

I Fights Mit Sigel
Designer's Notes

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A Short History of *I Fights Mit Sigel*. The development of *I Fights Mit Sigel* began in 1980 as an independent project for a college American History course. It's been nearly a quarter of a century and I'm happy to say that the game, or should I say the system upon which that game is based, has yet to be "finished" (I'm speaking of the *Rebel Yell* game system). I'm happy that its not finished because, quite simply, I don't *want* it to end. My intention is that this game's design and development never close. Art is growth, it is evolution. *Rebel Yell/I Fights* (these terms are interchangeable to me) remains central to this designer's "art." As I look back at the other facets of my work I perceive the reflections of change. I see maturity, learning. Art is *knowledge*, and I know more about the Civil War now than I did 24, or even 10, years ago. How can I not incorporate that data into a Civil War simulation such as *Rebel Yell*?

I think I know more about game design too. About what works, what doesn't. There were plenty of problems with *Rebel Yell*, some of which sprang from the designer's inexperience. This HomeGrown version of *I Fights* tries to meet those deficiencies head-on. No more Programmed Instruction (one critic called it "Programmed Screaming"¹). Here is a specific battle over a generic one, "personal" counters (e.g. "12th West Virginia Regiment of Moor's Brigade") over "impersonal" ones (e.g. "First Regiment of the First Brigade").

I originally published *Rebel Yell* and *I Fights* as a HomeGrown design about 12 years ago. It remained an obscure (I think I sold about 20 games or so), but generally well-received design. A "quintessential, Mom-and-Pop, labor of love game" wrote Dave Powell in 1992². In 1995, GPG/OSS published the game to mixed reviews. Despite the faults, the critics found some things to be excited about; Advance Fire was cool and Assault was as it should be: a rush of adrenaline and blood. The gist of their work: *Rebel Yell* was ambitious, had some novel concepts, but was generally an interesting failure. Fair enough. In living I've tried to learn. So now the wheel has turned and *I Fights Mit Sigel* has returned, still a labor of love, and still HomeGrown. Back to where I started? To this I can only respond with an emphatic yes and no.

The Game Map. The map is scaled to between 80 and 100 yards per hex. Okay, lets just say 90 yards for the sake of argument. At first glance, units seem to move a little fast. Over clear, flat terrain they buzz about at 900 yards per 15-minute turn. In fact, units that marched "by the book" traversed about 1000 yards in the same period. This supposed ideal conditions, not accounting for blue-berry picking and the presence of the enemy. Regardless, considering that a unit has its movement halved during a turn that it rallies, fires, charges, or assaults, its game movement is a reasonable guess.

Weaponry ranges may appear a little short. Rifles, the primary infantry weapon, have a range of 360 yards (4 hexes) with a "kill zone" (MFZ of Standing to Fire units) of 270 (3 hexes). Taking

¹ George Pearson in Berg's Review of Games, 1995

² Berg's Review of Games, 1992

into account battle smoke and ruined weaponry because of bad loading technique (rifles were often gleaned from a battlefield with double and even triple charges) this figure is probably generous.

In other Civil War games, the defender exclusively enjoys the benefit of high ground. This is not necessarily the case in *I Fights*. Any firing unit, whether on the tactical offense or defense, derives the advantage of superior elevation (typically it receives a +1 line modifier for fire and assault). The premise here is that elevated terrain provides sweeping fields of fire against a foe, with clear and converging kill zones. In an assault, high ground supplies the attacker with an impetus bonus, as the force of gravity assists his shock. The rule robs the defender of a Wellingtonian "reverse slope" deployment. Low-ground units can still hide, but not for long and are at a distinct disadvantage in a fire-fight. Artillery on inferior elevations suffers too, as it sustains a -1 fire line modifier when bombarding units on higher terrain.

The Game Counters. The drive to simplicity demanded that all units be given the same strength (1). This is why the term "companies" is a misnomer. Sometimes they are what they indicate, but usually they are a composite of 2 or more companies.

In their own right, Civil War troops were every bit as colorful as their Napoleonic compatriots. The counters display the diversity of the Civil War "uniform" while facilitating rapid unit identification.

One of the criticisms of *Rebel Yell* was its lack of artillery weaponry. There are only 3 weapon types (Rf, N, H) and even these seem homogenized. The designer considered further differentiating between artillery, but decided against it. Creating additional weapon types would only snarl an already complex design with questionable detail. Sometimes less is more, especially in a battle manual that pushes 70+ pages.

Fire Combat. The system rewards multi-hex fire against one unit or stack since units suffer most of their O hits due to multiple "D" combat results. Units in different hexes may not be able to *coordinate* their fire, but they can *concentrate* it and are most effective when doing so. This is especially true for artillery fire. One or two unlimbered sections probably won't, or shouldn't, give your adversary pause. But a concentrated artillery site, especially on high ground, may be costly to approach or stand against. Your foe may be compelled to reconsider another way around or to abandon his position all together.

Assault. *I Fights* owes the assault rules to *Panzer Command*, a vintage WWII Russian front simulation from Victory Games. This multi-round, simultaneous fire procedure works quite well in simulating the gore of close combat. Attacking units are automatically disrupted after the assault, leaving them vulnerable to a counter-attack, flag loss, and/or leader casualty. Throughout the Civil War positions were rarely held by passive defense. Even at Pickett's Charge, the Union maintained their position only by a counter-charge. The defender who does not carry a reserve for such a purpose risks suffering one disorganized withdrawal after another.

