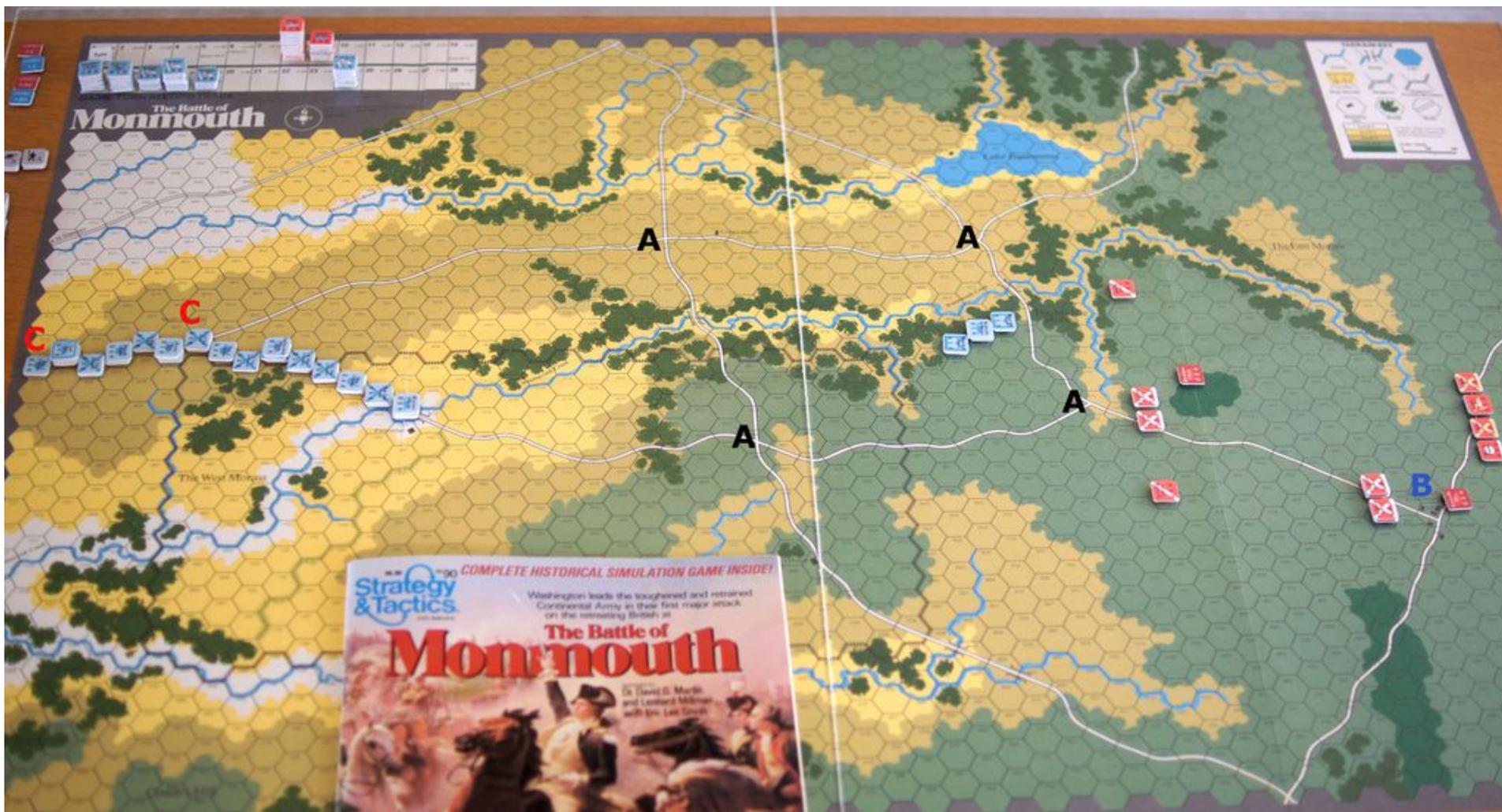


Battle of Monmouth Replay by David OS

I reacquired this game recently as I had good memories of it from when I was a bewildered teen subscriber to S&T only to discover they'd gone bust. This was the second game I received and it's not bad.

