

'Bloody Big Battles: Rules for Wargaming the Late Nineteenth Century'

By Chris Pringle

Review by Paul Le Long

Before I start I just want to say a few words about how this review came about and where it's going. Chris Pringle, the author, contacted George and Rich asking if they'd like to review the game for *Lone Warrior*; Rich asked me if I'd like to do the review and I said yes. Since I therefore received a free copy of the rules and a free supplement, I wanted to do the rules justice by doing a thorough job of playing several games and reporting how it went. That will take a while so this instalment is just a 'first impressions' review & I received the rules only two days ago & I've skimmed through them.

So, what are my first impressions then?

Bloody Big Battles (BBB) is 56 pages, soft-bound booklet. It is not a big hardback glossy book of the type that has become quite common (and costly) lately. That said, it is well-laid out, has plenty of very clear black & white illustrations and is attractive. The rules cover the first 25 pages and the rest of the book is scenarios & nine in all, covering the Franco-Prussian War. You can play them in sequence as a sort of campaign. Each scenario follows a standard 3-page format with orders of battle, scenario considerations and a full-page map. As I said, on a quick run-through I found everything to be attractive, easy to use, well-written and also clear and logical. There are examples of play spread throughout which helps a lot too.

A word about the supplement: This is Bloody Big European Battles (BBEB) which is 54 pages of scenarios (16 of them) all following the standard format set out in BBB. The wars covered are: Crimea, Italian War of 1859, Second Schleswig War, Austro-Prussian War of 1866, Russo-Turkish War, Serbo-Bulgarian War, Greco-Turkish War; so the second half of the nineteenth century then. There's no ACW though I do know that BBB does cater for this.

The thing that really struck me about BBB is that it seems to have its roots in boardgaming & combat is resolved on a combat results table, for example, and there are zones of control too & both staples of board wargames of the old SPI/Avalon Hill variety. Figures too are a peripheral factor & units are made up of several bases; the bases are all nominally 1" square and you can put as many figures on each base as you want, it doesn't matter. Which means that bases are effectively counters made more attractive by the presence of miniatures; the miniatures themselves are window-dressing with no in-game significance.

Now some of you will have read the previous paragraph and already decided that BBB is not for you and I agree that the boardgame style is not something that will appeal to everyone & I happen to like it. What I think it gives you (I'll find out when I play, of

course) is a clean game, which is exactly what you need in this case because we are talking about recreating very large (or bloody big!) battles like Sedan, Gettysburg, Solferino and Koniggratz *in their entirety*. That might be 100,000+ men covering several miles of ground and fighting over several days. This is not the usual division-sized game. Each army might be represented in the game by as few as ~25 bases or as many as ~80. These are big battles indeed, but the design philosophy is that you can play them on a normal sized table; you don't need to hire a ballroom to contain them. Playing time is 3-4 hours too, so not a mega-game despite the size of the battles depicted.

What about solo play? Well, usually the "solo-ness" comes out in the command and control rules but these are very light in BBB so it doesn't really. The book states that the game suits 2-4 players and, apart from a mechanism that randomises movement, there's nothing particularly solo friendly. But I didn't find anything that militated against solo play either (like hidden movement). It's a case of doing your best for both sides or bolting on some solo mechanisms ó the latter would be easy because the core rules are, as I said, clean.

Well, that's my first impressions; I'll keep you posted on how the games go. I have to say that I'm looking forward to playing because recreating a battle the size of Gettysburg in its entirety is not something most of us get a chance to do ó usually this would be a mega-game with teams of players playing over a whole weekend ó not something that solo wargamers are particularly attracted to for the most part.