

## OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

# VERACRUZ

## Along the Straight and Narrow

by John D. Shelby

I am attempting to get an article on each *S&T* game published as rapidly as possible. This is easy to announce as policy and less easy to actually do. What with turn-around time and everything else, it can be six months until a good enough article is produced on an issue game. Mr. Shelby comes to my rescue with this piece that is something more than "good enough." —RAS

*Veracruz* simulates the climactic campaign to the war that is at once perhaps the greatest blot on the history of the North American character while at the same time being the greatest testimonial to the resourcefulness, courage, and daring that have been demonstrated by North Americans under arms throughout our history.

Reflections on the excesses of our immaturity aside, *Veracruz* is an accurate and fun simulation of the campaign that won the praise of Europe's greatest military men. The simulation, though of necessity somewhat biased in favor of the U.S. player, is an incredibly tense affair in the opening stages where one lost battle, however small in terms of numbers of participants, can result in an avalanche of crumbling morale that ultimately determines the final victor. Each side must win the first battles: the U.S. player to compensate for his overall disadvantage in numbers, and the Mexican player to counterbalance his inferior battlefield generalship and battle morale. The tenseness of these oddly balancing liabilities in the engaged forces is further reinforced by the U.S. player's requirement to escape the effects of yellow fever by quickly assuming the offensive against the easily defended Mexican interior. Yet uncertainties in supply, transport, and Mexican numbers — not to mention two fortresses that must be reduced — all work to perplex the U.S. player. As for the Mexican player, his initial inferiority in numbers and his inability to effectively organize his forces into armies will equally frustrate him when he has the U.S. forces busily occupied at Veracruz and agonizingly open to attack.

The Mexican player begins the simulation with the most unusual situation of having the first move but not the initiative. He knows the U.S. player will most likely open with an invasion in the vicinity of Veracruz, and to resist this invasion he has only the garrison of Veracruz and five untried militia units. Furthermore, a quick look at his reinforcement chart will reveal that sufficient force to resist the U.S. in battle is at least a month and a half away. Until mid-April then, any forces he can field will be easy pickings for the U.S. player with his overwhelming initial advantages in numbers, organiza-

tion, and leadership. He must both delay the U.S. forces as long as possible and keep his field army out of the reach of the U.S. This dilemma can best be resolved by withdrawing Morales and four strength points from Veracruz and using them to form the nucleus of a field army in the Sierra Madres. Morales is of no use in Veracruz, and a brief study of the Assault Table will show that four strength points in Veracruz will make that fortress most expensive to carry by storm. Yet with the reinforcements that arrive in April, four strength points are a small and easily recoverable price to pay to delay the U.S. By the end of March, turn three, the Mexican player can have an organized field army of 11 known strength points and seven militia, or a total strength 16 to 20 points. The U.S. player would be hard pressed to deal with this force unless he lifted the siege of Veracruz.

Here it should be pointed out that the militia arriving in Alvarado on turn two represent an actual liability to the Mexican player. They are too far away to reach the gathering Mexican field army, and they are well within range of any U.S. division around Veracruz. The U.S. can attack these units at any time, and definitely will if they move far from Alvarado. An attack by a U.S. division on these militia will not only result in their loss, but will also increase the U.S. National Morale Level by one. The Mexican cannot prevent this from happening, but by placing these units in a swamp hex or leaving them in Alvarado, he can make their loss as expensive as possible in terms of possible U.S. losses or delays. Under no circumstances should these units go after the pack mules at 2406. This will only play into U.S. hands and give the U.S. that Basic National Morale advantage sooner.

The U.S. player begins the game with numerous invasion options, but some reflection will indicate that the environs of Veracruz offer the only viable options in view of the U.S. need to get inland quickly and secure an easily protected source for supplies and pack mules. If the Mexican player has been foolish enough to place a field force within reach of the initial invasion hex, it should be attacked. The result of this will be Mexican unit losses, Mexican demoralization, and U.S. Basic National Morale increases. These advantages are worth delaying the actual siege of Veracruz. If such an easy early victory is not possible, and it shouldn't be, the U.S. should invade at hex 1807 and invest Veracruz from there and from hex 1709 with two divisions. The third division, without artillery, should move toward Alvarado and the pack mules at 2406 to pick off the Alvarado militia, should they move, or to collect the pack mules. With a division

at 1807, U.S. supply units can come ashore without need of further transport and still keep the besieging forces in combat supply. The available pack mules and some supply units will then be free for the mobile third division.

