written. City state feudal knights should not be upgraded.
Coustilliers/Lesser Men-at-Arms	Mounted Serjeants	Heavy/medium cavalry	I've referred to the mounted, fighting pages and less well armoured men-at-arms by the French/Burgundian term <i>coustillier</i> , as most figures with this type of armour are referred to as such in manufacturers' catalogues.
Mounted Crossbowmen	Mounted Serjeants with crossbows	Medium cavalry with crossbows.	
Stradiotti	Mounted Serjeants or Mounted Yeomen; Yeomen may be downgraded to javelins only, or upgraded to Expert, depending on their nationality and time period.	Medium or light cavalry, with bows or javelins.	Balkan light horsemen, employed in the armies of Venice. In game terms, I would suggest that this also encompasses Hungarian, Turkish, and other light cavalry used by other city states such as Naples, Florence, and the Papal States.

Unit type	Lion Rampant	Other rules	Notes
Men-at-Arms	Foot Men-at-Arms	Heavy infantry	Men-at-Arms would sometimes dismount to fight, especially in the Fifteenth Century.
Spearmen/Pikemen	Foot Serjeants or Foot Yeomen, depending on armour. Not usually upgraded to Expert.	Heavy or medium infantry with long thrusting spears or pikes.	Footmen in Italian armies sometimes carried a distinctive oval or long, almost rectangular shield, and frequently wore brigandine armour. Militia spearmen may be represented as Foot Yeomen in contrast to mercenary Foot Serjeants.
Halberdiers	Foot Serjeants or Foot Yeomen depending on armour, both upgraded to Expert.	Heavy or medium infantry with heavy cutting weapons.	
Sword & Buckler Men	Fierce Foot or Expert Foot Yeomen.	Medium infantry	Light infantry were present in many armies, but sword & bucklermen began to appear in Fifteenth Century Italian armies.
Javelinmen	Foot Yeomen with javelins, or Bidowers.	Light infantry or skirmishers.	
Crossbowmen	Crossbowmen, usually upgraded with pavises.	Heavy or medium infantry with crossbows and pavises	Crossbowmen were often accompanied by pavisiers, who were equipped with large a shield to protect the missile troops.
Archers	Archers, upgraded to Expert if using longbows.	Medium infantry with longbows.	
Handgunners	Handgunners are not represented as a troop type in <i>Lion Rampant</i> ; I have posted some unofficial 'Hollywood' style rules for them on the Boardgamegeek website and include them in this article, but they may also be fielded as Crossbowmen or Bidowers.	Medium infantry with handguns.	See "Handgonnes in Lion Rampant" section.



Unit type	Lion Rampant	Other rules	Notes
Artillery	Field pieces are beyond the scope of <i>Lion Rampant</i> , being better suited to larger games. However, a fine cannon would be a good objective in Scenario B: Defending the Indefensible.	Gunpowder artillery	
Carroccio	War wagons are not included as a troop type in <i>Lion Rampant</i> . However, a <i>carroccio</i> makes a superb objective in the same scenario as artillery (above). Or you may also wish to model the wagon in a unit of crossbowmen protected by pavises (the wagon counting as pavises). Alternatively, tweaking the convoy rules in Scenario K would be a great starting point for creating your own carroccio troop type.	War wagon or objective	Earlier Italian armies used these wagons to carry their flags into battle, acting as command posts and also as war wagons carrying missile troops. Some city states continued this tradition, and these wagons can make wonderful focal points for an army. Mirliton and Perry Miniatures both sell a carroccio in 28mm; Mirliton and Essex sell them in 15mm.

HANDGONNES IN LION RAMPANT

Lion Rampant is really intended for skirmishes fought before gunpowder became common on the battlefield, but if you're fighting battles in Fifteenth Century Italy, you may well wish to include some handgunners in your retinue; feel free to use this troop type in any retinue where appropriate.

However, please note that this profile is rather fanciful, to make this new technology stand out as something different on your battlefield – you may or may not like the results! Therefore I'd suggest it is also perfectly acceptable to field your handgunners as Bidowers or even as Crossbowmen.



Unit type	Handgonnes	Points	4
Attack	7+	Attack Value	6
Move	6+	Defence Value	6
Shoot	8+	Shoot Value	6 / 12"
Courage	4+	Maximum movement	6"
Armour	2	Special rules	Bang; Panic

Models per unit: 6

Special rules:

- Bang: All units count as Armour 1 against Shooting by this unit (Armour 2 if in cover).
- Panic: When this unit Shoots, the target unit must take a Courage test regardless of the number of hits inflicted.

Unit upgrades:

- Pavises @ 2 points per unit. As for Crossbows.

CONDOTTIERI UNDER THE HAMMER

Rather than just collecting and building your own mercenary army according to the lists available in your favourite rules, there's another - equally valid - way to muster opposing condotta retinues: bid for them. (You still need to buy and paint them first, of course...)

