

MOVES IN ENGLISH edited by Charles Vasey

Great Battles of the American Civil War Series

by Pete Bartlam

MOVES in English promised not to restrict itself to the realms of British history, and I can now make good this promise with the following overview of the *TSS* offshoots. *TSS*'s success has been phenomenal possibly because, unlike *Wellington's Victory*, it did not seek to engage in any of the brilliant originality of *WV*. Rather, *TSS* refined and remodelled ideas that had been around for some time, lifting them up from obscurity and setting them in the most effective place. That *TSS*'s faults have not been allowed to continue without adaptation is another positive factor. As Pete says, *Antietam* should prove an interesting game, perhaps giving the system its next really big test. — CHV

It may surprise readers on the colony side of the Atlantic to know that there are out-and-out Civil War buffs over here, too. I have numbered myself amongst this happy breed since the age of 13 (many moons ago). Since that time, I've suffered the constant interest in Napoleonic warfare and all sorts of Imperialistic campaigns involving the British Army with as much patience as I can muster (very little). Can you imagine sending for some resounding sounding volume on the Civil War, full of maps and photographs and all sorts of goodies, and something arrives in your mail-box on the *English Civil War*? It's more than flesh and blood can stand! Well it is, then, that the major games publishing companies are American, and such as SPI, AH, SDC, BL and Yaquinto have fueled my interest over the years. But are any of them getting it right?

In the early days we had the original *Gettysburg*. Do you remember: it had squares, terrain that had no effect on combat, and leaders that were there for historical value only? Yet I see from my old Time Record that I played 26 times, a feat I have never come close to with subsequent games. Anything that gets played more than two or three times these days is a classic. However, realistic it wasn't!

When SPI came on the scene, they produced much more realistic but still average games in *Bull Run*, *The Wilderness Campaign*, and the strategic *American Civil War*. Then they tried to develop the theme in two different ways. First with the simple, interchangeable *Blue and Gray* Quads. These had the distinction of giving rise to the term "beer and pretzels games." Still, they were reasonable entertainment for the money. Then there was *Terrible Swift Sword*. *TSS* was the shot that echoed round the wargame world. An early monster, it was the first to

treat the American Civil War seriously. To my eternal shame, I never bought it, being desperately poor at the time. I certainly heard about it though, as it picked up more awards than a Woody Allen film and shot up the sales league. So when *Stonewall* came out in my *S&T*, I couldn't wait to get at it.

When I tried it out, it was great. It was like a miniatures game on paper (which is meant as a compliment). There were different weapon types, formations, command, morale, brigade effectiveness, ammunition, and a lot more. Play required quite a lot of bookkeeping, but there were not too many units, so it was not too bad.

Next came *Bloody April*: 2 maps, 1200 counters, and chrome so thick you could walk on it. This had 6 infantry weapon types (though shotguns did not make it to the range table), almost a dozen artillery types, beautiful map sheets, sharp-shooters, stragglers, fatigue, aides-de-camp, alert, gunboats and ferries, rapid fire, exploding caissons, fire co-ordination, forest fire, weapons exchange, mistaken fire, and multi-commander play. All this and Grant's bad leg too — what more could you ask for?

Well, you could ask for enough roster sheets for a start. Perhaps duplicating 50-odd is not that bad if you can hi-jack your local photo-copying machine, but writing out the details of all the units, their commanders, sub-commanders, aides, and replacements certainly is. Still, the sides were set up and things got under way. By the early hours of the morning, and having not progressed beyond the early hours of 6 April 1862, the realisation dawned that this game was going to take a long time. It was a step forward from *TSS*, though there were still some wrinkles. So much then for *TSS* and *Son of TSS*. What about *TSS the Third*?

The third stage is, of course, the subject of this discussion; *Great Battles of the American Civil War, Volumes 1-3*, or a sort of *Blue and Gray* Quad for adults. This was the result of having an award-winning but complex system. People wanted variety of games without having to learn great chunks of rules with each new venture. So the basic system was streamlined, standardised, and made flexible enough to meet a wide variety of situations. This was harnessed, in each case, to specific exclusive rules to cover local contingencies. The package was rounded off with smartly presented maps and counters, all in a box complete with historical litho-

graph. This procedure results in a well produced set of games which can be learned fairly quickly, but...do they do their job?