The U.S. player's allocation of units to his three available divisions should be undertaken with great care. All the artillery should be allocated to the two divisions necessary to invest Veracruz, and the obvious desire to restrict losses to volunteer units if possible should dictate their placement in the mobile division. This mobile division will eventually destroy the Alvarado militia and will be in position to protect the rear of the besieging divisions, so its probability for experiencing losses is somewhat greater.

During the siege of Veracruz, the U.S. player should consider his supply situation above most other factors. He should not capture Alvarado too soon before Veracruz falls, or he will, in effect, be placing his arriving supplies two turns away from doing his divisions at Veracruz any good. Furthermore, he can count on the Mexican player positioning his cavalry in such a manner that the U.S. supplies will require a large escort to make the trip from Alvarado. The U.S. supplies would be just as lost if they were required to place their escorting forces in combat supply as they would be if the Mexican player captured them. Additionally, once the Naval Battery comes ashore and the *Ohio* and the Mosquito flotilla arrive, the U.S. player can conserve supplies at 1807 by allowing his divisions to lapse into general supply. His divisions are large enough that he has little to fear from a Mexican attack before mid-April, and even at half strength he can still get nine artillery strength points to batter Veracruz. Granted, this would probably lengthen the siege, but this course could be forced on the U.S. by some unlucky die rolls.

Once Veracruz is invested, the Mexican is faced with the tempting option of surrendering the garrison before the fortress strength is reduced to zero. Though he would save whatever strength points he left in the city for future use, he would also give up the fortress of San Juan de Ulua which could otherwise be a drain on the U.S. until it is reduced by bombardment. The Mexican player should weigh these considerations carefully before surrendering. The possible extra week's delay in the culmination of the siege and the potential attrition of the U.S. garrison by San Juan de Ulua afterward may be worth the small Mexican garrison. Then too, the garrison should be able to hold out until mid-April when it will probably be too late for the U.S. Army to move out of the

yellow fever zone in time to avoid the worst effects of the disease. Awareness of this impending danger might even arouse the U.S. player into attempting an assault on the fortress which can only work to the Mexican player's advantage. An assault would, at worst, yield an even exchange and would benefit neither force's morale. The Mexican can well afford exchanges of this sort with his overall superior numbers.

The eventual fall of Veracruz, usually in early to mid-April, again places both players in the type of dilemma that characterizes this simulation. By this time, the Mexican forces outnumber the U.S., yet the Mexicans have two possible routes to the interior to defend and a slight disadvantage in Basic National Morale, thanks to the Alvarado militia. The U.S. player, however, is faced with the necessity of getting his forces west of the yellow fever line before the end of April, and he will find both the large Mexican Army and possibly his exhausted supply situation working against him. If he is out of supplies, the U.S. player will have little choice but to wait in Veracruz and accumulate some extra supply units, despite the ravages of yellow fever. If he has supplies, the U.S. options will depend to a great extent on where the Mexican chooses to defend.

The choice of the Mexican defense site should be based on where the greatest threat to the interior of the country exists — obviously the route of the National Highway. With the U.S. in Veracruz, an initial defense at Cerro Gordo would close this road to the U.S. and still afford the defenders protection, for a turn, from U.S. flanking moves. If, given the Mexican concentration on this route, the U.S. advances along the Cordova-Orizba-Puebla road, the Mexican Army will have more than enough time to either withdraw ahead of the U.S. Army and/or advance a force to invest Veracruz, an action that could cause the U.S. player great concern given the threat to his supplies. In this early stage of the game, the U.S. won't have enough supplies to cut himself off from his base as Scott did some months later in the campaign.

Consideration of this possibility pretty much commits the U.S. to an advance along the National Highway, despite the Mexican advantages of numbers and position. To successfully attack the Mexican Army, the U.S. must reduce it to a more manageable size. His initial attack odds will at best be 1-2, and he can expect no more than a one or two column combat adjustment shift in his favor given his minimal edge in leadership and morale. Odds of 1-1 or even 3-2 with a minus one addition to the die roll don't give the U.S. player much of a chance to inflict a morale crippling loss on the Mexican Army. However, if the Mexican Army can be placed in general supply before the U.S. attacks, the odds go up in the U.S. Army's favor. This is the key to the initial U.S. attack: in the turn before the planned attack, move two divisions to the flanks of the Mexican Army and isolate it. The Mexican Army will be in general supply in its turn and either be forced

to attack one of the isolating divisions at an horrendous disadvantage or be easily handled by the U.S. in the next turn.

