

'Solo-Wargaming'

By Donald Featherstone

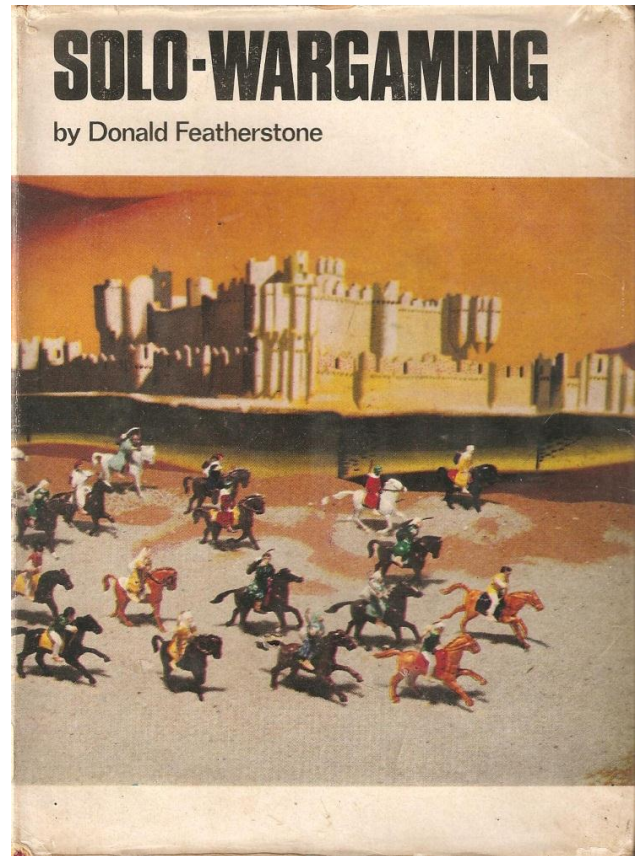
Review by Jonathan Aird

It would be easy, looking back from the vantage point of 36 years of the Solo Wargamers Association (and 180 issues of *Lone Warrior*) to think that, for a fairly niche section of the greater wargaming hobby, the Solo Wargamer is quite well served. There are solo games, the occasional solo scenario in the larger wargaming press and now of course quite a lot available on the Internet. It was not always so.

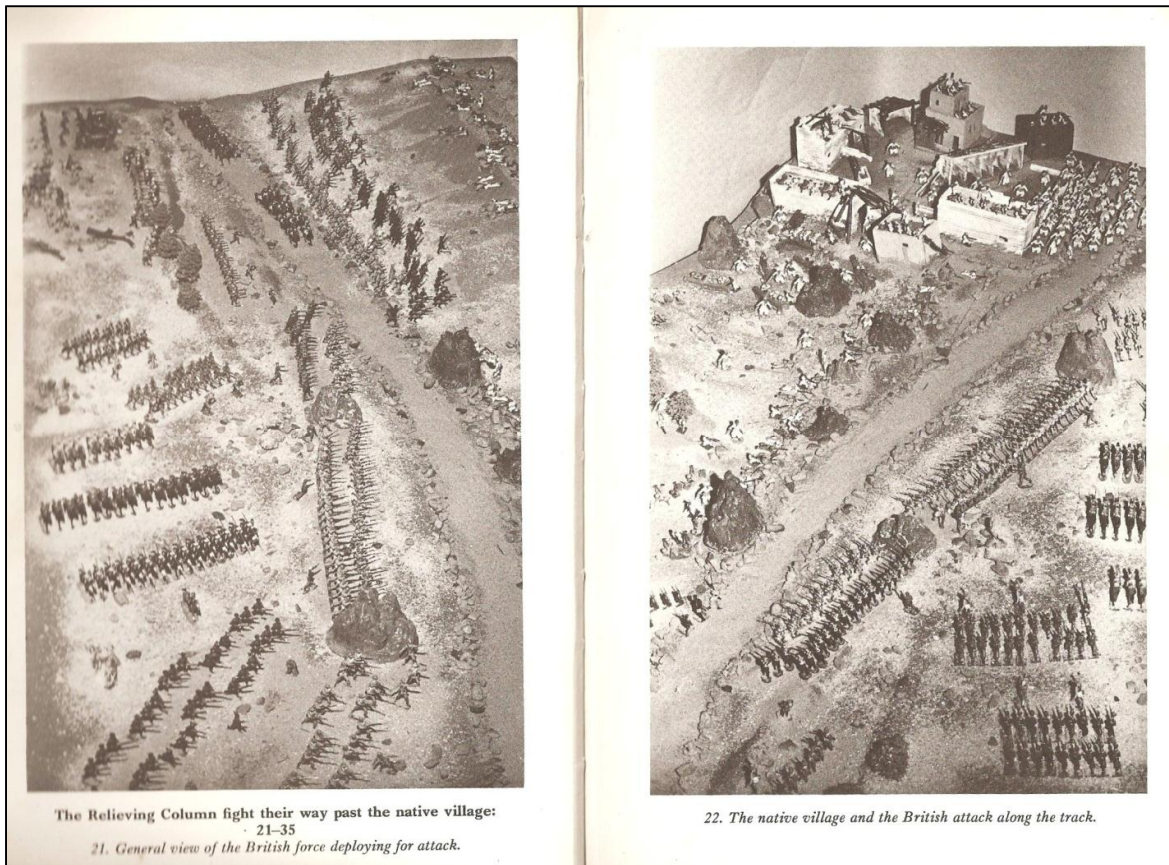
The situation was very different in 1973 when Donald Featherstone presented this title to the wargaming world. Having in previous books already covered wargaming on land, sea and in the air, Featherstone was well placed to now start addressing subjects such as the details of wargaming a long campaign or the details of history as they relate to miniature warfare. Solo wargaming fits in well with these concerns. The question inevitably arises: the experienced wargamer will from time to time or perhaps through choice find himself without an opponent – what to do?

