

‘Naval War Games’

By Donald Featherstone

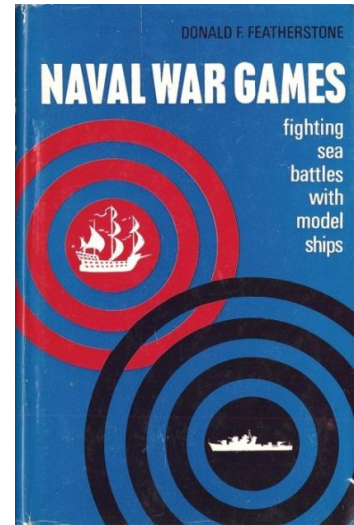
Review by Jonathan Aird

By the time this book appeared there was much – even approaching an information overload – for the wargamer who dabbled only in land battles. However, as Featherstone remarked early on in the introduction to this book (and recalling it was aimed primarily at a British wargaming audience):

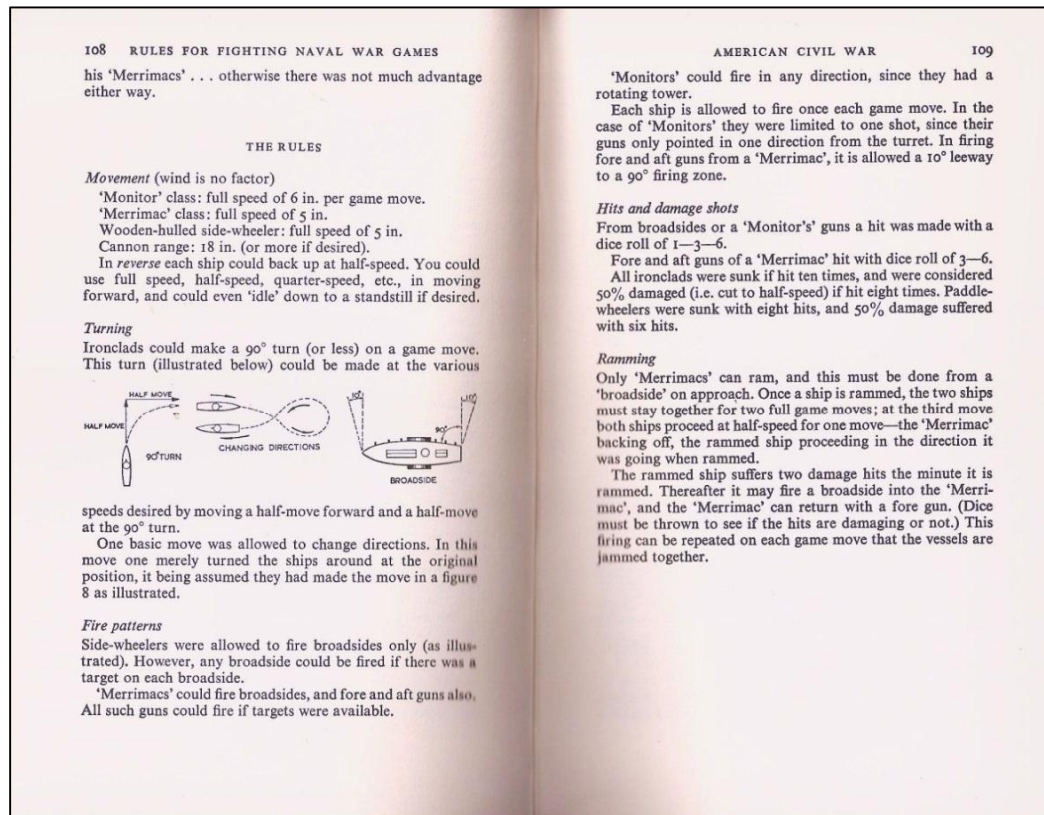
“dormant within the breasts of most Englishmen lies the urge to ‘go down to the sea in ships’ – which is probably the reason for the unsurpassed reputation that the past and present British navy has won....That being the case, it might be claimed that every one of us has a sneaking desire to act the admiral...this command can be attained through the use of model ships in naval war games”

In this one volume Donald Featherstone (with help from other gamers of the day) proceeded to lay out the methods for naval gaming from ships of the earliest times up to the modern day. Alongside this information was advice on larger campaign map games and essential information on how to procure (or build!) a navy of one’s very own. This was presented in five main sections of two to nine chapters each, under the following headings:

1. Games using model ships – covering tactical training games, as well as schoolyard favourites, such as “Battleships,” as well as similar commercially available (at the time) board games of a like complexity.
2. Model ships for War Games – covering both commercial sources (very limited – and often requiring an ability to assemble and convert plastic models) and, more usefully perhaps, home construction – wherein it is shown that with a ready supply of wood, card, paper and glue the wargamer can produce anything from a fleet of galleys right up to modern battleships. This demonstrates admirably the modelling dedication the wargamer required in the mid-1960s.
3. Rules for fighting Naval War Games – there are nine sets presented, from ancient galleys through the age of sail (several sets for this) and on to more modern naval warfare. Many of the rules are reprinted from the thinking of other well-known wargamers of the period – Tony Bath’s Ancient rules are used, as are Jack Scruby’s American Civil War rules (see the photo below). Most of these rules run to only a few pages at most, but typically offer an entertaining fast-moving game as devoid of paperwork as can be managed.
4. The pioneers of Naval War Gaming – a few chapters on the rules and games of Fred Jane and the legendary Fletcher Pratt ballroom games (in which as the astute reader will have guessed a whole ballroom was hired and used for the manoeuvring of the fleets). Oh to have had the opportunity to play in one of those games!



5. Operational Choices – a guide to the best sea wars to refight, and a chapter on integrating naval and land battles to allow for Combined Operations, including a wonderful battle report of a French versus British battle across a lake using land and sea forces.



Jack Scruby's ACW rules – in full !

A final short section offers some advice on researching various periods of naval warfare with a fairly extensive reading list now (mostly) unavailable or superseded by more modern thinking.

The book is profusely illustrated with photographs that have all the period charm you'd expect from wargaming setups of almost 50 years ago, as well as perhaps the most shocking models you'll ever see pressed into wargaming service – Featherstone's own ACW ironclads constructed rapidly when he suddenly required to play out a river encounter. A reminder that the modern gamer should never bemoan the availability of this or that figure range – really, we are spoilt for choice compared to the founding fathers of the hobby!

