

NEVER CALL RETREAT

Jim Hind



"A heavy projectile struck Jackson in the chest mutilating his Bible. He removed the wreckage, turned and waved it over his head remarking 'Good thing I've already read it, eh boys'".

"As his fourth mount was shot out from under him Sherman was heard to say 'Think I'll ride a mule next time. They're cheaper and it isn't so far to fall'".

"Pickett sneezed and was immediately struck by 32 bullets before his body could clear the saddle. The word passed round the regiment: 'Keep low . . . and whatever you do, don't sneeze'".

These gentlemen, are three selected extracts from *Battles & Leaders*. No, not the four-volume collection of memoirs of the American Civil War; instead, from Yaquinto's new game of that title, which proves on inspection to be a multi-scenario tactical game on its subject: a sort of *Civil War Squad Leader*.

Physical description: card map in 3 geomorphic sections. Two sheets of counters, in varying shapes and sizes, including several moveable terrain pieces (woods, hills, buildings) which are scattered over the map before play begins. A typical infantry

regiment has six 1/2" x 3/4" counters, a 1/2" square Colonel, and a full-colour flag counter, Old Glory or Stars and Bars as appropriate. The artwork shows a crow's-eye view of a line of men, the Colonel in front brandishing his revolver, the Flag flying gaily. Meanwhile horses trot forward over the green grass, while battery commanders haul lanyards on their pieces preparatory to handing the enemy their Red Badges Of Courage (small circular casualty markers); all in all, as bright and cheerful a scene of death and destruction as you could hope to witness. All backed up with charts & tables, 24 pages of rules, plastic compartmented tray, etc. etc. Physical production gets an '8'.

Game system: 1 hex = 50 yards, 1 counter = 100-200 men, 1 move = 5/10 minutes. A lengthy Turn Sequence, comprising Initiative / Announce Charge / Move / Fire(both) / Morale / Charge / Defensive Fire / Charge Morale / Defensive Morale / Melee. In practice, it's a lot quicker than it sounds, several of the phases being non-existent if you don't charge, for example. But be warned - it can bog down, particularly if you're up against the Rules Lawyer who insists on looking up all the funnies. Steve Peek is pretty good at writing comprehensive rules, but it can take a bit of rummaging to find what you're looking for. Not only that, the game mechanics are, to my mind, unnecessarily messy in a few places, which can slow things down a bit. But more of that later.

Let us examine the sequence of play in more detail. To begin with, initiative. Roll two dice; he with the larger total chooses whether he wants to go first or second. Here already there's a minor unnecessary glitch. If you both roll the same total, you have to roll again. What was wrong with 1-3 = Union choice, 4-6 = Confederate? I'm probably carping in mentioning it; after all, it won't happen very often, and is quickly sorted out when it does. But it still counts as a small wart on what is basically a fine game. Let us press on before I seem to make altogether too much of the point.

The effect of the initiative changing hands in the way that this rule implies, is a much happier feature of the play; it will have you tearing your hair out. I recall the time that large numbers of Union troops succeeded in penetrating the Confederate entrenchments at Spotsylvania, and the Reb (moving second this turn) had either to throw them out again, or watch his entire position crumble. Charging up and meleeing would leave the Rebs in all sorts of disarray, with a second line of Yankees all ready to charge in the distance. Nevertheless it had to be done or the game was lost. Sure enough, the initiative dice gave the Confederates a second move on the trot; by the time the second Federal line charged, the Rebs had sent the first packing, and were back in their entrenchments ready for anything. The battle dragged on . . . Then there was the matter of the dragging away of the guns at Gettysburg. There was I . . .

