

Battle of Monmouth

By Russ Gifford

Background:

This is Battle of Monmouth, the first real clash of the rested and re-trained Continental Army in 1778. Washington was anxious to test his army against the British, and he attacked the rear guard of the British Army as it relocated from Philadelphia to New York. The resulting battle was the longest of the American Revolution, with many missed opportunities on both sides which the game allows players to explore.

An excellent game, Monmouth uses a greatly modified version of Wellington's Victory, with other features such as the Leadership and LOS from GBACW. The game gives players a feeling of the Revolutionary war's tactics, and the vast differences between the British and Colonial units.

I have played this game against opponents and solo many times. The beauty of the game is the highly tactical nature of the system, which is a perfecting of a marriage of the Terrible Swift Sword (TSS/GBACW) / Wellington's Victory (WV) systems. The regimental leadership and LOS are direct descendants of the GBACW system; Much of the rest is a streamlined version of WV. Reflecting the earlier era of the Battle of Monmouth, the troops are not as proficient, so the WV skirmishers and cavalry rules are missing, as well as the joined asymmetrical sequence of play.

Trust me, this system created a GREAT platform for American Revolutionary games, and I am grieved to say it is the ONLY ONE in the system.

The good news is, as an S&T game, it had a high print run, which makes it is easy to find reasonably priced copies – *sometimes as low as \$10 for an unpunched mint copy (sans magazine.)*

Setup and Turn 1:

While I am starting with the opening turns of the 28 turn campaign scenario with all rules in effect, I will likely assess the situation at the end of the 14th turn for the Monmouth Courthouse scenario. As to there are other scenarios within the game, plus an additional one printed in the S&T Special Edition. You can find it in the scenario section on this website (www.SPIGames.net)

Important notes: the terrain height is green (highest) then dark brown, light brown, white. Woods are the dark green, and streams can be crossed. Colonials can occupy woods, most British are disordered if they are in woods. Crossing a stream will also disorder you, which drops your morale by 2, and makes your fire effectiveness poor. The four crossings are victory point hexes, with points per turn occupied. Otherwise, casualties are Victory points.





Above -- as the Colonials march toward the battle. (Lee is in the rear of course....)

Below is the view over the Monmouth Courthouse.

Time for more details on the mechanics of the game.

Troops in March order can use the roads, which is what is happening with the Continental army. If flipped to line, they pay terrain costs. In March Order they cannot come within 6 hexes of an enemy troop.

Casualties are 1 point per 100 men, and most small arms have a two hex range and a one hex minimum range. You must be in line to fire.

You can only change formation when in the command radius of your Brigade commander (or stacked with an Army commander), and in the Formation Change phase.

Most Colonial Brigadiers have perhaps a two hex command range, but they also help on morale checks.

When in line, you face the vertex, and get one free facing change. Otherwise, it costs a point to change facing, and if you want to move, you can ONLY move into one of your two frontal hexsides.

The two hexes on your left and right are flank hexsides, and the two behind are the rear hexsides. Any fire you take through a non-frontal hexside is an enfilade, which reduces your morale if hit.

Failing morale moves a good order unit to disorder, and a disordered unit that fails morale is routed.

Morale is infectious, so if a unit near you routs, you have to check, too. Entire front lines can disappear in this game!

Fire is semi-simultaneous – and each side designates a flank to start from. The phasing player goes first, and players alternate down the line of units. Both sides fire at units in their range mapped by their frontal hexsides. If you are disordered before your chance to fire occurs, then your shot occurs on the disordered table. If you are routed, you aren't there to take your shot. Easy to remember who has fired and who has not.

After fire, the remaining units can get to the real business of the era – the Shock Combat phase.

But let's get on with the game!

Turn 3

So as you could see from the previous shots, both sides had some marching to do to reach the enemy forces. To appreciate the game, the troops must be 'Activated' by their leaders to be able to engage in combat.

Which means, to enter enemy Zones of Control, which for this game is the minimum fire range – ie, the front two hexes of a non-routed unit in line formation, or an unlimbered gun. (Different size guns have different minimum ranges.)

