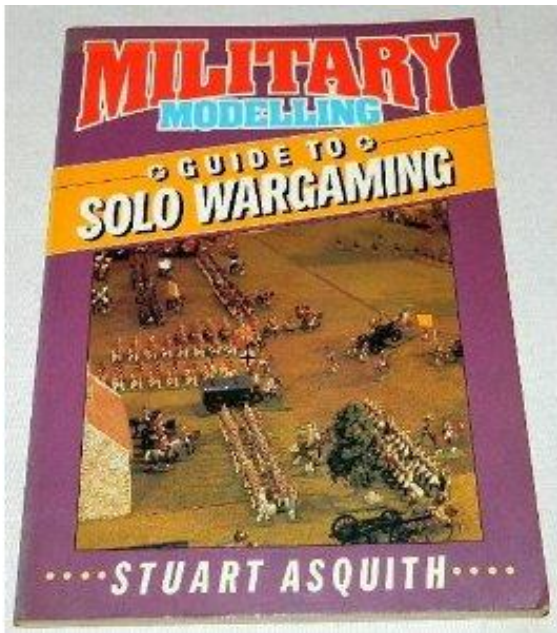


# **‘Military Modelling Guide to Solo Wargaming’**

## **By Stuart Asquith**

### **Review by Paul Le Long**

Just a year after publishing the “Military Modelling Guide to Wargaming,” Stuart Asquith produced a sister volume –a guide to solo wargaming. As Jonathan Aird pointed out in his review of the former book, Asquith was an important figure in the wargaming world in the late 1980s and 1990s – he was editor of the very popular and sadly missed *Practical Wargamer* magazine for example.



The “Guide to Solo Wargaming” was published in 1988, 15 years after Donald Featherstone’s seminal “Solo Wargaming.” These two books remain, to my knowledge, the only books on the subject. Nevertheless, there must be a market for this since Asquith’s book was re-issued as a revised edition in 2006 by Partizan Press. In this review, I will concentrate on the original edition for the most part and just say a few words at the end about the revised edition; in reality, there is little substantial difference between the two.

So, what do you get in the book? Since this is an important book for soloists, I’ll go through it in more detail than usual. Chapter 1 is “The reasons for playing solo wargames” which does pretty much what it says on the tin. The pleasing aspect of this chapter is that the author doesn’t simply present solo wargaming as a second-best hobby for people who don’t have any like-minded friends and have to make the best of it; instead he espouses the positive benefits of soloing and why in some cases soloing is better than more traditional wargaming.

Chapter 2 is “Solo wargaming systems.” This covers ideas on introducing rules for automating the enemy; here we have chance cards, random terrain placement, random deployment of armies, random arrival and entry point of reinforcements and ideas about resupply. To be honest, anyone reading this blog will be familiar with all of these ideas – they are fairly basic and some are sketched out rather than explained in detail – but for the beginner would still be a useful starting point for solo wargaming techniques. I remember that the SWA produced something similar (but more detailed) a few years back called the Beginner’s Pack.

Chapter 3 is “Small scale actions” which is five skirmish scenarios: an ambush, Indian raid on a fort, assault on another fort, a Napoleonic fighting retreat and a Franco-Prussian War surprise attack. As scenarios, they are nice in themselves and they have some good, if fairly basic, ideas for playing them solo.

Chapter 4 is “Historical solo play” which features two larger games – Borodino 1812 and Suvla Bay 1915. These are both very interesting scenarios not least because only one side (the attacker) is represented by figures on the table. The Borodino scenario takes you step by step through the battle while the Suvla Bay scenario has some lovely ideas for launching an assault of this type – essentially you have to get your men through a zone swept by small arms and artillery fire before they are mowed down; and you never even see the enemy – how evocative is that?!

Chapter 5 is “Solitaire scenarios.” This is a bit odd because, although the scenarios are good, they are not particularly “solo-centric” and so seem a little out of place. Nevertheless, you get eight perfectly good scenarios here with force lists for either Ancients or Horse and Musket.

Chapter 6 is “Programmed scenarios” and is reprinted from a book (“Programmed Wargames Scenarios”) by C.S. Grant (another must for soloists). This is a great chapter and although it wasn’t actually written by Asquith, he was perfectly right to include it. The scenario he has chosen to reprint here is a simple “defend the line of hills” one. The scenario allows you to programme the plans or responses of one or both forces. For example, Blue force is defending the hills and Red has to drive Blue away. There are instructions for what to do if either side is automated (or indeed if both sides are automated). Let’s assume you, the player, are commanding the attacking Reds. There’s a random element to establish whether you have scouted the position properly. If you haven’t then you write your attack plan before (randomly) setting up the defenders. Now let’s assume you are leading the assault with your right flank; you will then have to refer to a table to see how Blue responds, which will depend to an extent on how he deployed. You get the idea; it’s perfect for solo play and a good addition to this book.

Chapter 7: “Solo campaigns” is a misnomer – there isn’t much here that is specifically solo wargaming. But there is a lot of very useful advice here on campaigns generally; in fact it reminds me of the book that Asquith published with C.S. Grant years later on campaigns. Chapter 8 is “Siege warfare” which like chapter 7 is not really solo specific but does have a lot of interesting general content.

Chapter 9 is a short chapter about postal gaming, including a note on campaigns, multi-player games, solo games and running campaigns as a league table. The final chapter is a fascinating one about the Solo Wargamers Association, with a very interesting account of how the association was set up by John Bennett in the 1970s. Chapter 11 finishes the book off with a list of suggested reading.

Moving on to the Partizan Press revised edition, I must say that this is an inferior edition; if you don't have this book then look out for the original 1988 edition, it's cheaper and it's better. In truth, the revised edition is almost identical to the original except for the following differences: the Partizan edition has a Second St. Albans (1461) battle instead of Suvla Bay in the historical battles section. This is OK but adds little that you don't already get from the Borodino scenario at the expense of the excellent Suvla Bay scenario. The chapter on programmed scenarios is missing from the Partizan edition, as is the chapter on the SWA. The postal wargames bit is expanded a little to include e-mail games and the newer edition has a lot of very attractive photos. But in truth, if you have the original you don't need the revised edition. And if you're choosing between the two books, pick the original.

Overall, this is obviously a very important book for soloists – one of only two on the subject, three if you count C.S. Grant's "Programmed Wargames Scenarios." I imagine most SWA members already own this title; if you don't, then it's one you probably should have on your shelf. If you were starting out as a soloist, then this would still be a valuable purchase but for hardened soloists there isn't anything here that you don't already know. There are a few chapters that are not even particularly solo-centric, which is disappointing. But overall there is plenty of good stuff here: staples like chance cards, random deployment and terrain placement. There are also some very good scenarios and the chapter on programmed scenarios is excellent. And the historical scenarios where you only field one army is very interesting; I must admit that doing something like that had never even occurred to me before.

All things considered, a must for the soloist's bookshelf.

Details:

- Paperback:** 128 pages
- Publisher:** Argus Books (1988)
- ISBN-10:** 0852429347
- ISBN-13:** 978-0852429341

The book is out of print but the current price on Amazon for used copies starts at £3.19.