

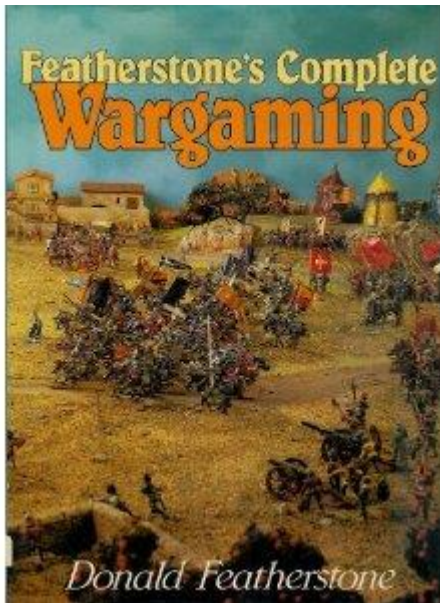
# **'Featherstone's Complete Wargaming'**

## **By Donald Featherstone**

### **Review by Paul Le Long**

If this were a record, it would be a greatest hits album ó òThe Very Best of Don Featherstone.ö Like any greatest hits collection, it largely consists of material that appears elsewhere in Featherstone's many books, plus a few bonus tracks ó in this case, mainly lots of new photos. In fact, it is an interesting parlour game to identify from which Featherstone book various chapters and snippets of òComplete Wargamingö are taken from.

This, by the way, is a review of the original book that came out in 1988, rather than the John Curry revised reprint which I don't have.



òComplete Wargamingö is jam-packed with material; I'll try to cover most of it in this review. After a short introduction, Chapter 1, òWargaming for Real,ö deals with some familiar Featherstone tropes ó military possibilities, classification of commanders, morale, time charts (keeping track of off-table movement) and chance cards. Tacked on at the end of the chapter is a section on surprise and concealment. (There are bits and pieces scattered around the book, sometimes in side panels, sometimes not, varying from a couple of hundred words to several pages.)

Chapter 2, òInstant Wargaming,ö is a good one, designed to get the novice going quickly with an American Civil War battle. We start with a potted history of the war, followed with a discussion of leaders, tactics, arms of service, uniforms and factors to include when thinking of rules for the period. Finally, we have some simple rules. This is a nice idea ó an entire wargames period in potted form, enabling the beginner to pick up the period with minimum preparation.

Chapter 3, òThey Came in Like Great Birdsí ,ö is an account of the German paratroop attack on fort Eben Emael in 1940, with ideas for setting up a wargame scenario to recreate the battle, together with some simple rules. Somewhat randomly, the chapter ends with a couple of pages on fog of war, which deals with smoke on the horse and musket battlefield.

Chapter 4, òThe Sand of the Desert,ö is all about Victorian òcolonial small warsö ó this time, more of a narrative with no scenarios or rules. Chapter 5, òBy Air to Battle,ö is all

about paratroopers and includes a discussion of the battles of Crete and Arnhem, as well as a few simple rules. Chapter 6, 'The Pure War', focuses on World War II in the Western Desert 1940-42 ó narrative, equipment, rules and so on. For Chapter 7, 'Great Grandfather's War', we're off to South Africa 1899-1902 for the Boer War. An overview of the war and wargaming aspects is followed by a wargame reconstruction of the battle of Modder River, complete with maps, terrain, ratings of commanders and a historical account of the battle. This is all followed by a few pages of advice on wargaming the Thirty Years War!

Chapter 8, 'A Battle for All Seasons', is an interesting one ó it is three scenarios, all involving a surprise attack; the scenarios are from the Hundred Years War, Peninsula War and WWII respectively. Another nice idea this. And what completely random subject do we have to finish off this chapter? Horse and musket period light infantry, of course.

