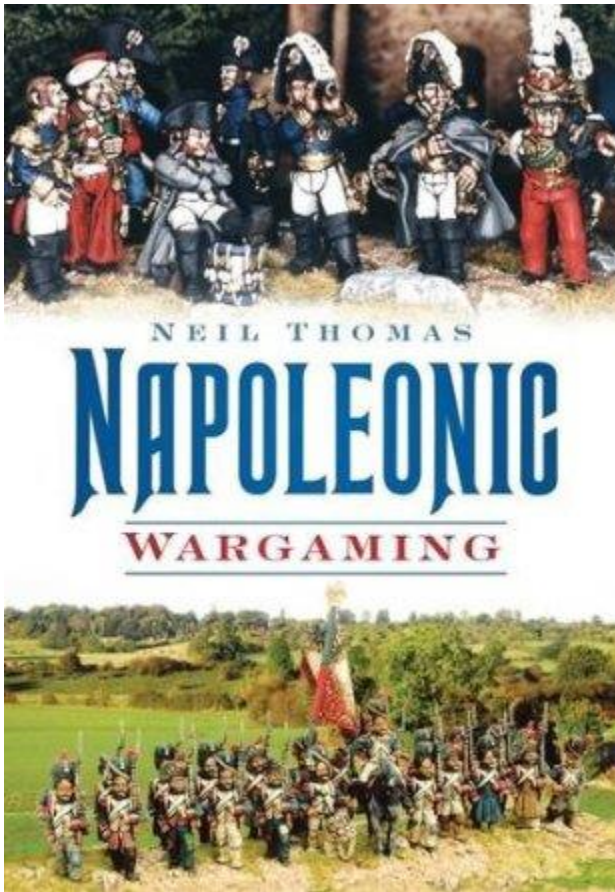


'Napoleonic Wargaming'

By Neil Thomas

Review by Paul Le Long

I am a real convert to Neil Thomas's work. I read his *Wargaming: An Introduction* a few years ago and being unimpressed, I didn't bother with the rest of his output until very recently. But I thought his book on 19th century wargaming was terrific and so decided to give his other books a chance; I'm glad I did. This current volume is a very good book that gamers interested in the period would do well to read.



This is not a 'classic' wargaming book ó it was released in 2009 ó but it is written in the style of the old classics and self-consciously tips its hat to the likes of Featherstone and Wesencraft throughout, so I think it does properly belong alongside them.

Part 1 comprises nearly a third of the page count and is a historical overview, nicely written, clear and accessible. Essentially, we have an overview of warfare in the *Ancien Regime* and a comparison with the newer style of the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras as well as a potted history. If you know the period already then you won't learn anything here but it's nicely presented all the same.

Part 2 is two fairly short chapters on Napoleonic strategy and tactics. This is very strong. I've read about these topics before ó many times ó but Thomas presents the subjects in an

extremely accessible fashion; you will not read anywhere a better description of column versus line or the march on the central position, for example. Old myths and tropes are discarded without fuss or ceremony and the whole thing is clear, simple and unpretentious. The author should be commended for doing such a good job of this in only 25 pages.

The next chapter provides advice on how to wargame the period ó things to consider when setting up a game or writing rules for the period, such as units, formations, movement and firepower. Essentially, this chapter is the author's design philosophy for

the rules that follow in the next chapter. Those rules are simple but fairly elegant -- very much in the style of Charles Wesencraft.

Then we have a very useful chapter on army lists. As in other books by Neil Thomas, each entry gives you a list of unit types that comprise a given army and how many you would typically field; we are also told the quality, formation and weaponry of each troop type and there are some special rules for each force. Armies covered are Revolutionary French 1792-5, Republican French 1796-1800, Imperial French 1805-7, Iberian French 1808-14, French Grande Armee 1809-12, French 1813, French 1814, French 1815, Old Regime Army which covers the Austrians up to 1799, Prussians up to 1806 and British up to 1800. Still with me? Ok, then we have Austrian 1800-15, Russian 1792-1815, Prussian 1813-15, Anglo-Portuguese 1809-14, Anglo-Allied at Waterloo, Spanish 1792-1815 and Portuguese 1792-1808. We finish with a couple of unusual armies ó Ottoman 1798-1815 and Mameluke 1798-9. This chapter could easily have been very dry but it isn't. In fact, it gives the reader a good overview of the period. Cleverly done, in my view.

There follows a short chapter on setting up a wargame followed by a longer chapter which takes us step by step through an example battle between the French and Russians. The book ends with an excellent bibliography and a nice, if limited, chapter about figure ranges and scales.

A great book. If you are new to Napoleonics you should definitely buy this book. If you already know the period well then you may not learn anything new but I maintain that that it is still worth your while because everything is presented with such verve and clarity. The rules will not be to everyone's taste, some gamers will find them simplistic. That would I think be harsh ó they are certainly simple but they have an internal logic that hangs together quite well and they do not pretend to be anything other than simple old-school fun, while nevertheless still trying to retain genuine period flavour ó not perfect but you could do worse. I think the army lists are great, you don't need to stick to them but they do provide a good flavour for the period.

Highly recommended.

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