The answers to this open question are provided over 23 chapters of varying length and covering Solo Wargaming in various guises – the pure solo game where one player controls all troop movements, with the possibility of the umpire in a campaign playing out and reporting on various “side shows” as one example. Postal games are touched on, as are the various possibilities of impromptu aide-de-camps in the form of family members being used to make important decisions or even assist with the disposition of armies. Wargamers who have been blessed with sons are encouraged to use this last method – as in mere 10 or 15 years there could be a ready-made and fully trained opponent living under the same roof!

As is often the case in Featherstone's books, there are liberal “borrowings” from other well known gamers of the time. Sets of rules and solo methods by Jack Scruby, John Schuster, and Lionel Tarr are reproduced at length over several chapters. Donald Featherstone had also recently completed ‘Wargame Campaigns,’ and several chapters are in part lifted from this volume with remarks made on how to adapt them for solo play. There are also chapters on the use of chance cards, tactical cards and regimental cards -- the latter assigning character to every regiment involved in a solo campaign, and then tracing its rise (or fall) as the campaign progresses. The use of inspiring historical



books – either of the factual or historical novel genres – is explored as a way of playing successive battles with a method of assessing how well the solo player is doing against his sources. Featherstone also stresses the importance and enjoyment of a detailed campaign diary – with excerpts provided from his own, as well as a running photo-narrative throughout the book of a colonial campaign with the troops massing and marching



A huge colonial battle which formed part of an on-going solo campaign

out in a column to punish recalcitrant natives only to find themselves ambushed along the way. It's a stirring tale, and rather inspiring.

The great importance placed by the author on creating a permanent record of the game is further illustrated by tales of other solo campaigns – such as the “multi-solo” game Retasol – which are dotted around the book.

Not everything in the book will be new to the solo player of any standing – but some of it will, and rereading the book reminded me of the apparent origin of some of my own “original thinking” as I came across what I had fondly believed to be my own thoughts. “*We all borrow all the time*” should, perhaps, be the motto of the Solo Wargamer! Some aspects of the book are a little “of their time” and the “humour” can be a little dated, but this is to be expected and shouldn't put any reader of either sex off the book too much. In short, this seminal work should be on every solo gamer's bookshelf -- that is without doubt. It's an entertaining read in itself; it brings in several people's ideas under one cover, it dives off in all sorts of directions but without seeming “patchy” in its approach. If there is one odd thing about the book it is that the author cannot disguise his true feelings – that

solo just isn't as good as playing someone else. It's clear from the frequent application of the description "the lonely Wargamer," the sadness expressed that Lionel Tarr's approach to gaming doesn't enrich the experience of a wider circle of wargamers, and in many other wistful comments. It is spelt out early on: *"In spite of the pleasures and even advantages of solo-wargames, Man is a gregarious animal and there is little doubt that the majority of Wargamers would prefer to fight against a live opponent."* Even with this somewhat ambivalent attitude to his subject, Donald Featherstone delivered an essential read.

Luckily, this book has been reprinted in paperback by John Curry as part of his history of wargaming project, with some minor additions to bring it slightly up to date. Copies of the original hardback are available second-hand from Amazon UK for around £25 (although I notice from the inside cover that I picked my -- rather battered -- copy up a few years ago in a charity shop for 10p – money very well spent!).

Kaye & Ward. 1973

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