I'll analyse them in two ways, first as games — the physical components, the rules, the level of play and play balance — and secondly as simulations of American Civil Warfare — organisation of the army as a whole and an individual look at the three separate arms of combat. Though, of course, one side of the equation has an effect on the other.

THE PHYSICAL COMPONENTS

Let us look at what you actually get for your money in terms of paper and cardboard: map, counters, and box. The game map is a key element of the boardgame package. The buzz you get (or don't get) when you first unfold that sheet has a lot to do with the amount of pleasure you are going to find. Maps have a twofold function. First they provide the setting for the battle. Often the terrain is the very reason for the clash of arms. The map, therefore, must be able to faithfully recreate the historical situation. It must bestow the advantages and pose the problems that the real lay of the land would have done for the original combatants.

Second, and perhaps less obvious, to be successful from a game point of view the map has to look good. An ugly mapsheet is like an ugly wife — you are going to have to live with it for a long time! It is important to be able to relate to it and to what it represents. This is one reason, I feel, why tactical games on random bits of terrain don't gel, unless the level of detail is sufficient to make one believe they represent an actual place.

Of the five *TSS* system maps that I possess, each is different in style, and whilst RAS is credited with each one, they could easily have been done by different designers. *Stonewall* was spartan, but it did its job clearly and pleasantly — cheap and cheerful, as they say. *BA* was rather attractive. The wide variety of terrain was handled neatly, with the dense greenery defining the nature of the struggle without overpowering the eye. *Drive on Washington* is the next step on from *Stonewall*. Here once more we have an uncluttered battlefield, despite the nine types of terrain, but the improved graphics and the change of shade from brown to yellow refresh the eye. *Wilson's Creek* is ugly.

Whilst the grey-green overprint of the bush might work in game terms, it makes the whole thing dull and miserable.

Pea Ridge, in contrast, is a masterpiece. You could quite easily frame this map but, more importantly, it brings the field alive. As your columns of men march through the gap in the forest, or charge across the open fields, you know, as soon as you look, what problems they will encounter and where best to direct your energies. Thus we see that when a map sheet scores aesthetically, it also scores simulationwise. I sincerely hope that all future maps in the series will be done in this superb style.

On then to the other half of the physical components, the counters. These are relatively appealing without being stunning. The information shown is generally well presented, although I should like to see one or two improvements. The link to the brigade commander ought to be more graphically represented, perhaps by using particular symbols or colours, or at least by underlining the CO's name. Constant confusion over which name is which often invokes irritatingly fruitless searches for some non-existent commander. Cavalry units, too, could be im-

proved by a symbol on their dismounted side to remind one of their ability to remount. Perhaps the horse's head, as used for horse artillery, would be appropriate, which reminds me: the horse artillery themselves should similarly have the symbol repeated on their unlimbered side.

Regarding the change in the infantry counters, the backs of which have been changed from column to routed status, this obviously makes sense as units are more often routed than in column. Also, one column marker can be used for a whole line of units. On the subject of markers, even though they are a bit fiddily, I think the SP marker system now adopted is preferable to the *Bloody April* style roster sheets. The latter tends to lead one into the error of committing a unit purporting to have 800 men, only to find, on reference to its sheet, that it is down to its last SP. Finally, for a nice touch of spurious colour, how about having battle flags on the leader counters?

So much then for the physical make-up, but what of the spiritual element: the rules?

THE RULES

As this is the third attempt at the rules, they should be just about perfect by now. The little slips of the past are tidied up (those missing shotguns at Shiloh for example), but, unfortunately, they are replaced by new examples. A whole section is devoted to supply wagons: their ammunition capacity, guards, depletion by attacks, etc., and yet there is no mention of how they are used to resupply troops: I assumed the same rule as *BA*, with a unit being resupplied if it is within its Movement Allowance of the wagon and neither unit moves or fires during the turn concerned. Presuming such obvious omissions are cleared up in later editions, the standard rules are generally all right and look as though they can stand adaptation to a variety of situations.

The exclusive rules suffer from their widely differing approaches. The establishment of each individual designer's style is one thing, but the emergence of two entirely different artillery counter systems is quite another. *Drive on Washington* and *Wilson's Creek* have mixed gun batteries with their own crew whilst *Pea Ridge* has split batteries and neutral crew counters for both sides to use. I am not averse to experimentation; in fact I prefer the newer *PR* system. However, within a system that seeks standardisation as *Great Battles of the American Civil War* does, surely a basic element like artillery should merit a consistent approach?

