

Review of 'Military Modelling Guide to Siege Wargames'

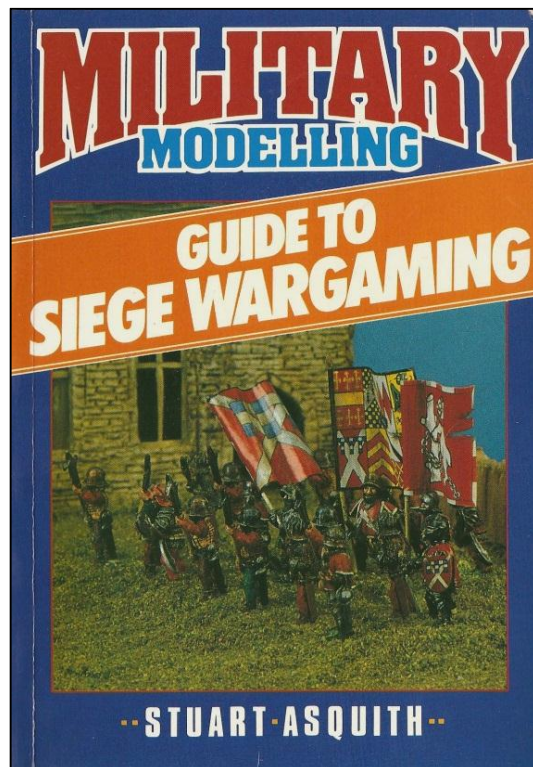
By Stuart Asquith

Review by Jonathan Aird

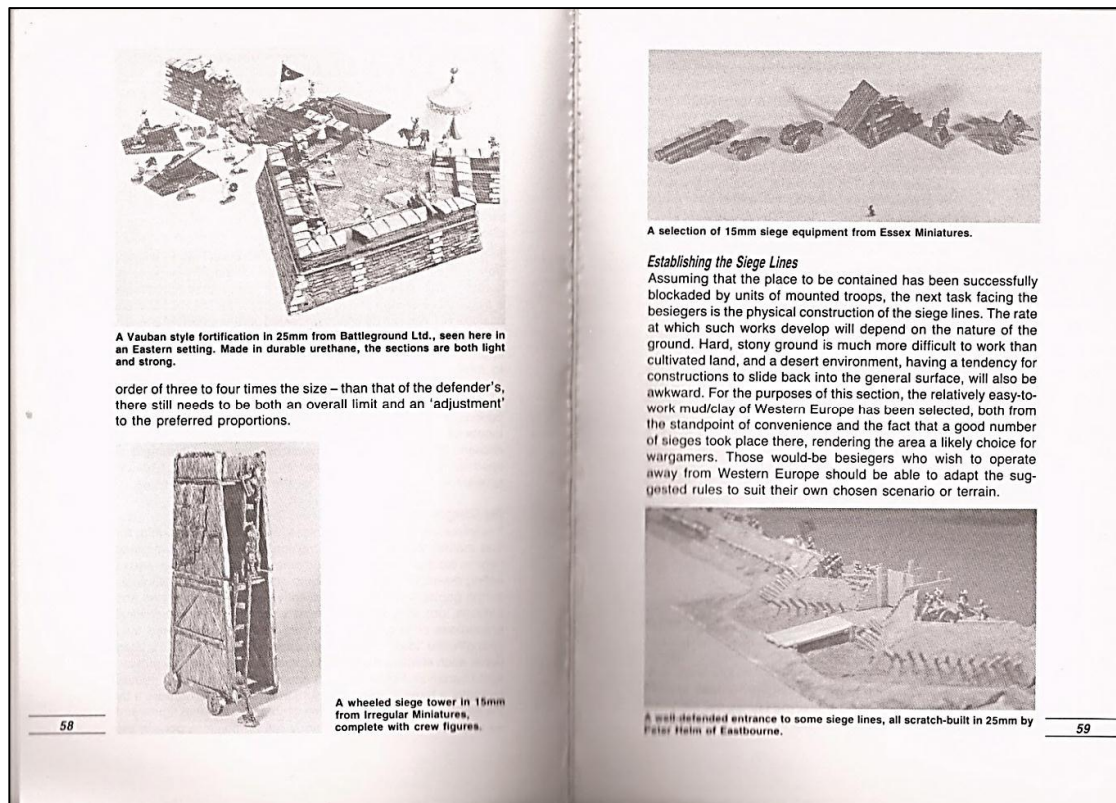
Following on from the success of the "Guide to Wargaming" (the subject of a previous review), Stuart Asquith went on to look at various aspects of wargaming in more detail. This book is, I think, unique in the wargaming literature in that it focuses totally on sieges through the ages. That these are a relatively neglected area of wargaming -- despite there being more historical sieges than there were ever pitched battles -- is not wholly surprising. Sieges can take a long time with little happening other than the defenders starving and the attackers digging earthworks and dropping like flies from disease. Where they are gamed, there is a concentration on those moments when either an assault on the defences or a breakout by the besieged is attempted. And yet they have many things in their favour -- not least that with their rather static nature they are wargames that are ideally suited to solo play.

