



# Country Under Pressure A Wargaming System for the Australian Frontier Wars



David Smith



# Wargaming the Australian Frontier Wars

## *Modelling the Soft Aspects*

- Historian and rules designer
- Not about refighting battles
- About modelling conditions



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# • Purpose:

- What this session does
- Where traditional models fall short
- What the soft aspects are
- How they become mechanics



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# The Problem:

- What traditional wargames miss
- Defined battlefields
- Clear objectives
- Structured encounters



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# The soft aspects: What shapes behaviour

- Morale
- Cohesion
- Perception
- Decision making



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# Why the frontier wars matter:

- No fixed fronts
- Localised repeated violence
- Country shapes conflict



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# Country as Actor:

- Country is not passive
- Shapes what is possible
- Narrows choice
- Acts on decision making



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# • Asymmetry:

- The asymmetry is structural
- Mobility and knowledge
- Fixed points and visibility
- Situational strengths and vulnerabilities



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# Perception and Misreading:

- People act on perceived risk
- Perception is central
- Perception is often wrong
- Behaviour follows belief



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# Fear and Uncertainty



- Fear is persistent
- Not only in combat
- But in anticipation
- Tension should exist before contact



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# Cohesion:

- Cohesion is the key variable
- Groups hesitate
- Groups fragment
- Groups withdraw



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# Decision Making:

- Decision making is constrained
- Incomplete information
- Pressure and uncertainty
- Narrow and shifting options



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# Escalation:

- The frontier wars are not static
- Contact
- Response
- Escalation



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# Modelling Country:

- Country must shape play
- Not terrain as decoration
- But terrain as condition
- Visibility, movement, risk



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# Modelling Morale:

- Morale must sit at the centre
- Not a single break test
- But an ongoing process
- Behaviour changes over time



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# Modelling Perception:



- Perception is where tension sits
- Hidden movement
- Partial visibility
- Misinterpretation



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# Modelling Asymmetry:



- Asymmetry must be structural
- Different sides
- Different functions
- Different play experiences



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# Scenario Design:

- Scenario design brings it together
- Objectives must reflect behaviour
- Not destruction
- But control, survival, pressure



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# Example in Practice:

- A simple example
- A patrol in constrained terrain
- Limited visibility
- Unknown opposing presence



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# Why it Matters:

- Why this matters
- Better representation
- Better historical understanding
- More reflective play



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# A recap on what I have covered so far:

- The central argument
- Country
- Perception
- Pressure
- Human response



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# From Theory to Practice:

- From theory to practice
- Do these ideas survive when turned into rules?



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# Design Principle:

- The design principle
- Soft aspects drive the system
- They are not modifiers
- They are not optional



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# Country as a System:

- Country in the rules
- Not a backdrop
- But a system of influence
- That shapes the space of play



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# Country Features in Practice:

- Country features within the rules
- Zones of influence
- Overlapping effects
- Layered environment



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# Country Creates Decisions:

- Country and decisions
- No clearly safe option
- No clearly optimal route
- Every choice carries consequence



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# Morale as a System:

- Morale
- Not a single test
- But accumulation
- Pressure changes behaviour



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# Cohesion Over Casualties:

- Cohesion not casualties
- Groups degrade before they break
- Orders become harder to execute
- Function matters more than loss



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# Perception Mechanics:



- Perception in the rules
- Hidden state
- Restricted knowledge
- Possibility of misreading

Cohesion



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# Orders and Constraint:



- Constraint
- Orders express intent
- Intent limits response
- Plans do not survive intact

Cohesion



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# Escalation in the Rules:



- Escalation
- Pressure increases
- Responses harden
- Early decisions matter

Cohesion



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# What This Produces:

- Uncertainty
- Constraint
- Risk
- Limited control

Cohesion

Control



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# Thank you for listening:

- Contact me on [guru@gurupig.com](mailto:guru@gurupig.com)
- Additional resources can be found at <https://gurupig.com/australian-frontier-wars-resources/>



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Cohesion

Coherence

# Questions

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CONFLICT  
UNDER  
CONSTRAINT  
An  
Educator's  
Guide

Conflict  
Under  
Constraint

Country, Pressure, and Decision  
Making in the Australian Frontier Wars

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Conflict  
Under  
Constraint -  
a campaign  
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War on  
Gunditjmara  
Country

Frontier Conflict and Moral Judgement  
in the Western District of Victoria.

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