

# **‘Wargaming Airborne Operations’**

**By Donald Featherstone**

**Review by Paul Le Long**

What I’m reviewing here is the original book which came out in 1977 – there is a reprint available from John Curry’s History of Wargaming Project but since I don’t have that I will confine myself to the original.

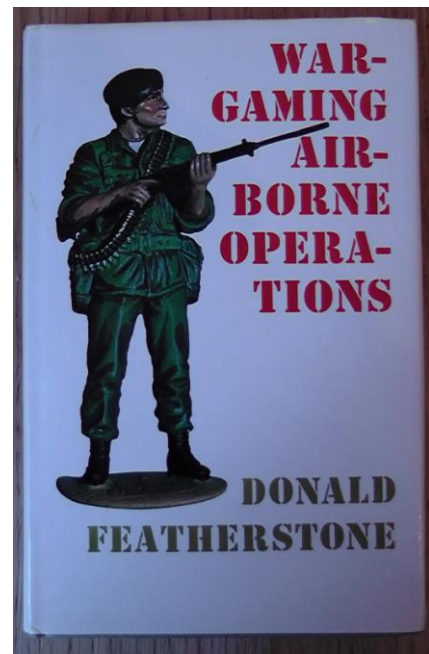
This is another very good book from the Featherstone stable with a mixture of history, military theory, wargaming advice, rules and a thorough examination of the two greatest airborne operations of World War II – Crete and Arnhem. It also has lots of lovely, evocative photographs of wargames in action with soldiers that I suspect many of us owned 30 years ago.

I will simply go through the book in order to show you what you get. We start with a very short chapter on the early history of airborne forces which focuses on the Germans and Soviets before embarking on a much longer chapter examining the formation of allied airborne units – mostly British and American. This is all nicely written and interesting material. Chapter Three is “Factors Controlling the Employment of Airborne Forces,” which is a fascinating (if short) discussion of military theory.

Then we have chapters on gliders, parachutes, dress and equipment, pathfinders and dropping supplies. Some of these are quite short but there is nevertheless plenty of information and data here. This is followed by a very long chapter (40 pages) on airborne operations in Europe in WWII – this is a narrative history which I suspect many readers will already know; nevertheless, it’s nicely written and informative.

This is followed by two long and very detailed chapters on the German airborne assault on Crete (1941) and the allied operation Market Garden (1944). Between them, these chapters cover nearly 100 pages, which is approaching half the book. They are narrative accounts, again well written, and illustrated with evocative photographs of wargames in progress with Airfix figures and vehicles.

The last 50 or so pages of the book are some of the best – a chapter of advice on how to wargame Crete and Market Garden (Arnhem) specifically and a chapter on reproducing airborne operations generally on the tabletop. There are rules suggestions peppering these chapters as well as more generalised advice on transferring certain



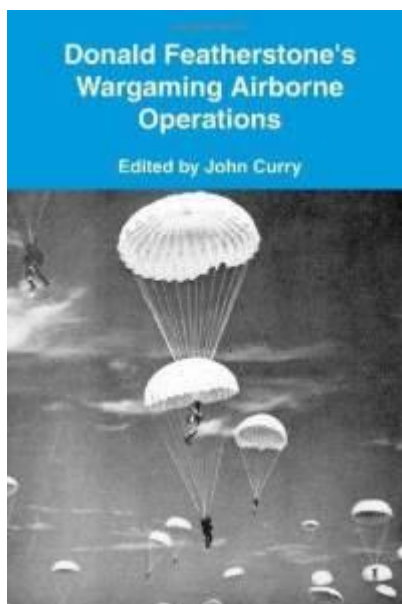
technical aspects (like glider landings for example) to the wargames table. It's all a little "old school" for my taste and there is some material recycled from other Featherstone books and there is the usual emphasis on familiar topics and mechanisms like chance cards and military possibilities but I think it works well enough and even if you don't follow the suggestions or adopt the mechanisms in their entirety, they should nevertheless provide inspiration. The point is not that you need to take on all the advice in a slavish fashion – so long as you incorporate all of the elements set out by the author (parachute landings, how much equipment can you pack into a glider, what equipment will the airborne forces have to hand once on the ground and so on), you will end up with a game full of flavour.

Whether you like this book depends I suspect (apart from an interest in airborne operations, obviously) on how much you already know about the battles described here. The narratives of Crete and Arnhem are very good, but if you already know this stuff well then you will not gain much here. Similarly, the earlier chapters on dress, equipment, parachutes and so on are all good but many modern gamers may well know a lot of this already. If, however, you have an interest in this aspect of warfare but are relatively new to it then this book is invaluable. In any case I think this book is a handy reference even for those already familiar with the subject.

I think this is a very good book - accessible, clear and quite evocative in places, both in terms of the historical narrative and the photographs of old Airfix soldiers. Strongly recommended for novices in airborne warfare and recommended for veterans as a handy reference tool and nostalgia trip.

Details:

- **Hardcover:** 250 pages
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The original is available on Amazon for £2.56.

There is a John Curry reprint available for £13.46/\$21

