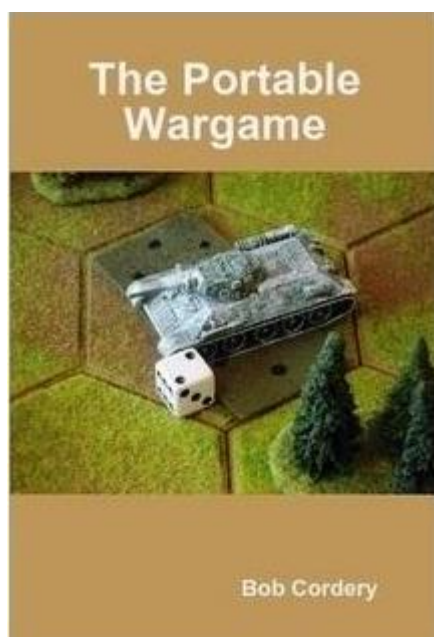


# The Portable Wargame

Reviewed by Arthur Harman

Bob Cordery | Eglinton Books | 2017 | £14.99 | hardback | 102 pages | ISBN: 978-1-326-90454-8 | amazon uk or [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com)



Bob Cordery will be known to many readers as the Treasurer of Wargame Developments and the author of the Wargaming Miscellany blog. He has also edited a new edition of Joseph Morschauser's *How to Play War Games in Miniature* for the History of Wargaming Project, and describes *The Portable Wargame* rules as "being mainly Joseph Morschauser with some extras of my own added."

I can best begin this review by quoting his own introduction:

"The portable wargame is my answer to a problem faced by many wargamers. In the modern world, where the amount of time, money, and space one can allocate to a hobby is limited, I saw a need for a set of simple, fast-play wargame rules that would enable most wargamers to fight a battle to a conclusion in about an hour. Furthermore, the size of the playing surface that the rules should require would be limited to what most wargamers would easily have available to them,

namely a 2' by 3' (or 60cm x 90cm) tabletop. The final factor would be that the size of the miniature armies used should be small enough for even the most time-pressured player to be able to put them together without undue effort or expense."

His aims have many similarities to those in Neil Thomas's books, especially the latter's recent *One Hour Wargames* (Pen & Sword, 2014), but there are several significant differences in their execution.

One is the use of a grid – squares are recommended for the nineteenth century; hexes for the twentieth – to simplify and speed up the measurement of troop movements and weapon ranges on the tabletop. A brief section offers examples of gridded wargames; another uses diagrams to show how movement and arcs of fire are determined on grids of squares, offset squares and hexes.

Another is that there are no arbitrary limitations like those imposed by Thomas upon the number of different troop types or the number of units that may participate in an engagement. Some of Thomas's rules, such as light infantry adopting a narrower frontage than close-order troops so they can manoeuvre more quickly are counter-intuitive; this is not the case here.

At the heart of the book are the two sets of rules - one for late 19th century and 'colonial' warfare, and one for the first half of the 20th century. Both versions of the rules are essentially the same, but with a few extra additions, such as armoured vehicles and self-propelled artillery, in the 20th century version. The principal differences are to be found on the Unit charts, detailing strength point values, movement allowances and weapon ranges. Each version of the rules is followed by a sample game with a turn by turn narrative, explanation of combat resolution and a photograph. The author has, understandably, presented rules for his favourite periods, but it might have been more interesting to have illustrated how *The Portable Wargame* principles could have been used to portray historical periods with greater differences in weaponry. Period variants will appear in other proposed books, describing further developments of the system, which Bob has mentioned on his blog.

Although the rules follow a broadly IGOUGO structure, the effect of both sides' artillery fire is resolved simultaneously in a preliminary Artillery Fire Phase. One d6, modified by no more than four factors, is thrown for each artillery unit firing and a total of 5 or more is a hit on the target grid area. Each enemy unit in that area must then throw a d6 and consult the Resolving Hits on Units chart to discover its effect. Once artillery fire has been done, dice are thrown to decide which side moves and fires small-arms first that turn. Small-arms fire is resolved similarly to artillery, save that machine-guns throw three dice and there are fewer modifiers. Both sides dice for their *own* troops in Close Combat to discover whether they are 'hit' and then dice again to discover the effect upon them, referring to the same Resolving Hits on Units chart used for artillery and small-arms fire.

The rules themselves occupy only a few pages, and most of them are easily memorised. The two charts and an *aide-memoire* of the rules, whilst not quite able to fit 'the back of a postcard', once proposed by Donald Featherstone as the ideal for wargame rules, would almost do so. The author uses them primarily for solo games, so there is a section devoted to the latter, with an alternative, 'Sudden Death Option' for resolving hits on units without recording the loss of strength points. The rules are equally suitable for two-player games, but their very simplicity makes them also eminently suitable for multi-player wargames involving much larger forces or for participation games at shows.

*The Portable Wargame*, with its use of only normal d6 dice, its line diagrams and black and white photographs, has a distinctly 'old school' style that many older wargamers – including this reviewer! – will find very appealing. Whether it would appeal to youngsters used to modern, colourful styles of presentation is debatable, but an adult could certainly use the rules to introduce children to wargaming.

These rules can be used with either small scale figures and models, or counters and a chessboard-sized playing surface, with simple, stylised scenery and terrain to create a truly portable wargame. Alternatively, they could also be used with larger figures, such as Irregular Miniatures' 42mm figures, Spencer Smith's Shiny Toy Soldier range, 54mm metal models or plastic toy soldiers in wargames on larger tables, a floor or outside in a garden.

The rules are also 'portable' in the sense that book itself is small and light enough to carry in a briefcase or jacket pocket, unlike many modern, thicker, large-format rulebooks. The hardback

edition of this book is nicely bound in dark blue with gold lettering on the spine, with a good quality colour dustjacket showing a photograph of a T34, portraying a Russian tank unit in a minefield, from the report of a game with the modern version of the rules contained inside. This was my first experience of a Lulu hardback and I was very pleased with the binding, so this book fully deserves to sit on my shelves beside my original copy of Joseph Morschauser's *How to Play War Games in Miniature*. The book is also available as a paperback, priced £5.99, and as a Kindle e-book, priced at £2.69.

The author says the rules "... make no claims to be an accurate depiction of real combat ... but surprisingly enough, when it comes to it they are no worse than a lot of other wargame rules."

And, I might add, a lot shorter and cheaper! Bob has certainly achieved his stated aims, quoted above, to offer a simple, easily-learned, playable game, whether it be historical, Imagi-Nation or toy soldier, and I cannot recommend *The Portable Wargame* too highly.