Maybe like a lot of SPI's stuff at the time it is a little bit fiddly. I get the impression that designers since then have got better at achieving similar effects (command, activation, etc.) with less fiddly elements. When it comes to pre-WW2 I could be completely wrong about that, as I have few points of comparison. Anyway... this is the first post of a series to this thread about a play through of the campaign game. Here's the setup:



The victory conditions are about inflicting damage on the enemy (pretty much 1 VP per strength point) and per turn control of the indicated locations: crossroads at A are worth points to either player, B is worth VPs to the Colonial player (in Blue) and the two locations C are worth VPs to the British (in Red).

Although the Colonials have a lot of units on the map at the start, they are typically much lower morale values (which makes them vulnerable) and their Advance wing commander Lee is pretty flakey so they can't reliably activate all the units and/or brigade leaders they might like. Being in command is enough to defend effectively, but activation is required to attack effectively. The exception being Wayne who is always activated (he's the leader at the head of the Colonial column). The British have a good commander in Cornwallis and generally high morale values.

Anyway. 20 minutes later:



(colors are a bit different due to lighting conditions)

Nothing too dramatic. The Colonial column has broken up a bit because Lee rolled badly for activation points and only the always-active Wayne at the head of the column, and Maxwell - heading up the northern route could use grand tactical (slightly faster) movement. Splitting the column like this may not be the best idea since Maxwell to the north is unlikely to be able to be activated much of the time, so will be able to defend, but not attack. The British advance from Monmouth towards the front.

20 more minutes:



Colonials continue their advance, and start to deploy. The southern column will aim to get at least some units into the woods next turn (the Colonial units are hard to dislodge in the woods). The artillery are heading south to deploy on that flank.

British continue their advance. Light infantry attempt to dislodge the militia in the woods with mixed results. One unit gets a Dr result and forces a retreat, but the neighboring unit survives a morale check and the attacking British unit takes a 1 point step loss. The other British unit doesn't do as well and is disordered in the exchange of fire before it has a chance to shock attack.

Chances are, I am messing up rules, even at this simple stage. I notice, for example, that the facing of Colonial Battery 1 (heading south from the main column) is incorrect. I'm pretty relaxed about these sorts of things unless they seem likely to change the outcome... so no do-overs.

That's it for now... more to follow in subsequent posts. Only 26 turns to go.
I'm feeling pressure now to keep this up! I haven't much chance today to continue things, but did manage another turn last night.

11:00-11:20



The main armies, such as they are at this stage are facing off along the southern road a little to the east of the crossroads. Actual contact occurred in the woods to the north, from which we learn that the Colonials, even mere militia, are not to be trifled with in the woods! They managed to inflict step losses on British light infantry, even routing one. The other light infantry unit along with dragoons managed to inflict enough damage to cause them to retreat. It's not clear what happens next on that 'front'. I guess the British will reassemble themselves and then maybe push toward the northeast crossroads, although maybe this is a distraction from the main action.

More than anything it was seeing these losses that caused me to hold back with the British a little in the main confrontation, at least until the units under Loos (a little to the rear) can get into the line. It will give some more of Wayne's units a chance to get into the woods. But of course, if they *all* head into the woods then they can't stop the British advancing.

Interesting choices for both sides.

For those who don't know the game only British light infantry can enter woods without becoming disordered. Colonial units don't suffer this problem, and also are a 'class 4' (hardest to hit) target when in 'open line' in woods. How the two sides deal with this imbalance is important, as discussed in this nice article: <http://www.spigames.net/MovesScans/Moves59/MonmouthSTSE1.pd...> whose sage advice I've already departed from!

11:20-11:40

Mostly maneuvering for position this turn. In the south, both armies have formed up their lines a bit more, but at maximum infantry fire range of two hexes have been unable to do much damage to one another. British dragoons are heading for the artillery batteries to the south - possibly not a *great* idea, but who knows? we'll see.

lot of disorder results, and having doubled up in hexes in advance of shock combat attempts were not able to deal as much damage as they'd have liked (only the top unit in a stack can fire, but all participate in shock combat, and you want to double up to get good odds, but you lose the ability to deal as much damage with fire at close range).

