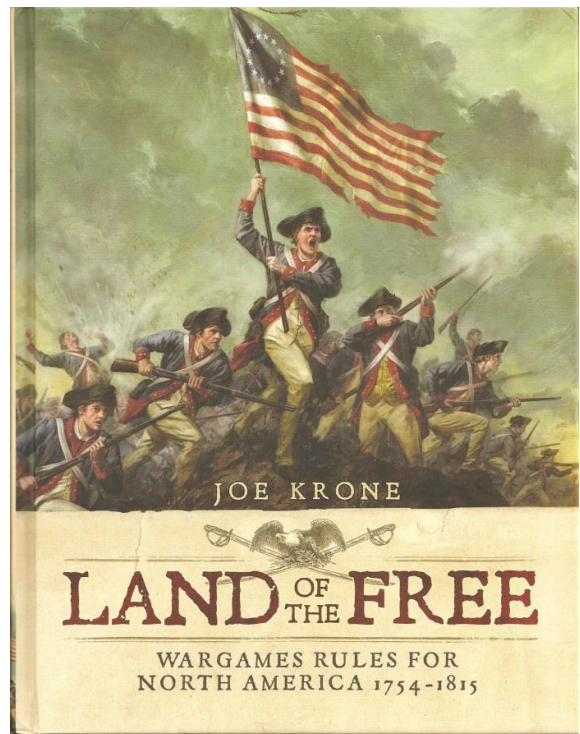


Land of the Free

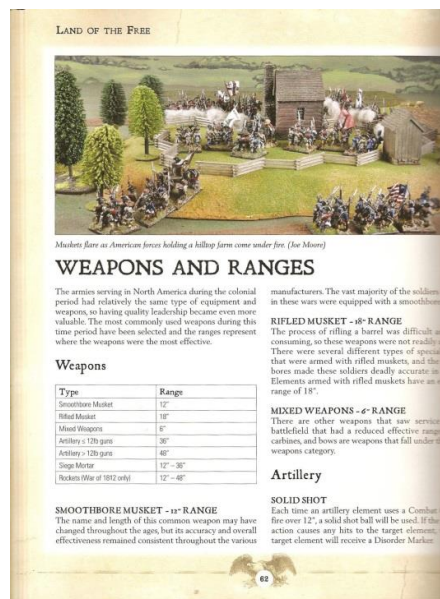
Review by Jonathan Aird

Land of the Free is a new set of wargame rules by Joe Krone, released by Osprey Publishing. Land of the Free is designed to cover the wars of North America from the middle of the 18th century up to the early part of the 19th century ó specifically the French and Indian Wars, the American Revolutionary War (a.k.a. the American War of Independence), the Northwest Indian War and the War of 1812. As well as covering a time span of 61 years, the rules also offer the possibilities to game at various scales ó from small skirmishes up to recreations of large historical battles such as the Battle of Germantown.

First impressions are very good; Land Of The Free is a substantial offering of almost 200 pages in a hardbound volume. It is profusely illustrated both with photographs of miniatures òin actionö on the wargame table and also with many paintings taken from complementary Osprey volumes, especially the Campaign and Raid series which specialise in depicting troops in combat. In addition, there are ample rules illustrations explaining the niceties of movement, combat moves and command radii, and the scenario section at the end of the book has many well drawn and easy to interpret setup maps. The general layout of the book is very pleasing on the eye ó with its solid hardback binding and the thick glossy paper of the interior -- Land Of The Free cannot be faulted on its physical appearance ó and perhaps just as importantly it feels as if it is worth the price tag of £25 (about \$40).



Colour is used widely, as are photographs of miniatures.



Land Of The Free is divided into three broad sections: a short introductory section, the main body of the rules ó running to about 100 pages ó and a substantial scenarios section. The introductory material assumes some familiarity with wargaming ó this is, after all a rule set, not a gaming primer ó so the reader is made aware of the need to obtain figures, but there is no push to any particular manufacturer or, in fact, any particular figure scale. The points values and various abilities of different troop types are discussed adequately, and there are some photographs of beautifully painted armies of different nationalities and point values to indicate what the prospective player might be aiming to achieve.



The rules are subdivided into a set of Core Rules and a section of Advanced Rules. As would be expected, the core rules cover organisation of the miniature armies, movement, command and control, shooting and melee combat and morale. The advanced rules mostly add in special skills for different troop types and nationalities. So, for example, Minutemen have the special skills of Self-preservation, Ambush and Scouts. Some of these Special Skills are actually not very favourable ó the aforementioned skill of self-preservation serves to make a unit of Minutemen quite fragile in hand-to-hand combat. These advanced rules serve to lift the core rules from just very similar troop types fighting in a similar way and add the vital flavour of the period. The various combat units available to the different armies across

the four wars of Land Of The Free are all classified by troop type in a very brief, but adequate, set of army lists.

