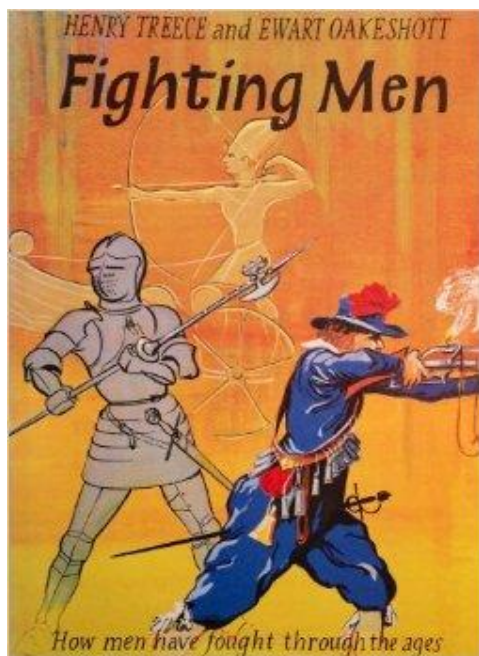


# 'Fighting Men'

## By Henry Treece and Ewart Oakeshott

### Review by Rob Morgan

Originally published by Brockhampton Press in 1963, and now long out of print, the subtitle of this most fascinating book is 'How men have fought through the ages.' It's one of the best, readable and interesting of all general introductions to warfare. This is a 200-page book, which deals, in several separate and discrete chapters, with what are the key elements, weapons, men and horses, in war from antiquity to the demise of the pike around 1700 AD. Oakeshott was a legend in the world of the sword, and his knowledge of edged weaponry shines through this now rare title. Henry Treece, on the other hand, was a brilliant writer of historical fiction for younger people: 'Viking Dawn,' 'The Road to Micklagard' and 'The Bombard,' just three of his scores of works, contain numerous, virtually ready-made wargame scenarios, of which more later.



Each chapter opens with a short fictional piece by Treece, related to the content to come, and its context. First, 'The Chariots' considers that finest and long-lasting of all shock weapons, it mongered 2,000+ years, from the Sumerians to the end of chariot warfare as recorded by Tacitus around AD 83. Next, the text turns to 'The Roman Soldier,' better written by far than any modern Osprey. This chapter covers the flowering, flourishing and fall of Rome, the strengths, the victories and the long, slow decline of the legions, which brought this force to be rightly considered one of the elite of all human history. Excellent writing.

The next chapter, 'The Vikings,' is a delightful tale, and plainly the interest and background research of both writers comes to the forefront, providing a good deal of material for someone investing in say, an army or raiding party of the new Peter Pig 15mm Viking series of figures. The *Holmgang*, that unusual judicial personal combat, gives much scope for the internalised side of Norse warfare, and the short tales of Grettir, Anlaf and of Hardrada's death are stimulating reading.

They move on to 'The Heavy Cavalryman,' which covers a vast swathe of time, from Adrianople in AD 378 to Crecy in 1340 AD and beyond that. This is the largest of the chapters, and flows well until it ends with the destruction of the horsed men at Pavia and Ravenna in the Italian Wars, and the complicated, sometimes disastrous procedure of the Caracole.

øThe Longbowö follows next, and this chapter provides a superb opener, a øtasterö for anyone about to read Don Featherstone's similar title, or that of Robert Hardy. This deals with the steady rise of the bow and of archery as a battlefield and defensive weapon, dips briefly into the crossbow's complexities, and lingers long over the demise of what was for so long the greatest and most levelling power in war. There's a fascinating comment to end this section of the book, suggesting that in 1940, a single company of the Home Guard, rifleless, defended its corner of rural Lincolnshire with bows! Given that pikes were manufactured and possibly issued to Home Guards at around the same time, this is another incredible wargames opportunity!

The book ends with a chapter entitled øPike & Musket,ö opening with a fictionalised account of the effect of the efficient, brutal Swiss pike blocks against German horse and Spanish sword and buckler men. This starts a positively Machiavellian chapter, and one of the book's best, I think. The Swiss, Landsknechts, and the Condottieri all drift in, followed by gunpowder. From the primitive handgun to the pistol and then the musket, the force of firearms which swept all before them is neatly handled. The beginning of the end for the Swiss at Novarra 1513 AD and at Bicocca in 1522 AD, the start of the øtaming of the pikesö across Europe's battlefields, is very well written. There's a rather good account of the Battle of Pinkie between the Scots and English in 1547, a battle saved and won (for the English) by warships' gunfire. The book ends at 1697 AD, at the Peace of Ryswick, which finally brought to an end the long French Wars, and the pike had gone from the battlefield.

This is an enjoyable read, and a book which brings a new, or rather different, approach to these weapons and the men who used them in battle. It sparkles as a text and the line drawings, I think by Treece, add much to it. This is an ideal introduction to warfare and tangentially to the potential of war games for a younger reader or a novice at the table top. I'd recommend it, though if I had to make a criticism, speaking as an ordnance enthusiast, the cannon, that mistress of battlefields and of fortifications alike, is dealt with less well, less warmly than I'd like. But then since Ewart Oakeshott's best known and most enduring works were entitled øSword in Handö and øDark Age Warriorö (this is a magnificent book if you can find it), then perhaps that underplaying was inevitable.

Incidentally, I first read this book after Don Featherstone recommended it back in the mid-Sixties; he thought highly of it.