Disordered units can still shock attack (I'm pretty sure this is right, although it feels a bit strange) and the subsequent round of shock attacks saw the Colonial line evaporate. Although not much actual loss was inflicted. Wayne's stack retreated following a morale check fail due to a neighbor retreating, which left the 2nd British Grenadiers unable to join the advance. Maybe for the best since they are disordered and would be facing a relatively high fire-power unit at minimum range.

To the north both sides are just getting their lines in order.

Thoughts

Fire combat is a lot of dice rolling, often to little effect - especially with high morale targets. So far the Colonials have had *much* the better of the dice. If the die rolls had been swapped I'm pretty sure the Colonial army would not only be in full retreat, but they'd have lost a lot more strength points, and of course the British wouldn't be as disordered as they are.

Next turn the Colonials need to decide whether to fall back or to perhaps try to take advantage of the disordered British units.

Correction: Just realized that rally occurs for the non-phasing player, so there will be no opportunity to take advantage in this way. I've been playing this wrong, but there have been relatively few disorders before the last turn, so it's not a huge deal. Interesting and neat sequence of play.

11:40-12:00





and fatigue sets in, meaning a turn is skipped. For the blues this is (i) good because they can rally all those disordered and routed units, (ii) bad because it brings the arrival of 74 SPs (yikes!) of British units one turn closer.

12:20-12:40



With the assistance of the rallying afforded by everyone taking a breather, the blues rally most of their units and manage to get themselves into some kind of order, mostly facing the right way. Next turn blue will try to sort out command (get everyone in touch with their leaders), get into the woods, and form more of a line with a reserve than this multilayered ranks formation which is prone to complete collapse due to contagious morale problems.

With the Colonial army making sure it was mostly out of harm's way by the end of its turn, the British spent most of this turn consolidating, with a couple of exceptions. That dragoon unit on the left is persisting (with no success) in attempting to outflank the Colonial right. Turns out dragoons just aren't much good at firing, and this unit is out of

command range so unable to shock attack, which is probably what's needed.

To the left of center an exchange of fire between more forward units disordered the British unit, but routed the Colonial unit, which, in retreating through the massed ranks caused more disorder - if not for the rest turn this could have been much worse for blue. In the woods to right of center a small Colonial unit inflicted a surprise rout result on one British unit but was forced to retreat after shock combat.

Jockeying for position to the north continues, but it's pretty clear that blue should pull back.

Thoughts

The maneuvering in this is surprisingly intricate. There is an impressive sense of the potential power of outflanking. I guess that is down to the [Wellington's Victory system](#) from which this is derived. The lack of real cavalry in this make outflanking less of a threat - I can only imagine how devastating it is in Napoleonic.

12:40-1:00



Colonial army starts pulling back in the north. An attempt to rally in the south is foiled by that pesky British dragoons unit, which finally manages to land an effective blow on blue's right, which routs one unit and produces a cascade of disordered units.

The British reinforcements are coming on and the forces already on the map aren't really in a position to take on the Colonials now they are in the woods, so a stand-off in the center.

1:00-1:20



Some skirmishes on both flanks, which the Colonial army gets the better of, routing a British guards unit in the south (aided by a round of artillery fire from the batteries that were at the southern end of the line), and dragoons in the north. The British dragoons in the south wheel around and attack the artillery from the flank, routing the crew and destroying the guns.

Meanwhile the rest of the British army should be at the front line in a couple more turns. Between now and then a stand-off in the center seems likely to continue. Colonial units in the woods are not easily tackled by numerically outnumbered British units, and Colonial units are vulnerable in clear terrain.

Thoughts

In terms of VPs, the British are ahead (not at the table right now, but something like 18 to 14), which is a slim margin. That margin will increase for the next few turns with no prospect of blue retaking three of the crossroads. 3 crossroads earn red 2VPs per turn held. I think some of red's reinforcements need to head north to threaten to overrun the fourth crossroad and also to open up opportunities to outflank the main blue army which seems a more likely way to dislodge them than frontal assault.