The movement phase has all the things you might expect; infantry in column or line, or broken down into skirmishers;



cavalry can mount or dismount, artillery limber or unlimber. Protect your infantry with a screen of skirmishers as you march up to him, or he'll cut them to pieces. Then shake 'em out into a line of battle, and off we go into the fire phase. Both sides fire at this point, casualties being applied at the end of the phase. The game features a pleasing variety of weapons; six separate kinds of hand arms (from smooth-bore musket to repeating rifle), and seventeen types of ordnance. It therefore comes as something of a disappointment that very few of them actually get mentioned in the given scenarios. If you want to blow him to glory with a breech-loading 12-pound Whitworth or a 24 pound James, you're going to have to do your own research. But then you are deliberately intended to do that anyway, as we shall see.

Firing uses two dice in an 11-66 system of several Casualty Tables of the type we are accustomed to in Steve Peek's work. Example: that 24 pound James we mentioned fires at an infantry

line at a range of 10 hexes. The weapon type/range table tells us we have 10 fire factors, on a basic hit table 5. The hit table is then modified by the usual barrage of tactical factors (+1 for a Crack unit firing, +1 for a partial flank shot, -3 because the target is entrenched, etc.). The casualty tables then present us with a number: in this case 34. Roll the dice. Roll 34 or less and you score 1 hit; 24 or less gets 2 hits; 14 or less, 3 hits. One infantry counter has 2 'hits' to lose, so the possibility of 3 hits might seem superfluous. However, there is an interesting Regimental Integrity rule which permits you to announce fire at the entire regiment, spread out as it is over several hexes, and claim your 3 hits that way. I like this rule; in a quite unobtrusive way it induces players to operate their counters together, as a team, instead of marching them all over the place every which way. Similar things have been achieved in other games by the use of commanders with a finite command radius, a method which can produce 'blob' tactics.

Here a regiment has integrity if all its units are in adjacent hexes. The flag counter is used to indicate the main body of the regiment, and hence define which, if any, of the units in the regiment are 'detached'. Detached units suffer bad adverse modifiers on any morale checks. Various other touches elsewhere in the rules, notably in the definition of a flank shot, go to make a most interesting attempt to encourage linear tactics instead of the hallowed blobs and islands. Good on you, Steve.



Meanwhile, charge and melee. One point in the charge rules which Steve, under questioning, admitted should be spelled out more clearly: at the moment a charge is announced, some (one or more) of the units charging must be able to reach the units being charged, at the time the charge is announced. A pretty obvious point; so obvious he'd overlooked it. When the charge does go in, the recipients get a defensive fire phase, then both sides check morale, and if everybody's still there then we're into the hand-to-hand rifle-butt bit. Each side refers to the casualty tables one more time, and then we're into the bit that could definitely have been done better. The melee, says the rule book only lasts for one turn, and must end with one side routing and running away so that contact is broken. So each involved regiment takes a morale check. If they both pass, do it again. And again, till somebody fails and runs. But it can easily happen that each side needs an 11 or 12 (total of 2 dice) in order to fail. So you sit there, rolling dice after dice waiting for somebody to roll a double 6. (Odd mathematical fact: there's a better than even chance that you will get at least one double 6 in 24 rolls of a pair of dice). It can take a long time. And if you're using the leader rules you then find the regimental colonel promptly does an immediate rally, thus preventing them from breaking, and you have all the weary work to do again. It's even possible to get into a situation where neither side will ever fail its morale check? yet one of them must. I put this as a Rules query to Steve Peek, but so far he hasn't replied. Until he does, I've rewritten this bit, for my own consumption, as follows. Each side computes its morale ratings, plus all relevant modifiers, plus two dice. Greater total wins, and the other side routs. Leaders may perform immediate rallies; but only once each per melee phase. After that the regiment is on its own. And if a regiment does break, its Colonel's Charisma rating (see below) drops 1. That won't give exactly the same results as Steve Peek's rulings, but it will keep play moving along much more smoothly.

