

‘War Games Through the Ages Vol. 2, 1420-1783’

By Donald Featherstone

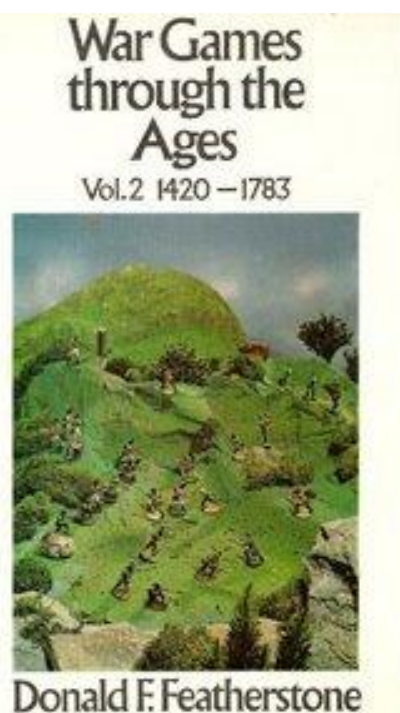
Review by Paul Le Long

Let's start off by saying that all my comments relating to volume 1 of this series (which you can find in that review on this blog) apply to this present volume. Basically, what I said there was that although the analysis was dated and old-fashioned, and a bit simplistic, these volumes are a very useful overview of their respective periods and provide a good starting point if you want a more detailed analysis.

So what do we get in this particular volume? The first 40 pages or so provide an introduction and offer advice on wargaming the period (basically the Pike & Shot era and 18th century), formulating rules for the period, a discussion about commanders and how to recreate fog of war. There are also a few pages on using 5mm blocks to recreate large battles. The book ends with appendices covering figures, magazines and further reading, all of which are, of course, out of date.

The heart of the book is a series of chapters (half a dozen pages or thereabouts each) outlining a particular conflict: Hussite Wars, Wars of the Roses; Italian Wars, French Wars of Religion, Dutch Revolt in the Netherlands, Thirty Years War, English Civil War, Dutch Wars and Wars of the Grand Alliance (1672-97), War of Spanish Succession, Great Northern War, War of Austrian Succession, Jacobite Rebellion, Seven Years War, American Revolution. There is also a short introduction to various sub-periods: Post-Medieval, Pike and Shot, 18th Century Linear Warfare.

As with other volumes in the series, each chapter is headed by a rather evocative line drawing of a typical soldier from that conflict. Then you get a discussion of the history of the conflict under review, as well as the tactics employed by various belligerent forces – accompanied by diagrams showing troop formations. I found these diagrams very clear and useful. The text is also well laid out, clear and authoritative. You also get a Fighting Assessment Chart for the main armies featured in each chapter – the chart covers things like morale, training, discipline, tactical system and much else and gives a score for each with a total at the bottom. For example, in the chapter on the Thirty Years War, the French army scores 32 points, Spain 26, Imperials 27 and the Swedes top the table with 41 points.





I'm not sure how dated the analysis is in this volume as it's not really my period, but judging by other volumes in the series and the fact that it's nearly 40 years old, I'm guessing that it has been overtaken, at least in part, by modern scholarship. Nevertheless I think this book is a really valuable introduction to the period. You get a potted history of 363 years of European military history, plus a very clear description of the tactics used by a wide range of forces throughout the period as well as an overview of the changing nature of warfare from the late medieval period, through the Pike and Shot era, and into the linear warfare of the 18th century. If you are an expert in the period, then you will have read it all before, I suspect, but if you are a casual reader or a beginner in this era, then I think the book is a must.

Recommended.

Details:

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