Unfortunately for the U.S., any flanking move on the Cerro Gordo position will take two turns to develop, so the Mexican Army should take advantage of the time it has to withdraw from the trap, falling back to Las Vigas where it can't be flanked and put into general supply. At this juncture, however, local politics should, by causing the withdrawal of Santa Anna and 20 strength points to the capital, suffice to give the U.S. initial even odds in an attack — if, of course, the U.S. volunteers aren't withdrawn before an attack can be made. If Santa Anna is not withdrawn, the U.S. will have little choice but to attack anyway, hoping for the best, or expend numerous supply units in a sweep through the other mountain pass with a sizeable force.

#### Possible US Division

1 3-8	2 3-8	3 3-8	4 3-8
1 Dragoon 2-10	Patterson ** 2-10	Division Marker	1st Div X-7

#### Possible Mexican Army

Gren Gd 4-8	1Lt 3-8	4 2-8	TamCst 1-8
TicCrs 4-10	2 3-10	Militia U-8	Militia U-8
Canalizo ** 2-10	Army Marker	Army of the East X-7	

The most common occurrence is, however, an ultimate U.S. victory in this battle of the Sierra Madres. Given this, and the incidental improvement of U.S. Basic National Morale *vis-a-vis* the Mexican, the Mexican Army should not attempt a second defense before Puebla with its terrain defense advantage; and here too, the Mexican Army should not remain if the U.S. can place it in general supply before attacking. A small force left in Perote can delay the U.S. follow-up for several turns, and some units should be dedicated to this end. In choosing this force, the Mexican player should not leave more of his strength than his current disease ineffectiveness rate renders viable. If his current disease rate is 15% or worse, a force of four strength points is worth the same as a force of five. This force, which should be surrendered before Perote is reduced to zero strength, will be quite useful in the Mexico City area by building fortifications once Puebla is abandoned or taken.

The U.S. player would probably be forced to halt for supplies and reinforce-

ments before a move on Mexico City. Rather than attempt to escort supplies through the guerrilla infested countryside, he should consider accumulating supplies and pack mules at Veracruz to be taken inland with the volunteer division he will be able to organize around Major General Quitman. This accumulation, which will probably be sufficient for the U.S. player to cut himself off from his bases as Scott did in 1847, should see him through to the end of the game. Of course, the Mexican Army will not have been idle in this time, and superior numbers with all the advantages of terrain, fortifications, and reinforcements will await the U.S. before the capital. U.S. morale and leadership advantages will be the only means to a U.S. decisive victory. If the U.S. Basic National Morale isn't at least four points better than the Mexican, the U.S. player will find himself hard-pressed to take Mexico City and vulnerable to a RD result that could cost him not only the capital but Puebla as well.

These strategic/grand tactical considerations give some insight to the basic tension that produces the dilemmas that, as stated above, characterize this simulation. The simulation is unusual in many aspects, not the least of which is the fact that morale is more important than numbers and that one most important factor changes with almost every battle. This unusual aspect results in both players seeking to win the initial battles with terrain objectives secondary to the goal of increasing the morale of their own forces. This very closely follows history where the United States sought to so demoralize the Mexican government that it would yield through negotiation the desired territories of California and New Mexico. This aspect of the simulation *Veracruz* works inordinately well and should be duplicated in future simulations.

One aspect of the simulation doesn't quite work so well, however. The historical designations of the counters, however well researched and however interesting, is just so much "chrome" — a term applied to other games in this magazine. Losses shouldn't be applied arbitrarily to the units involved in combat, yet rules to resolve this would add much complexity to the simulation without changing the overall effect. Change-type counters would have radically reduced the counter mix required and would have eased the problem of keeping hidden units hidden.