The limitation on the vastly superior troops for the British is as this is a rearguard action, they only have a few leaders available, to go with their limited numbers. So it is easy for them to manhandle the rebels, as long as they don't get surrounded by their rebel scum friends. (Routing without an escape path is a capture.)

The American troops have many leaders at the Brigade level, and 'Mad' Anthony Wayne is ALWAYS considered activated. Except for Wayne, most of the Brigade leaders are limited in range, but as Wayne was recently promoted, his former troops, now commanded by Lafayette, will also respond to Wayne.

Complicating things for the Continentals, though, Washington placed Gen. Lee in charge of the Army, and ordered Lee to engage. But the problem is Lee really has no desire to do so, and thus to simulate his vacillation the number of points he has available to activate the Brigade leaders will be limited by a die roll each turn. It might be great this turn, and near zero the next.

In the turn, we will see Wayne, always activated, forges ahead. Lafayette goes on a tactical end around - which will be problematic, but requires the British to also make a choice, since the Court House has a lot of points to offer the Colonials.

We also see the Colonial Militia holding the woods in front of the bridge that would give the Brits access to other important victory point hexes - and a path to get behind the army and perhaps bag them all.

I have chosen to not split the Colonial forces, so the north area could be exploited. But the militia in the woods can be formidable, and as you can see from this picture, they have stood, but the Brits are taking losses as the open order Colonials snipe at them from cover.





The end around is not likely to work, but we'll see!



End of Turn 4-

Bit different here. About a turn and a half later we have reached the start of turn 5. The Brits have been routed as Dickinson's (EDIT: NOT Rangers, MILITIA) drove off the QUEEN'S RANGERS but as they are British, they have already begun reforming. Since the British were not fooled in the least by Lafayette's threat to move around the flank - he has pulled back to help ensure Wayne's flank and the southern route is covered. Speaking of which, even Wayne decided discretion is better, and fell back toward the guns! The British continue to press, so we will see how it goes!



This is pretty much a totally different play through for me. I've always been super aggressive with Wayne, and really, while the Colonials usually win, there have been times where they are back at the hedgerow before they stop running. Of course in all my games I've never had Dickinson dispatch his attackers without losing at least a few points. The dice have been very kind to the Continental Army so far!

Turn 5

Monmouth turn 5 - Colonials are getting great dice - but it is a bit early in the game! At the end of the Colonial turn, Lafayette had moved up on Wayne's right flank to hold the higher ground. The Brits decided to send the troops to face them rather than hit Wayne – since they found Scott and guns backing Wayne would be unmasked if they did push Wayne back.

But in the resulting attack on Lafayette's group, all but one of Lafayette's group held! Worse from the British point of view, they pushed back two successive shock attacks! (The second one disordered them, but they repulsed the attack! That is close to amazing.)

Unfortunately for Lafayette the one Shock Attack that was successful for the British did break the line and will put Lafayette out of reach from Lee's command next turn. But Wayne can pick up the others regiments so look out! Lots of points being chipped away on those very tough Brits. That makes all the difference in future turns....



The other point against the colonials is the Brits found an excellent location for their arty. While the Rebels cheered when it missed the stack with its opening shot, I suspect it was merely getting the range. I predict that rebel Disordered stack will give ground either voluntarily, or by force this coming turn.

Speaking of turns, we have reached noon. The fatigue rules, which simulate the 100 degree heat of this daylong battle now comes into play. Any turns skipped now will play into the British's hands, since their reinforcements start arriving in five turns.

Turn 6

HUGE turn for the Continental Army - while Lee finally bottomed out on command points, the British 1/1st British Grenadiers that had broken Lafayette's ad hoc line in the south found himself surrounded and isolated. While he sent the unit to his front packing in the exchanges, Lafayette's men flowed behind him while the always active Wayne sent a troop to threaten the Brits flank. While Cornwallis saw it developing and strived to stop it, he could only disorder, not rout the key unit. The arty also could not prevent it. Now it all came down to the 1st Brits standing -- at least one Attack would be a flank Attack which would be nasty. With one point gone already, the 6 morale would drop to three once disordered.

