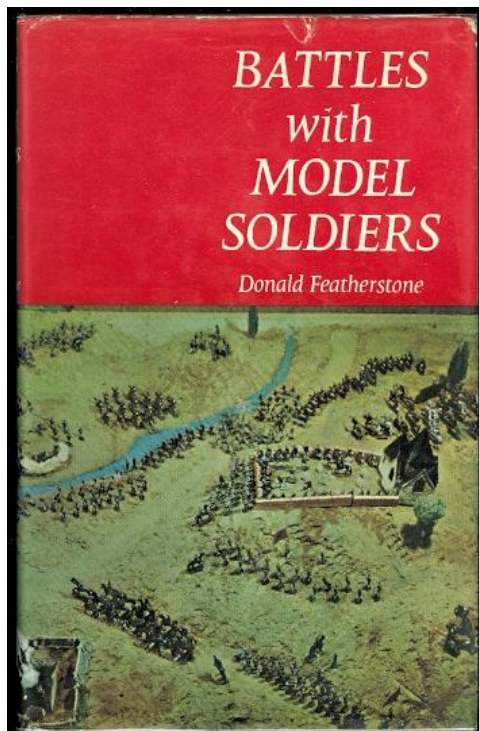


‘Battles with Model Soldiers’

By Donald Featherstone

Review by Paul Le Long

This is a book of two parts – the first is a “how to” of wargaming and the second is a brief overview of wargaming periods. Let’s look at the chapters in order.



We start off with a short chapter on “What Is Wargaming” which will present no surprises to most readers. Then we have a very long chapter entitled “The Three ‘S’s’ of Battling With Model Soldiers.” The ‘S’s’ are Soldiers, Scenery and Situations. I suspect that you will learn nothing here either, but this chapter is a lovely nostalgia trip now – the section on soldiers talks mostly about Airfix plastics, even providing a list of all Airfix soldiers so far produced by 1970. There is a discussion about converting figures and painting them. The scenery section is mostly concerned with constructing your own scenery and wargames table. Later on in the book, there is another chapter on how to build scenic boards – a mini wargame table really. This is all good if you’re looking for a bit of nostalgia because it takes you back to an era where the ethos was far more “do-it-yourself.” This is followed by the situations section which is really advice for the novice on how to conduct a wargame – using Movement, Missiles and Melees as the main focus.

Chapters 3 and 4 are about scenarios. The advice here is to start small and increase the complexity gradually; we are given three American Civil War scenarios, each a little more involved than the last. To be honest, I don’t think anyone reading this review will learn anything from this but for the novice reading this book in 1970 this must have been an incredible resource – everything you needed to know about wargaming explained from first principles, armed with just a couple of boxes of Airfix figures.

Part two of the book is an overview of wargaming periods – Ancient, Medieval, 16th and 17th century, Malburian (and 18th century generally), Napoleonic, ACW (plus Crimea and Franco-Prussian War), WWI, WWII, Modern War (Korea and Vietnam). All of these chapters are very short: Ancients gets 15 pages but most of the rest are around 6-7 pages. So the content is brief – generally a bit of history and a discussion of some tactics, some illustrated with diagrams of military formations and maps. There are suggestions on rules too. Some of this material is recycled in other books by the author. All in all, light, familiar but entertaining nevertheless.

There is a chapter though that will be of particular interest to SWA members – Chapter 6 is ‘The Lonely Wargamer’, an 18-page chapter devoted to solo wargames. Since this was two years before Featherstone’s own “Solo Wargaming” appeared, this must be just about the earliest mention of soloing in print and at 18 pages certainly the most in-depth. Particularly nice is the statement that solo games “should not be looked upon as the inadequate last resort of the man unable to find an opponent, or as rather pointless manoeuvring of model soldiers across a hastily erected battlefield with the same general commanding both sides and knowing exactly what each is going to do.” Bravo! He goes on to extol the virtues of the soloist having more time to contemplate his games, random deployment, chance cards, and using cards to randomly dictate the actions of a unit. Disappointingly in a chapter on solo wargaming, only five pages are allotted to it, with the remaining 13 pages concentrating on joining a club! Which is rather a let down after the inspirational “soloing isn’t a last resort” rallying cry at the start.



All in all, this book – though probably of very great value to novices at the time – is now mostly a trip down memory lane. That isn’t necessarily a criticism; I enjoy flipping through the pages from time to time and following this review I’m even tempted to play through the ACW scenarios, simple though they are. This book scores low on usefulness (to the modern gamer) but high on charm.

Details:

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