One thing that did become apparent is that there is no direct discussion of ground scale to figure ratio. Different sizes of stands *do* represent different numbers of troops ó which implies a change of ground scale as one moves from skirmishes between platoons to battles between massed regiments. However, there is no concurrent modification to weapon ranges and move distances. Simply put, the player is meant to overlook this discrepancy, but it does lead (especially for later scenarios) to a situation where musket range has improved several times over what is achievable in a small-scale skirmish. Many players are happy to accept this in the name of playability ó and it is true that there is as much incongruity to the regiment with a historically realistic firing range of 1 inch as there is to the single named house on an historical battlefield still being able to accommodate many hundreds of troops. These are the

everyday complications we wargamers have to stoically endure in the name of playability (and the *game* part of wargaming).

Scenarios make up a good third of the volume. There are an initial set of nine variants of table setups to cover different kinds of meeting engagement, ambushes, battles for specific objectives and so forth. These are backed up by a series of historical refights for each war – four for the French and Indian Wars, seven for the American Revolutionary War, two for the Northwest Indian War and another seven to cover the War of 1812. These are enough to keep even the most regular gamer busy as the basic set could form the basis of a fictional campaign, and doubtless players will want to try both sides at least once in the historical refights. This is a very strong section of the book, with the right level of detail to allow the gamer to quickly get to grips with a scenario. The provision of different sizes of scenario is a boon to the gamer that doesn't have access to an 8' by 6' table as a good proportion of the scenarios will be playable on a more modest 4' by 4' table.

Returning to the rules themselves, they are characterised by the use of Elements made up of two to seven stands of figures, these too carrying a varying number of figures depending on the troop type, the scale of the game and the figure scale in use. A number of Elements are controlled by a single officer, and a number of officers controlled by the general, giving a formal structure to the army. When it comes time to manoeuvre across the battlefield, the orders and the formation changes permitted act to enforce the linear tactics of the time on those troops who had been subject to the rigours of drill. There are also allowances for skirmish and open order troops. The role of officers is similarly essential to gameplay, with each officer given a certain skill level at the start of the game and this is used on a turn-by-turn basis to determine how many command points and also determines how great a Sphere Of Influence they have and therefore how effective they are at getting the troops under their control to react as desired. Better commanders will typically get more command points and can exert their authority over a larger area.

Troops are activated on an Element at a time basis within a group of Elements controlled by one officer. Once one group has completed all possible actions, the opposing side activates the Elements making up one of their command groups and so on back and forth until all Elements have had at the least orders to stand to their ground. There is clearly some skill required here to decide on an order of play for one's own side and additionally in deciding what orders to lay on each Group and its Elements.

Shooting combat is D6 based, with a five or six needed for a hit on troops within range – with modifiers applying to an Element to decide how many dice it has to cast. Melee is controlled in a similar and consistent fashion. Morale tests are subtle enough to follow the effects of adverse combat results on the reaction of the Element being tested – and also include the effects of disorder from various maneuverers and from being successfully charged and so forth. This concentration on the maintaining of unit cohesion and the restricting of manoeuvrability to those formations available to the well drilled soldier again serve to add that oftentimes elusive atmosphere of authenticity.

There is nothing specifically in the rules that aid their use for solo play ó and from his introductory text Joe Krone has clearly in mind two or more people playing Land Of The Free. There is nothing that is a real show stopper for solo play either ó there are a couple of places in the rules where a decision is required on the use or otherwise of order markers and the ability to save some actions up for potential reaction moves out of turn sequence. The solo gamer can easily assign a list of possible actions and then roll for a random result, and, since the turn sequence is a modified I-Go-You-Go approach, I don't see any insurmountable problems.

Land Of The Free is rounded out with a half dozen sides of play sheets and several example army and element rosters, both should be very handy for speeding up play. Overall, Land Of The Free is a very well presented package of easy to read and easy to understand rules applicable to a relatively brief time period during which a certain stability of methods of warfare was achieved. Whilst they have been described for North American battles, there is no real reason why they shouldn't be suitable (with a few adjustments) for similar conflicts with large numbers of light troops and little prospect of reinforcement elsewhere in the world at this date. Land Of The Free is a fine example of the full colour Osprey approach, and this serves only to enthuse the reader. Land Of The Free looks to be an excellent and playable rule set and I look forward to moving from just reading to actually playing the game.

Land of the Free by Joe Krone
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