After a brief introduction setting the scene for the book, there are two main chapters, both of which describe the various stages of a siege. The first of these -- bearing the title "The Strategical View" -- covers all the practical features of putting a siege wargame together. One requires something to besiege -- will it be bought or home-constructed? How will trenches and earthworks be represented? What types of siege engines exist and which ones are appropriate to the period gamed? How will the accoutrements of an assault (breaches in walls, scaling ladders, undermining etc.) be represented? There is also some discussion on how to scale down the siege, both in physical extent (so that it will fit on the wargame's table) and in time (so that, unlike a real siege, it does not require months or even years to complete).

The second main chapter is "A Siege In Detail," and this addresses the actual gaming factors involved in playing out a siege on the wargame table. It is worth noting that the term siege is quite loosely appended to various actions, including the storming of battlefield redoubts, so some aspects covered here will not always apply. Subjects raised include: how to decide how big the garrison is, how long does it take to dig a trench, what ratio of skilled engineers to ordinary men is required, how to handle logistical features, such as food and ammunition supply, and what are the most suitable methods of gaming the actual assault on a fortification. There are a number of rule or decision making suggestions made in this chapter but in general the advice is more along the lines of "this needs to be considered and these are ways that you could approach it".



The last large major chunk of the book is an historical survey of sieges through the ages -- this makes up about 30 percent of the book. This survey starts with the siege of Alesia -- and not, perhaps surprisingly, an older siege, such as that of Troy -- and moves forward through the centuries with other exemplars of each "period" of history. For each chosen siege, there is an overview of the action and a section of "wargaming notes" which provide hints on the buildings and other terrain required, along with a selection of further reading for more detail. The book is wrapped up with a general guide to availability of suitable wargame figures and scenery, and some suggestions on further reading.



There are plenty of black-and-white illustrations throughout the book showing the wide variety of buildings and scenic terrain pieces that were available, as well as many of the suitable figures from the manufacturers of the time. Many of these are still available -- Irregular Miniatures were noted for their siege equipment ranges, and companies such as Gallia are still in the business of providing the wargamer with towers and walkways!

This is an entertaining and stimulating read but, like the "Guide to Wargaming," it does have some faults. The history section is really too light, and it is disappointing to not find any detailed siege specific rules in the book. Older readers may recall that many years ago Games Workshop produced a boxed "mighty fortress" (a picture of which is featured in the Guide!) and, at the same time, issued a book of siege rules and scenarios. There is a real feeling that something along these lines should have been included.

Not, then, an essential purchase, but if a copy can be picked up at a reasonable price (Amazon UK currently has copies starting from £20, which in all honesty seems a bit steep) then it's worth getting hold of.

Argus Books, 1990

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