A general observation: the Colonials generally lower morale can cause cascading routs as we've seen, but... it also tends to prevent them taking serious casualties - they head for the hills before that can happen!

1:20-1:40





Some imperial over-reach in the previous turn, on both flanks led to British units being routed in both areas although they will rally in the next turn, so little permanent damage done. (In the north blue is not activated because of command limitations, and so they are not well-placed to take advantage of this temporary success.)

The stand off in the center continues.

The arriving British reinforcements have split up, with Grey heading north, where they will have an impact next turn even if only to hasten a Colonial withdrawal. Agnew, Leslie, Clinton (the army commander) and some British independent units are heading for the center, where things will start happening again in a couple of turns.

These moves feel a bit like marking time for the British, in around four turns significant Colonial reinforcements will be arriving, making any serious attempt at the most westerly VP hexes unlikely.

This is a fun game, if a bit long (at 28 turns, it's hard to see how it could take less than 10 hours, and probably closer to 15). But it's a fluid and interesting situation, with both sides having chances to attack and manage ordered retreats.

1:40-2:00





I took this photo then had a change of heart and decided that Leslie's command should head north to make the threat of turning the Colonial northern flank more substantial (after all, it's a stand-off in the center, so the British already have enough there to hold). That's what the white dotted lines show - those units really went north, and I forgot to retake the shot.

Anyway... seeing that threat the Colonial northern flank drops back, while the stand-off in the center continues. The British start to get into position for an assault. Turns out that all but the southernmost pair of units do not have line-of-sight to one another, so there was a desultory exchange of fire with no results on either side.

Colonial army in good order for the first time in a while!

2:00-2:20



But not for long...

I may have miscalculated this turn for the Colonials. They dropped their line in the center back a hex with the idea that a British assault would have to enter the woods and would be disordered as a result, making effective shock attacks difficult. It didn't quite work out like that, although some die rolls did not go blue's way. Perhaps firing on would-be shock attackers in the open would have been better.

Either way, close contact was unavoidable at this point, and the British were anxious to force matters before Colonial reinforcements (just one more turn after this one) show up. The British advanced two powerful stacks into the woods (one along the road, so *not* disordered), survived the exchange of fire, and in shock attack dislodged Lee, also precipitating morale checks on either side. The advanced unit is potentially badly exposed after advancing, but it's not clear the Colonials have enough around to do it any serious harm.

To the south the hapless Scott was forced to retreat after taking fire twice (seriously... every time that guy gets anywhere near the enemy he's in retreat).

Further north, just south of the bridge, the British dislodged one Colonial defender from the spot outlined in blue (the first eliminated unit of the game) almost splitting the blue lines and making it highly likely that the northern Colonial defense will be outflanked from the south.

To the north a militia unit was also forced back.

Blue reinforcements can't arrive soon enough!

[at this point, a question from a viewer: Thanks for continuing your report, David! I'll be interested to see how the colonials fare. The only time I played (the Hedgerow Scenario), they seemed over-matched.]

[David's Answer:] I think they might be. Initially low morale drops by a further point every time they lose a step, so it's not uncommon for the base morale of a unit to be '0' after a few turns, which makes it, uh... challenging... to form a solid line. Based on experience of the turn just completed, I think the British should probably not have waited for reinforcements, and could have pressed forward even earlier.

Woods are critical, and they're not in the right places!

At this point, it's hard to see a Colonial win - the British are making 2VPs a turn for holding 3 crossroads and probably netting one more on casualties inflicted. They are already quite a few ahead. I don't remember what the VP differentials for wins by either side are, but it's hard to see how the Colonials can retake crossroads unless some seriously better units show up. British morale levels will get worse making them more fragile, but even so it's definitely a mismatch at the individual level. Morale levels one higher for the Colonials, or maybe a slower loss in morale per step loss (-1 per 2SPs maybe?) might shift things a little.

Still a fun experience though!

[OK - back to the action!]

2:20-4:00

A bunch of turns all at once:



I accidentally missed the next turn (apparently my camera lets you take a picture even when there is no card in it...) Also there has been one more 'breather' turn due to fatigue.