I said before, the standard rules were generally all right. I use the term generally, because the rules suffer from one major omission: there is no advance after combat procedure. This can have bizarre consequences. You can march your infantry up to a defended position, engage in a successful fire-fight, and rout the defenders. You must then stand helplessly by as your opponent wheels in a fresh regiment to refill the contested ground before you can advance! This is hardly very realistic. This proved to be a

constant thorn in the side of the attackers in the difficult terrain of *BA*. It was something I prayed fervently would be resolved in *Great Battles*. The simple answer would be to let any unit advance one hex in the Melee Phase, either to attack the defending unit as in the current rule, or to advance into the hex left vacant by a unit it had itself routed in the immediately preceding Fire Phase. With this addition, the standard rules are just about complete as a basic set.

I should, however, like to see the system expanded on the *Squad Leader/Cross of Iron/Crescendo of Doom* lines, so that it becomes the complete American Civil War tactical system. Development should take the form of additional, and maybe optional, rules to the basic system in preference to over-emphasis on the used-once-only exclusive rules. One would, of course, want to avoid the AH stepping stone effect whereby you must have each preceding game to play the next. A solution might be to have games grouped at a level of complexity, or even just an advanced set of rules as a sort of expansion kit to the basic set, usable, if applicable, in any of the battles already portrayed.

These then are the constituent parts. What of the whole, in game-playing terms?

THE PLAY

Because of the tactical level of the simulation, much effort must be put into the actual command, organisation, and movement of troops. Initially this puts the accent of the game on the mechanics of war. Dramatic strategic sweeps and pretty counter-shuffling go to the wall as you sweat blood just trying to get your men where you want them, when you want them. Elaborate, tactical trickery is discarded in favour of a basic "furthest with the mostest!" One needs to play a fair deal to master the techniques to the level that one knows on an instinctual basis when best to change formation, the most efficient way to move through woods under fire, how to get the maximum bangs per buck from your artillery, the optimum use of leaders, and so on. You and your army have to become properly drilled.

The advantage, then, of a standard system such as *Great Battles of the American Civil War*, as opposed to some play-it-once-forget-it affair, is obvious. Without replaying some sterile scenario to the point of distraction, you and your opponents can develop your skills through a variety of campaigns. You can enjoy many different battles as you progress from the prosaic prosecution of basic actions to the execution of the more theoretical elements of military manoeuvres.

To achieve this level, however, consistency must be maintained. Playing about with ground and/or time scales to give different movement rates, as is already evidenced, must be resisted. Whilst this could sometimes present problems in scaling the action to a high degree of accuracy, I feel such sacrifice must be made for the sake of standardisation. This is particularly true when one considers there is always some degree of

SUMMARY OF COMBAT UNIT TYPES

Front		Back
	Infantry	
	Cavalry	
	Artillery	
	unlimbered	limbered
	Supply Wagon	
	crewed	uncrewed
	Artillery Crew	
	full crew	half crew
	Supply Wagon Crew	
	Division Leader	
	Brigade Leader	
	Replacement Leader	

abstraction in the scales anyway. Participants want to be able to concentrate on the new challenge each battle presents in terms of military objectives without having to re-learn all the basics.

Whilst the players go through “boot camp” to learn their drill, it would help if their workload was reduced. The simulation should, therefore, aim towards the most efficient way of achieving its goals. I must agree, then, with the shedding of the fatigue rules even though I admired them. Also the simplified form of the ammunition depletion rule is preferable, despite its apparently unrealistic nature. Whilst you might argue depletion should be more predictable than random, this is true only from the unit commander’s viewpoint. If one considers the case from the distance of the overall commander (whom the player is supposed to represent) then random loss becomes a much more realistic event.

Similarly, I would extend the simple form to artillery with merely a differing required die-roll to distinguish the greater level of supply of the Union pieces. This would be very helpful when using the style of artillery organisation used in *Pea Ridge*. As the units need to be massed to have any real effect, one currently has to find and mark up to a dozen names from a list of 25 just for one shot, which is quite a chore! Even the detailed rule is stylised, as one piece could use up its shots as shell while another uses the same shots entirely as canister; so why not go the whole hog and make life easy for yourself? As a final thought to complete the depletion debate (as long as I have enough ammo for a parting shot), I think units should be exempt from the rule on their first fire.