Apart from the odd details, that completes the basic game. When you've found your way round that, proceed to add in the leaders. Their effects, as you might guess, are akin to those of Squad Leaders; DRM's for fire, melee, morale, and a movement bonus. But the effects are noticeably less than in the AH game. No bad thing; I had begun, reluctantly, to suspect that the armies of all the fighting powers of WW2 were officered throughout by

John Wayne. In *Battles & Leaders* the effects of the leaders are tempered sensibly. Each Colonel has a Charisma level, from 2 to 12. Levels 6,7 and 8 have no effect on anything; a Charisma 9 leader gives a +1 on all morale checks; 10 and above and you start to affect fire and melee. A charisma of 5 or less causes comparable adverse effects on the regiment. Charisma can change appreciably during the course of the game; probably the easiest way to do this is to draw up the regiment just within extreme long shot of the enemy (so it's not really dangerous), then strut up and down in front. Charisma +1 per game turn. Assuming you've got the time to spare, get the guy up to charisma 12. Then turn him loose. Because, any time his regiment take casualties, a colonel may attempt an Immediate Rally, as we have seen. Roll two dice; if the total is less than or equal to the Colonel's charisma, the rally succeeds. If his charisma is 12, then, his regiment will always, in effect, pass their morale checks. "He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat", as the Battle Hymn of the Republic aptly puts it.

These guys are now functioning in many ways like berserk Russians in *Squad Leader*. With one important difference; *they are still following orders*. No running straight out into the street and getting themselves killed. Instead, they form up in line of battle, charge exactly the enemy units you want them to charge, go through them like butter emitting Rebel yells, and - get themselves killed.

There are only two ways to stop a regiment that has achieved this position:-

- kill the entire regiment, or at least the colonel;
- charge them with a charisma-12 leader of your own. That will certainly stop them. In fact, as the rules are printed it'll stop the entire game. It's the situation I referred to earlier where neither regiment will ever break, and so the melee never gets resolved. I have, as I say, referred this question to Steve Peek,



and will pass on his reply when it comes. Along with his replies concerning a few other minor funnies. At present, for example, the rules are not at all clear about melee when a leader is alone in a hex, or the matter of rallying and routing of units which, adventerly or otherwise, become detached from the main body of the regiment (this last point being the one blemish on those interesting Regimental Integrity rules; pity).

These few loopholes in the rules are nothing that would detract over-greatly from the game. The thing that does, to my mind, is the paucity of scenarios. Look at the *Squad Leader* series; well over 60 scenarios published, and more to come. In Yaquinto's *Ironclads* there were over 20 scenarios, to which the expansion kit added another 2 dozen. In *Battles & Leaders* we are given - six. Of these, three are based on actual incidents (Little Round Top, Spotsylvania, the cornfield at Antietam), while three are bland generic "scenario types" (Partisan Raid, Delaying Action and Meeting Engagement); though if you look closely at Scenario 5, it looks remarkably like Buford's brigade during the first hour at Gettysburg. In response to questioning, Steve explained his reasons as follows:-

"... no matter what I did to a historical scenario one or more playtesters, using his own research sources, could 'prove' that my estimation of the various grades of the units was wrong... it became obvious that we would catch a horrible amount of flak from ACW buffs... we also noticed that when players were left alone, they preferred to play the generic scenarios over the historical ones".

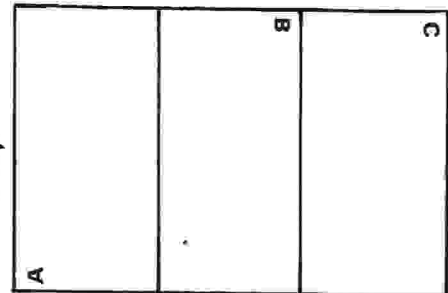
Yes, well. If you want a game which is guaranteed balanced, for example, I can quite understand you'd opt for scenario 6, with exactly equal forces entering opposite sides of the board, and all

that. That apart, am I alone in feeling that those little pieces of cardboard come to life just a little bit more when you have an actual event with which to compare their doings? *B&L* is subtitled "a game of tactical combat in the American Civil War". So which tactical combats in that war featured Whitworths and Blakelys? Find out for yourself, buddy.