But with the Colonial Med range arty on the next rise, the disorder would come quickly, and the follow up attacks would finally cause the unit to fail. The result is a surrender of the unit! At this point, the Rebels have a 20 VP advantage! Still a lot of game though!



The above is after the action that bagged the British troops. Looks good, right?

Well as often happens you break your line to scoop up the regiment, and everything breaks loose!

Compare the previous picture with the one below!!

The Brits were enraged and attacked Lafayette and Wayne in force. Though the colonials stood tougher than could be imagined, as you can see not much left on either side. Lots of disorder as the smoke and heat disoriented everyone. Most of Lafayette's command is hiding in the valley under the guns and Gen. Lee. Wayne came out better on his side, first facing down the Queen's Dragoons and sending them packing, then doing it again with one of the Guards. In the end the last British troop declined to Attack since he was outnumbered!

The majority of the rebels are in the slight dip between the hills, so the arty has a clear shot if the Brits Attack across the left hill. Scott has drawn a line on the second rise, and behind the stream, so if the Brits try to come that way, they will be disordered crossing the stream, then have to attack uphill. But attacking on the Brit right will be mean too. Which will they choose? Stay tuned!

Turn 8

Wow! The end of turn 8 in the Battle of Monmouth was a surprise. The British troops had pulled their troops back to the front and lined up shoulder to shoulder from Wayne to 3223. But the Colonial arty starts the literal rout, surprising one regiment and sending them packing. And their infectious rout took another troop with them. Then Maxwell's fresh troops gave the 16th Lt Dragoons a reason to fall back in a rout. And on down the line. Eventually only two Brits remained on the line - and the sent the 9th Maine to the back - but no loss of men! No points lost this turn, but lots of movement! Still, the British reinforcements hit the board, so this might be the Union's last laugh!







Weird turn. Goes very bad in north for the Brits when the Queens Rangers routs away, followed by Loos and the 1st Btln! Then it goes perfect in the south as Cornwallis helps stand up the 1st British Guards for a successful Shock Attack, and inspiring their following unit to push Lafayette and company out of the woods. But in all cases the Colonial rebels stood tall and inflicted damages. Afterwards however both sides decided it was time for a break! The Fatigue rule will skip the next turn! The time could not have been better for the English. Their many Routed units are suddenly rallied!

The fatigue skipped turn may really have hurt the Colonials. We will have to see.

Turn 11

Wow - the surprises continue in turn 11. With the fatigue break, the Brits managed to rally troops that Wayne and Lafayette had spent good troops disordering and routing. The further irony is Cornwallis had finally gotten fed up and led the charge into the Continental's line, and broke it - and in doing so, found himself next to General Lee!

Thus, the Continentals had a tough choice - do they try to bag the two British regiments, and risk being bagged in turn by the approaching British reinforcements? Lee chose to dress his lines and prepare for the onslaught. I think he should have gone for the win instead, but... so it goes. Thus, in this picture, we see the end of the Rebel turn 11. The only action was a constant bombardment of Cornwallis's position - and he shrugged off four disruption rolls.



In the following turn, it became clear the British could not have responded quickly had the American's tried to surround the troops. Loos had been knocked back out of range, so Cornwallis had to waste his points to activate Loos men individually. And the woodsmen holding the bridge were in effect interdicting the road for Grand Tactical movement, so the reinforcements were not able to come anywhere near the action by the end of the turn!



But still an incredible ending combat - Cornwallis is sent backwards as this time the arty finds the range. But Erskin responds to Clinton's lashing to try to drive out Colonials from the woods - and makes it look easy!

And in the American turn, the left side dresses their lines,, arranging arty and troops for maximum effective fire. The guns and backing troops have been placed on a higher elevation which can thus fire over the friendly front troops. Also, the friendly front lines have deployed behind the stream, which would cause a disruption for the would-be Shock Attackers if they come.

Different colonial troops are now risking stacks in an effort to even the odds if possible. In the North, troops have faded into the woods looking for potential flank attacks if the Brits want to charge the colonial front line.