This brings up another facet of the simulation that doesn't quite work, and that is the limited intelligence provision for the U.S. forces. Unless the U.S. player suffers horrendous setbacks, the Mexican won't be taking the initiative and voluntarily attacking him. When one is on the strategic and tactical defensive against a force basically attacking along one avenue of approach, the inclusion of dummy units in that force is of little consequence. In other words, there is little advantage to the Mexican player not knowing the exact composition of the U.S. forces, because the Mexican player won't much care anyway. He won't be in any position to use his knowledge for the most part, nor will the

*(continued on page 31)*

## After Thoughts

Tournaments are very popular at the various national and regional conventions. Winners are announced as the best players of a specific game or a specific set of games. I would think, however, that the ultimate accolade would be "best wargamer." Unfortunately, it will never be given because it is too much work to arrange. Whoever devised the tournament would have to take a widely known game (or system) and create several new situations. During each round of the tournament, each pair of gamers would play the same new situation. As in duplicate bridge, all players of the French (say) would be evaluated amongst themselves, and their opponents would be evaluated amongst themselves. After perhaps three or four games (opponents in each case assigned at random) winners could be determined from total scores. There are various ways this could be arranged, but a timing system would be necessary. A tournament of this type would test the ability to wargame, not just the ability to play a specific wargame.

## Veracruz *[continued from page 11]*

U.S. player be able to exploit any misinformation the Mexican might have. The dummy counters could be effective if the U.S. player attempted wide flanking moves, but the U.S. supply situation and the terrain fairly well preclude this from happening, or from being very effective if it does happen. (As an aside, the untried militia rules work well, particularly in the early stages of the simulation.)

As for the units in the game, the Leader counters represent the most important. The U.S. player should carefully plan his attacks to ensure the highest possible preliminary leadership level. This level for him should never be below three, nor should the Mexican player ever fight with a level below two. This necessitates both players restricting their use of the one-level leaders to instances of absolute need or to attacks against unled forces. In fact, the U.S. player may be better off using one less division rather than organizing one around Major General Pillow.

The artillery units are the most restricted land units in the game. Not only can they not move without benefit of division or army organization, but they are also forfeit in a force that suffers a flee result in battle. Given his slim chance of ever attacking a U.S. fortress, the Mexican player should take his battle losses in artillery units to preclude losing more than necessary due to a flee result. Likewise, the U.S. player should take artillery losses after the volunteers have withdrawn and Perote is in hand. He will have no other targets requiring the use of artillery, and the stipulation of no more than three artillery units per division can restrict his flexibility at a critical time. If Santa Anna is called to the capital, he should take three artillery units with him as part of his required 20 strength points as well.

The U.S. Navy battery is of very limited use once the U.S. takes Veracruz. With a movement rate of one hex per turn, it is far too unwieldy to do the U.S. forces in the interior any good, yet it is an ideal garrison force for Veracruz. Once in Veracruz it can, with the fleet, reduce the fortress of San Juan de Ulua and serve to keep the Mexican Army out of that key port once the fortress is rebuilt.

As for the other units in the game, their utility is fairly obvious. The cavalry units, dragoons for the U.S., are perhaps the most flexible combat units available to each side. The Mexican units can strike deeply along the U.S. supply path in the middle and late stages of the game. Though the U.S. player has only three dragoon units, he will find them of particular value when he attempts to cut the Mexican Army off from its supply sources. The reconnaissance units can be useful in obtaining information about flanking forces, though the Mexican player will find he will need to reconnoiter with many units to obtain any information at all and that his strategic situation may render that information unusable as discussed above. More useful to him will be his insurgents who can tie up large U.S. forces in escort duty.

All things considered, the simulation *Veracruz* is a success. It's a rare game that provides such graphic beauty with the balanced tension of its subject matter. What is more, the morale rules of *Veracruz* should become classic.

## Raid! *[continued from page 23]*

his platoon headquarters (which will affect his artillery).

The proper use of command control is a very important consideration as it affects the ability of your units to fire. Be careful when carrying out offensives or defenses that require your forces to be spread out, because the destruction of platoon headquarters will probably put a great deal of your forces out of command control. Likewise be careful when using radios—the destruction of one will again put units out of command control. All heavy weapons should be kept within six observation points of the platoon headquarters so that, in case line-of-sight is interdicted these weapons will remain in control. The headquarters unit itself should be stacked with a fireteam since these units have the greatest number of men and correspondingly they take the longest (on the average) to kill. The other fireteam should be kept close in case the one with the platoon headquarters is killed. If possible, one should make sure that not only are his units within radius of the headquarters, but also within radius of the nearest unit to that headquarters since this will assure his units of not being out of command in case of the destruction of the unit containing the headquarters. Make sure that this unit has a good field of sight so that it can continue to plot artillery missions.

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