Overall, then, *Battles and Leaders* is a good game. A very good game. One which, with a bit more shove in some directions, could have been a great game. Never mind - perhaps we'll get some more scenarios in the Expansion Kit. In the meantime, just in case you don't have to hand historical resource material of the quality available to Steve Peek, try these two.

But first, a Player's Health Warning. OK, all you Civil War buffs, NOW HEAR THIS. The ratings, from elite through crack down to poor, given to the regiments are in no way subject to historical "proof". They are purely subjective, a designer's device for blending simulation with the Cardboard mechanics of his game. If your subjective interpretations differ from mine, because your great-granpappy fought at Shiloh, for example, you are perfectly at liberty to design scenarios of your own. I for one will enjoy playing them. Meanwhile here are *my* subjective assessments of how various people actually fought on The Day, and I'm sticking to them. (There you are, Steve, that's how you do it). 613 SCENARIO No. 7

- Cross Keys.
- Mapboard Configuration. The mapboard sections should be placed together in the following manner:-



- Terrain layout. The three large hill units make a large ridge running from C3933-C2632. The SE edge of the ridge should have 10 hexes of trees placed on it. Hill unit 39 should be centred on A2712, with 3 hexes of trees on it. Place 6 building units within 3 hexes of A2605, West of the creek. The remaining tree units go West of creek "A", from 4 to 8 hexes from A2609. The remaining hills are scattered about boards B and C.

- Special Rules. Crop fields exist as printed, except where the ridge covers field IV. Creek A is not fordable below hex A2007; bridge 1207 is down. Creek C is the Shenandoah river, impassable except at bridges. Treat the railway line as a road in all respects.

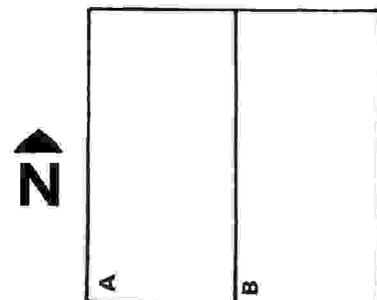
- Forces
 - UNION: inf: 1-cr-5-6, inf 2-av-5-7, inf 3-av-5-7, inf 4-av-5-6, inf 5-av-4-6. Art: A-a,B-a. General: level 7.
 - CONFEDERATE: Inf: 1-el-4-8(rep rifle), inf 2-cr-4-8, inf 3-cr-5-7. General: level 9.

- Entry/Setup. The Confederates deploy anywhere between the two creeks. The Union move first on Turn 1, and enter the map anywhere on the Northern half of the West edge.

- Victory Conditions. Each side scores points as normal for eliminated units. In addition the Union scores the full Victory Point value for each artillery unit deployed on the ridge at the end of the the game. For any Union artillery unit still on the map and not deployed on the ridge, the Confederates score half the Victory Point value. Game length is 15 turns.

614 SCENARIO No. 8.

- Sherman at Shiloh
- Mapboard Configuration



b. Terrain Layout. Use all woods and hill units, placing them East of the creek. Place one building in the centre of Hill 34, in hex A2711.

c. Special Rules. The playing area is East of the creek, which is running high and may not be forded. No units may move onto or West of the creek. Roads, and the railway line, do not exist.
d. Forces.

1. UNION: inf 1-p-5-6, inf 2-p-5-5, inf 3-gn-5-5, inf 4-p-5-7. Art A-av. General level 10.

2. CONFEDERATE: inf 1-av-5-7, inf 2-av-5-7, inf 3-gn-5-7, inf 4-av-5-8. Art A-av, Art B-av. General level 8.

e. Entry/Setup. The Union forces deploy first, anywhere on the board. The Confederates enter the Southern edge on Turn 1. Confederates move first.