Advance Fire. If the combat procedure is the heart of this system, the Advance Fire routine is its soul. One Civil War combat narrative after another chronicles the devastation wrought by rifles against units advancing shoulder-to-shoulder across open terrain. From the first play-test 24 years ago to the present, Advance Fire was *the* priority in *I Fights*.

A unit's Minimum Fire Zone (MFZ) represents its "kill zone", or area where it most efficiently inflicted damage upon the enemy. According to most sources, this field was about 200 yards for a unit with rifled muskets. Units Standing to Fire initially have a kill zone of 3 hexes, or 270 yards. If this seems generous, take note of the word "initially." If it fires once that zone is cut to 180 yards, and if it fires again the field is 90. It thus has an *average* kill zone of 180 yards, which is

about as close as I could get considering the 90 yards per hex scale. Also notice that enemy units constrain an MFZ; the closer the foe, the shorter the MFZ.

Advance Fire markers represent the effect continuous fire had on a formation's efficiency. In the modern era, the more a unit fires the more accurate its fire becomes. In the Civil War, the opposite was true. First, Muskets aren't the easiest things to handle. Loading and firing in ideal situations is a complex, multi-step procedure. Under hostile fire, it's a wonder the contraptions could be fired at all. Mis-firing, double loadings, even the launching of ones ramrod were not uncommon battlefield occurrences.

Secondly, the more a rifle was fired, the more fouled its barrel became. The Minie ball, whose base expanded when fired, theoretically scoured the bore at each discharge. In practice, this was not the case. Each firing left the barrel increasingly caked with the sooty residue of black powder and it didn't take long before a rifleman could barely ram his ammo home.

Cavalry. *I Fights* emphasizes cavalry as a dismounted formation. When its mounted, its probably trying to get somewhere. Fighting with mounted cav against any kind of infantry line is suicide. This is how it should be. The best cavalry leaders in the war (Buford, Forrest) fought dismounted, and so should the players.

By 1863, Federal Cavalry was quite adept at the tactical delay. They probably couldn't hold long against a concerted infantry push, but they could certainly force that infantry to deploy and waste time reconnoitering. This is one reason the design gives carbines (C weaponry) equal range to rifles. Most textbooks would argue against this, but considering the carbines rate of fire, and its effectiveness in the hands of skilled skirmishers, the designer saw no other option.

The Wider View: History vs. the Game. For a distance of fifty miles, from Strasburg in the north to Port Republic in the south, an eminence known as Massanutten Mountain, or simply the Massanutten, knifed up the Shenandoah Valley. At this distance the Shenandoah was actually two aisles, the Shenandoah Valley in the west and the Luray Valley in the east. An army could ill-afford to ignore either corridor. A macadamized thoroughfare, called the Valley Turnpike, ran along the Shenandoah alley, traversing prime farm and pasture land and promising swift lines of march. In the Luray corridor, numerous gaps poked through its eastern wall along the Blue Ridge Mountains, spilling into the Virginia plain and the flank of the Army of Northern Virginia.

The Massanutten dominated military strategy in the Valley for there was but a single pass through that tangled green partition, the Massanutten Gap. The pass connected New Market in the Shenandoah to the Blue Ridge gaps in the Luray. Possession of the Massanutten Gap was essential for both sides. Its control meant that friendly forces moving up or down each corridor were mutually supportable and guaranteed that enemy operations would be disconnected and poorly synchronized.

Strategically, ***I Fights Mit Sigel*** is a fight for this pass. If the Union wins, his force can run the Massanutten and then the Blue Ridge gaps, turning Lee's Rappahannock line and threatening his communication with Richmond. A CSA victory bottles the Yankee threat and supplies Lee with much-needed reinforcements (historically, this is what happened).

Locally, the Union player in ***I Fights*** has little incentive to maintain his initial deployment (roughly, the Church Road/Stone Wall). Why should he risk a fight along that line when he can withdrawal north towards his reinforcements (and away from the CSA's) forming a much narrower front buttressed by 6 artillery sections? Sound tactics perhaps, but from a Grant perspective, *bad strategy*. Given this, there is nothing to stop the CSA player from stopping the attack, hunkering down, letting the USA player flail against his STF'd, and Volleyed infantry supported by 18 guns. Again, sound tactics, but from a design perspective, *boring game*.

During the Civil War (and during most other periods for that matter), units that locally withdrawal acquire an inertia that is difficult to reverse. Often these tactical adjustments (see the Sunken Road at Antietam as a prime example) turn into a stampede for the rear that even the best officers fail to contain. Without handcuffing a player with contrived rules forcing the spirit of a *strategic* concern, both players should be compelled to fight – that is what they are there for after all. This is the basis for the optional first turn restrictions on the USA player. The Luray Road, and the Massanutten Gap to which it leads, demands the players' attention and it is here that the fight should properly begin. At some point, a Union withdrawal towards Bushong's is probably advisable. It is the premature retreat, heedless of the wider frame that the first turn constraints address.

Conclusion. What else is there to say? You've read enough. Go play *I Fights Mit Sigel*, and let me know how you make out.