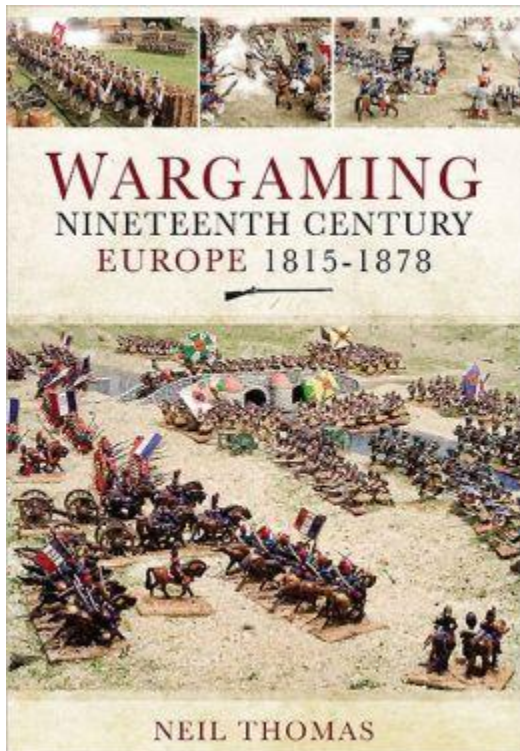


# **'Wargaming Nineteenth Century Europe 1815-1878'**

**By Neil Thomas**

**Review by Paul Le Long**

I wasn't intending to review this book as Jonathan Aird is due to review some other books by this author and since I owned none and had already read Thomas's 'Wargaming: An Introduction' and not been impressed I was content to leave this author alone. But I saw this particular volume in the library and thought I'd give it a go (without high expectations). It turned out to be fantastic as one of the best books I've read in ages. That made me want to review it so that everyone else could see how good it was and it also made me want to check out the rest of this author's canon as maybe I was too quick to judge in the past.



This is not a 'classic' wargaming book as it was only released in 2012 as but it is written in the style of the old classics and tips its hat to the likes of Featherstone and Wesenraft throughout, so I think it does properly belong alongside them.

Anyway, what's so good about this book? The period is an unusual one as the 19<sup>th</sup> century is a wargaming backwater really, except for the ACW and Victorian colonial 'small wars' as none of which is covered here, obviously. This book is concerned with the Carlist Wars in Spain (1830s), Crimean War (1850s), Italian Wars of Independence (1850s-1870s), various Prussian wars against Denmark, Austria, France, Franco-Austrian Wars and various liberal/nationalist revolutions among others. In the past, mention of the Schleswig-Holstein War would be enough for me to slip into a coma, but Neil Thomas writes about it all in a

clear, simple and engaging way as not in-depth history but enough to get you started and with plenty of practical wargaming advice.

So what do you get? Chapter 1 is a historical overview, as I say nicely written, clear and accessible as all in 20 pages so, not daunting or boring. Chapter 2 is advice on how to wargame the period as things to consider when setting up a game or writing rules for the period, such as the decline of cavalry, advances in military technology and the quality of armies. All very good stuff. Chapter 3 is a set of rules for the period as these are very simple but nevertheless fairly elegant; they reminded me of Charles Wesenraft's rules as

the latter is an author that Neil Thomas clearly admires (incidentally, I can't recommend Wesenraft's "Practical Wargaming" highly enough - a real classic and in my view the best wargames book ever written).

Anyway, chapter 4 is "Wargames Scenarios" which is an excellent chapter providing some generic scenarios - set-piece battle, flank attack, rearguard action, meeting engagement and a "mini-game" which is essentially just a smaller scenario for those with limited table space or fewer figures. These scenarios are very good and although not intended for soloists, they contain many ideas - random deployment, random force selection and so on - that would suit the soloist very well.

Then we have a long chapter on army lists which is also excellent. Each entry gives you a list of unit types (it does not limit you to x number of x troop-type - it's more of a general guide). We are told the quality, formation and weaponry of each troop type - Austrian infantry in 1866 are classed, for example, as average quality, formed in loose order and armed with a rifled-musket. Then there is a list of special and optional rules that apply to that army - the 1866 Austrians, for instance, have a superior rifled-musket but poor marksmanship and favour cold-steel charges. Each entry is finished off with a commentary (usually a couple of paragraphs) on how the army operated, how good it was and so on. By the end of this chapter, I had learned a lot about the period.

The rest of the book is about wargaming historical battles. The approach is based on not having thousands of figures on the table - most armies are represented by only about 10 wargames units. The author argues that so long as you maintain the *relative* strengths between the two sides you don't need to represent all the troops on the table. The author is also not interested in equal points forces or anything of that kind - so if the Prussians outnumbered the French 8:6 you just need to reflect that on the table without needing to bother about what the real numbers were or about having to artificially manufacture a "fair" scenario. All of which I found refreshing.

Each historical battle is described in the following format: historical account, army lists with a description of the armies, special rules for each army and scenario-specific rules and ending with "military possibilities" (a conscious nod to Donald Featherstone). The battles described are: Alegria (1834), Oriamendi (1837), Alma (1854), Montebello (1859), Oeversee (1864), Rackebull (1864), Nachod (1866), Kissingen (1866), Mars-La-Tour (1870), Sedan (1870).

The book ends with a useful bibliography and a nice, if limited, chapter about figure ranges and scales.

As you can see, I really loved this book. Nineteenth-century Europe has not been one of my interests, so a lot of this was new to me - perhaps readers who are more familiar with the subject would not be so impressed, but I can only speak for myself. I learned a lot from this book and it presented the period as an interesting one with much to recommend it. I will be wargaming the period as a result of reading the book - what better recommendation is there?

**Details:**

- ☐ **Hardcover:** 160 pages
- ☐ **Publisher:** Pen & Sword Military (15 Mar 2012)
- ☐ **ISBN-10:** 1848846290
- ☐ **ISBN-13:** 978-1848846296

The book is available from Amazon for £12.79.