Chapter 9, 'They Came in from the Sea', is all about commando raids as wargames, with St. Nazaire presented as a scenario. Chapter 10 is a fully developed scenario for the Battle of Kadesh, complete with military possibilities, rating of leaders, styles of fighting and a narrative of the campaign, battle and the armies involved. This is followed by Chapter 11, which is all about chariot warfare from Ancient Egyptians to Ancient Britons. Then we have three pages on weather in wargames.

Chapter 12, 'Wellington in the Peninsula 1808-1814', is actually more about British light infantry in the peninsula than the war as a whole. It's a nice discussion of the famous 95<sup>th</sup> Rifles and includes a description of the British Light Brigade's action on the River Coa in 1810, with advice on how to recreate the battle on the wargames table. We round off the chapter with a short section on built-up areas on the tabletop.

Chapter 13, 'The Macedonian Phalanx', does what it says on the tin with a brief history of the Macedonian army under Philip II and Alexander the Great, followed by a detailed scenario for the Battle of Cynoscephalae. A discussion of elephants in wargames ends the chapter (and is unusual in being relevant to that chapter!).

Then we have a similar (in style) chapter about medieval English longbowmen ó background, tactics, style of fighting and so on, followed by a scenario: Morlaix 1342. Random end to the chapter? The depiction of civilians on the table. Chapter 15 is all about the American Revolution, with the bulk of the chapter consisting of notes for reconstructing the Battle of Guildford Courthouse 1781. Medieval mercenaries ó what else? ó finishes us off.

Then we have some random bits and pieces ó wargames magazines, figures, books, a long discussion about rules, terrain, clubs and shows and advice on forming a club.

Ok, I know this is a long review but this is a big book with a lot of things packed in. Bear with me, we're almost there. I'll just round up the random bits scattered through the book. There are three longish anecdotes from 'Down at the Wargames Club' ó all

entertaining. What else? Mostly very short pieces in side panels scattered among the chapters: The English in the Hundred Years War, Surrendering and POWs, (Napoleonic) infantry column attack, colours and battle honours, Indian Mutiny, Crimean War, several pieces on planning a wargame (representing things like surprise and realistic generalship), several pieces on famous historical formations like the ACW Iron Brigade, armour 1919-39, Thirty Years War, minefields, helicopters, Boer War, wargames scales, painting tanks, ambushes, casualties amongst the artillery, armoured cars, modern artillery fire, French Napoleonic tactics, medieval French armies, revolutionary French armies, couriers and communication, Roman battle tactics, the Spanish Civil War, Roman Civil War, Boadicea's (sic) Revolt, Great Northern War, longbows at Agincourt, Napoleonic artillery, treachery in wargames, wargaming Pike and Shot, 18<sup>th</sup> century warfare, the Spanish-American War.

Phew. As you can see, it's all a bit random, with lots of information, some of it very brief, packed in, in no order at all. In a way that's part of the charm. And the material itself is mostly very good. As I said earlier, it's mostly lifted from Featherstone's many books so if you own them all, then you don't need this volume. This book is coffee-table format with lots of colour photos that don't appear in the original books and various maps and pictures, which do feature in the originals. I own quite a lot (but not all) of the Featherstone books but I still love this one so it has an indefinable charm; the randomness only adds to that for me. All the usual criticisms and praise for the author's work apply here so the analysis is a little dated, it feels very 'old-school' throughout, all the old Featherstone tropes are present, but it's well-written and engaging and just because the material is familiar that doesn't mean it's bad.

There's plenty that's useful in here and the novice could find some useful nuggets so though it will take a lot of sifting due to the randomness of the organisation. For the seasoned campaigner, this book has bags of nostalgia value and the coffee-table format is very novel for classic wargames literature and has great appeal I think.

Highly recommended.

Details:

- ☐ **Hardcover:** 208 pages
- ☐ **Publisher:** David & Charles (27 Oct 1988)
- ☐ **ISBN-10:** 071539262X
- ☐ **ISBN-13:** 978-0715392621

The book is out of print but is currently selling on Amazon for £7. The John Curry reprint is £15.95.