Also note Wayne's troops are at a lower elevation allowing the arty to fire into the coming attackers if they wish to close. And Dickenson's bridge defending militia troops send one attacker fleeing, while the other regiment chooses to engage the Dragoons in a Shock Attack! The result is the worst possible result, but it allows the unit to reposition after the retreat at no loss, while shaving yet another few men from the Dragoon unit.

It is a mixed bag for the Militia, but the British will know they were in a battle today!



And this is the correct picture for the end of American turn 12. One Major point (pun?) is that the arty disrupted then routed one of Loo's regiments, but more importantly, in the risky Shock Attack the American's tried on the Dragoons, the unthinkable occurred - in the loss of 100 British troopers, Erskin was also incapacitated! A huge blow to the British!



Turn 14

We have reached the end of turn 14 - the halfway point of the campaign game. Had we been playing the Monmouth Courthouse scenario, we'd call it quits here - and thus it seems a good point to total up the situation: the American forces have lost 5 SP and the British have sustained 20 SP losses! Plus the British have lost one commander, Erskin. All of that is due to the Americans rolling out of their head, though once the Brits figured it out, they suddenly had the added difficulty of the Colonial army started adding their weight, and that was more trouble for the British.

In the Monmouth Courthouse scenario VPs count a bit differently so if we were playing by those rules, the British would have 5 VP for holding the Courthouse road to the map edge, and 5 VP for Colonial casualties sustained. = 10 VP. The Americans 42 VP. Total at -32 VP means IF this were Monmouth Courthouse, it would be a Decisive Colonial Victory. Again, much of that is due to my poor handling of the British reinforcements as well.

Which is a win for the system - better play = better results!



After the action: Averaging a full turn a day. It has been a relaxing way to spend my nights. I had really forgotten a lot of the rules and misplayed them at times early on, though only the handling of the Brit reinforcements had much impact.

I really think the Brits have a chance to win this still. The hedgerow scenario experience show these Colonials are about to start running, and I am not certain the hedgerow will be enough to protect them from the wrath of the British! I am curious if the Brits could get them running and roll them right off the board!

[Allen Dickerson](#) asks: "I'm scratching my head at this, to be honest. I sure don't have the familiarity you do with this title, but when I put together the VASSAL module for this (*cough* *cough* :)), I played at least one scenario and was aghast at the morale differentials between the Brits and the Colonial rabble. My impression was always that the British should be able to get fed up at any point, put in a half-decent attack and the Colonials would never recover from it. However, if the dice intervene, and 6s start flowing freely, then anything can happen: 6 is an automatic fail for any morale check, and is always the most stinging combat result. And how come the Brits haven't had a go at that Militia up north? They'll scatter at a RUMOR that Redcoats are coming."

[Russell H Gifford](#) answers:

Because the militia up north handed them their heads every time they tried. The British finally broke one of them but that was a sheer luck thing that time too. Woods make it tough to get a hit. Standing in the clear makes it easier to get hit. The British were the ones in the clear, and they got tagged repeatedly. Once you lose an SP, which each of the attacking Brits did lose an SP in those initial exchanges, thus their morale was no longer only fail on a 6. They were approaching the human threshold, and thus easier it for them to fail.

And the MAJOR weakness for the Brits is in the early turns, they lack leaders – and thus have to make a choice on who is active – ie, able to attack – and thus the choice is 'do I stage an attack on the main Colonial forces, or do I go for the main colonial line? Before the reinforcements arrive, the British don't have the leaders to do everything.

Same for the rest of the point you made: the Brits can usually Attack anything outside the tree line and make them disrupt - but they have too few leaders, thus too few activated troops to get multiple shots on someone. So if the disrupt, the only follow up to get a rout is Shock. And if that is into the tree line they lose their morale superiority (they disrupt entering the woods.) but then add this game's dice, the rebels have often stood up to morale checks even when they need a 2 or less to pass! And for the first few shock combats the attackers were getting it worse than the Defender's, depleting their morale level, and making it tough choose Shock as the next step. That made it harder to continue attacks that stretched across the board.

I can't say you are wrong on your assessment of the morale issues, Allen. While I have found you can win against the British, it usually seems tougher than this playing. I do expect to see the Americans literally heading for the hills in the next few turns.