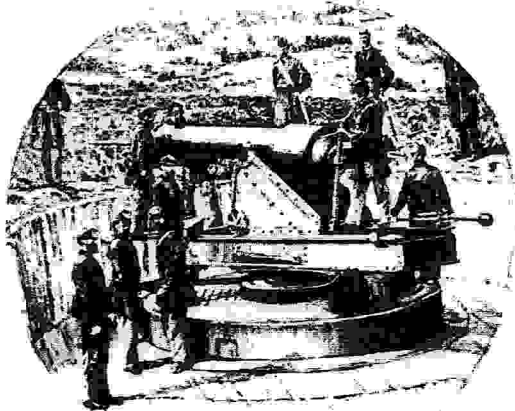
f. Victory Conditions. The Confederates get the full Victory Point value for every unit which exits the Northern edge of the board by the end of the game (exiting units may not return). The Union get the full Victory point value of every Confederate unit still on the board at the end of the game. Game length is 25 turns.

STOP PRESS

After the review article was completed, Steve Peek came through with his answers to various rules queries I had put to him. Take note of them; they count as Official Errata.

1. The movement rate of a Colonel is 12.
2. If two regiments with charisma-12 leaders get into melee, then ignore both leaders for morale purposes until the melee is resolved as per rule 120D.
3. A detached unit may not be rallied by a colonel who is with the main body of the regiment. If a detached unit routs, so does the rest of the regiment (and its leaders may not rally it).

(Comment from Steve: "this rule, while having some historical foundation, was primarily included to force players to maintain regimental integrity, which has a tremendous foundation. Rules Barristers 3, Peek 0. (Where are these guys when we send out rules to be blind play-tested?")

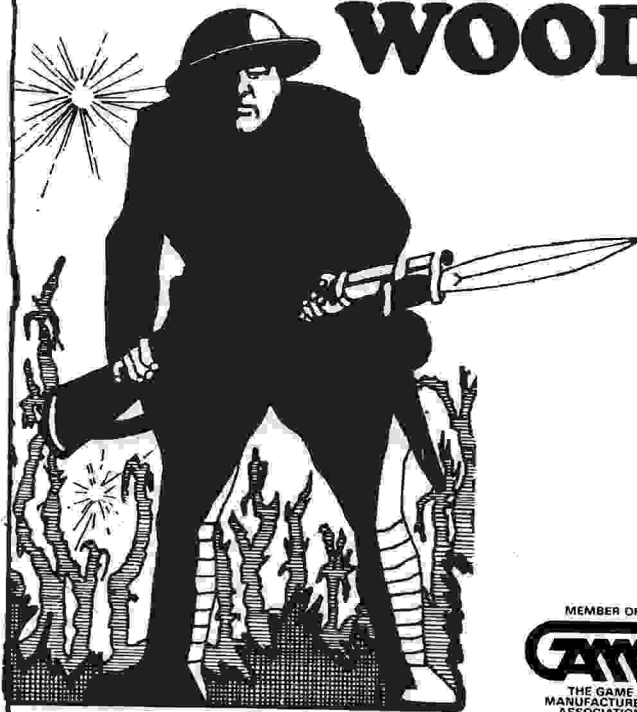


4. Melte when a leader is alone in a hex. If the leader is adjacent to a friendly regiment, he may not be meleed individually. This is because the "real" position of the leader is just slightly out in front of his gallant lads. If a leader is alone in a hex NOT adjacent to friendly units then he MAY be meleed, and cannot fight back. Any casualty result will eliminate him and if not eliminated he will immediately rout.

* * * * *

("I hope you're satisfied", Steve wrote. "Here I sit wondering if I might be getting a little senile for rules writing"). Kidding apart, the above represent four snafus in fairly obscure corners of the game system. Steve was obviously ill-served by his playtest team, they ought to have picked them up, but they don't serve to diminish my regard for the game, particularly now they *have* been sorted out. I have this vivid mental picture of Steve copping result 55 from his own Leader Hit Table: "Knocked to the ground by his third wound of the day, Col. Peek struggled to his feet and growled: "I'm gittin' damn tired of pickin' myself up. Let's giv'em what fer". (Wounded, Charisma +2, Troops +1 for this turn).

YANKS STOP HUNS AT BELLEAU WOOD



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