The first - and quickest - way to choose armies in this way is one that I suggest in *Lion Rampant*: the mash up. Both you and your opponent collect and paint whichever units take your fancy, and bring them all along on your games night. Choose which scenario you're going to play and then place all of the units

you've both brought along on show on the tabletop; get your opponent to do the same, and make sure that your opponent knows what each of your units is (moral grades, troop type, etc - whatever is relevant in your chosen rules). Next, take it in turns to choose one unit for your own retinue (dicing to see who chooses first); if there are an odd number of units, the player who chooses last takes the final two units. This mixes things up nicely, works for pretty much any rules set you choose to use, and gives you a chance to try out some different unit combinations.

If you have a little more time pre-game, rustle up some coins, gaming gems, or other tokens (even paper chits will work), and indulge in a bit of real-life, Italian city state-style bidding:

CHOOSING YOUR MODELS

Many manufacturers sell medieval ranges suitable for condotta armies. As professional soldiers, most condottieri would be well equipped and wear the latest style of clothing and armour. Most Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and even early Sixteenth Century ranges can provide at least some suitable options, notably those marketed for the Hundred Years War, Burgundians, Swiss, and the Wars of the Roses.

The following manufacturers (with their relevant ranges shown in parentheses) are ones that I think are especially well suited to building your retinue from.

28mm hard plastic

Perry Miniatures (Wars of the Roses)

28mm metal

Front Rank (Hundred Years War, Wars of the Roses)

Kingmaker (Condottieri, 15th Century European)

Mirliton (Condottieri, Swiss, Burgundian, Renaissance)

Perry Miniatures (15th Century European including Italians, Wars of the Roses)

Redoubt Enterprises (Renaissance)

Foundry (Condottieri, Wars of the Roses, Swiss) **As seen decorating this article!**

20mm soft plastic:

Accurate/Revell (Hundred Years War)

Caesar (15th Century Europeans)

MiniArt (15th Century French, Burgundians, Italians, Germans)

Red Box (Wars of the Roses)

Zvezda (Hundred Years War)

15mm metal

Essex (Medievals, Renaissance)

Legio Heroica (Burgundians, Swiss)

Mirliton (Condottieri)

Museum Miniatures (Free Company, Hundred Years War, Wars of the Roses, Hussites)

Vexillia (Medieval Eastern Europe)

1. Place all of the units you've gathered from both armies on the tabletop. Make sure you've explained to your opponent what each of your units is in game terms. (In *Lion Rampant*, just describe each unit by troop type and any upgrades or downgrades used.)

2. Quickly total up the number of units on show and give each player four times as many bidding tokens (so if in total there are 12 units on the table, each player gets 48 tokens). These could be coins (real or plastic), gaming gems, tiddlywinks, dice, or whatever you have to hand. Alternatively, use scraps of paper to write your bids on. Whatever you choose, we'll refer to them as florins.

3. Taking it in turns, select one unit to put up for auction (yours or your opponent's). Each of you must place a bid of florins to win this unit's contract.

4. To bid, each player selects a number of florins in secret and hides them in his/her hand. The minimum legal bid must always be one florin, but there is no maximum bid.

5. When both players are holding their bid hidden in their hand, they reveal them simultaneously. The highest bidder wins the contract of that unit for the coming battle. A draw means that the unit accepts the contract from the player who owns those miniatures (loyal service and all that!).

6. After each bid, the players surrender the tokens they just bid with, whether winning or losing.

7. If a player no longer holds any tokens, his or her opponent automatically wins all of the remaining units' contracts.

8. Once all units have been contracted to one or other player, you now have your starting forces for the battle.

This way of selecting your army isn't only applicable to medieval Italy: it works well for any period where armies consisted primarily of mercenary troops, or where uniforms could not instantly identify a unit's allegiance: modern African Bush Wars, the Thirty Years' War, the English Civil Wars, Wild West shootouts, Dark Ages battles between Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, to name a few. If you're playing a period where your forces can be selected by bidding, you'll really find that this frees up the choices of units you'll collect and paint – there's no greater deterrent against mustering an unstoppable horde of super units if you know that at least half of them will end up fighting against you!



FIGHTING A CAMPAIGN USING THE CONDOTTIERE BOARDGAME

Dominique Ehrhard and Duccio Vitale's boardgame *Condottiere* (published by Fantasy Flight Games) is an excellent resource if you're looking to play a campaign a little different from the norm.

As the name suggests, *Condottiere* focuses on the warring cities of medieval Italy. The aim of the game is to control four connected regions, winning each by playing cards from your hand that represent mercenaries, the seasons, and various political maneuverings. It's a great little game in itself - one of my favourites in fact - but the card play used to gain control of regions could equally be used to seed each player's army in your next tabletop wargame.

For example, the winner of the round/region might gain a larger army to fight with, or be allowed to choose the scenario being fought. I'd suggest the former is an appropriate benefit: in the case of *Lion Rampant*, the winner could perhaps field an extra unit of Mounted or Foot Men-at-Arms or another suitably powerful troop type.