To summarize, the British are going to win the game - they've held all 4 crossroads (worth 3VPs a turn) for 5 turns now, and even with the arrival of reinforcements, it's hard to see how the individually inferior Colonial units can mount a serious counter-attack that has any chance of retaking those objectives. The objective-based VP margin is +17 to the British at the moment. They are also ahead on damage inflicted by +9, making +26. That's a British Substantial victory already if things stay that way. Red could consolidate and invite Blue to attack (which would not go well for Blue). +40VPs are required for a decisive British victory, which they get to by holding four crossroads for 5 more turns of the 10 remaining. Even if they lose one, they are earning 2VP per turn.

A lesson now learned: artillery are pretty devastating defensively if you can deploy them, which in the last few turns the Colonial army has succeeded in doing. The batteries behind the hedgerows in the south have kept the British from coordinating an assault there for the last hour of simulated time. And a single battery forward of the main line in the north has successfully prevented the northern flank from being turned. That has given Colonial reinforcements time to arrive and form a reasonable line in the north, and the next wave of reinforcements should allow the same in the south. The British are going to need a couple of turns to form up for renewed assaults. It's possible such an assault can be repulsed, but it's hard to see how the Colonial army can mount a sustained counterattack with any chance of retaking any of the crossroads.

Experience with the system also suggests that even a relatively solid looking Colonial line can be breached. Their morale values are so low compared to the Brits (2s and 3s vs. 4s, 5s, 6s) that there is no serious prospect of Blue being able to take Red on in the open. Artillery can be deployed while you are defending, but using them to support an attack is near impossible.

All this suggests that maybe the better early game option for Blue is to hold back and deploy artillery to cover key locations. The problem is that the best they can manage with that is probably to deny one crossroads to the British. However the VP requirements for a British win are such that they need to attack, so perhaps it could work.

It's tempting at this point to reset and try a different plan for Blue.

Hmmm.

[Another viewer asked: What is the problem with artillery on attack?]

[David's Answer:] The front line tends to move quickly and so keeping up with the front line and getting deployed in time to make a contribution is tricky. When the line stabilizes it becomes more feasible to make a contribution.

[Back to the game!]

Here's a final image.

I've decided to call it a day on this now, although there are still 6 turns to go. Things are stalemated really. Like the British reinforcements that I redirected north some turns back, I redirected some Colonial reinforcements south after a rethink. That has forced the British to reform their lines on their left, but they have more than enough firepower to cope with anything the Colonial army can throw at them.

The British, per the discussion in my last long post don't really need to do anything other than hold their ground to get a Decisive Victory. The Colonial army need to do some severe damage to the British to even claw their way back to marginal victory territory. They have a numerical advantage, but don't have the necessary fortitude (i.e. morale factors) to take the British on in clear terrain, still less fighting their way uphill as they would have to in the south. On top of that, the crossroads they need to take are too far away for them to get there against any kind of opposition (and the British are some kind of opposition!). The British artillery have now been deployed and some of the damage the Colonial guns were doing is now being repaid in kind.

So, although it's still diverting enough, I've had my fill for now.

Overall, a fun game. The system gives a pretty nice feel for tactics. It took me a while to figure out how to approach things to make the most of the two sides -- I'm still not completely there yet.

As I've said, I think the British are a little overpowered. With 1d6 morale checks, morale values of 2 for Blue vs 5/6 for Red are a serious obstacle to overcome. It wasn't until the Blue artillery were in place that things evened up, even a little. Long range infantry fire at 2 hexes typically only has a 1/3 chance of inflicting any adverse results; 2 hexes is 'minimum range' for artillery and provides guaranteed or 5/6 chance of trouble for target units.

It's hard overall to see a Colonial path to victory. They might be able to delay British capture of all four crossroads a bit longer, perhaps even hang on to one (but which one - north or south?) although that looks difficult. The woods, where they can fight on more equal terms are set too far back from the crossroads themselves to make it a viable option to set up in the woods and wait for the British to arrive.

Be interesting to hear any other experiences of the game.