To wind up the first half of this analysis, let us briefly consider play balance.

PLAY BALANCE

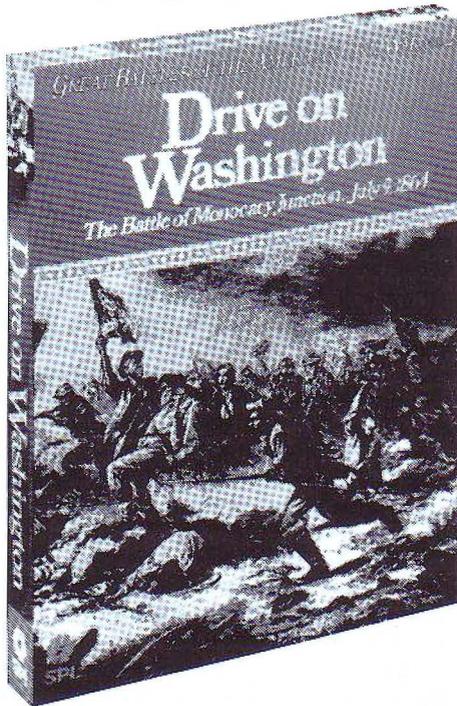
Play balance is a difficult subject to assess. Considering the overall manpower situation, level of supplies and equipment, the Confederacy must always be at a disadvantage. Historically they won battles when they had the better generals. In the early days, Lee and Jackson ruled the roost against the likes of Scott and McClellan, making the best use of their limited resources, often producing a tactical numerical superiority out of a strategically inferior force. Once the North was able to respond with the likes of Grant and Sherman, there was nothing left in the Rebel repository, and the Confederacy was swept away. How then in game terms do you give two equal opponents a fair chance? The obvious way out is to choose battles like Gettysburg, Shiloh, Monocacy Junction, Wilson’s Creek, or Pea Ridge where the southern forces had the advantage of either numbers or surprise to outweigh their inherent handicaps. So we see the question has been neatly side-stepped so far, but what will happen in battles like Antietam or Atlanta, where the Rebs are up against it, remains to be seen.

Having disposed of the gaming aspects of *Great Battles*, we shall now look at it as a

simulation of American Civil Warfare. Does it capture the feel of the period, and does it pose the problems for commanders that their historical counterparts (no pun intended!) faced? I’ll consider these topics under four headings: organisation (a grab-bag title which covers actions of the force as a whole) and the three individual arms — infantry, artillery, and cavalry.

ORGANISATION

The rules reflecting the different levels of command (brigade and division) are quite effective. One is forced to group one’s units in realistic order. Whilst you are allowed the tactical freedom to detach a limited number of units on alternative courses of action, you cannot disband your army to become a motley crew of individual units. When I say cannot, there is no Iron Maiden rule that forbids, but merely the deterrent effect of the results of such action (i.e., units tend to slow down, stay where they are, and merely look after themselves).



The next problem one faces is how to make the best use of one’s leaders. You have to choose whether to concentrate on moving the bulk of a force as far as possible, to stay in the background to rally shaken units, or to heroically lead charges where one officer is worth a hundred men. Each decision will differ as the battle ebbs and flows, and making the best use of leadership is the cornerstone of each campaign. Thus we have come full circle, in simulation terms, from the old *Gettysburg* “there for historical purposes only” idea and rightly so.

What then of leadership loss? Up to a point this is fairly represented. Dead commanders do not just disappear as in some games, but are replaced by junior officers gaining battlefield promotions. This usually entails a deterioration in performance representing the greenness of the deputy. This

is not always true, to depict the case of an old war-horse keeping a good man down, and one wonders whether such duress should be safe-guarded by a rule to stop his own side blowing him away. But surely no one could be so callous?

In either case, any further loss will not entail any additional ill-effects. There are, it would seem, a never-ending supply of new men of equal ability. Whilst I should not want to see myriad replacement counters, I do think wholesale slaughter of a unit’s upper echelons should incur a greater penalty than just a loss of Victory Points. I suggest the death of a leader should both score a point against BCE (Brigade Combat Effectiveness) loss and demand a morale check. The loss of a divisional commander should have this effect on all units under his command. This would increase realism by eventually demoralising any unit that was going through CO’s like they were going out of fashion.

This brings me nicely to BCE, which I’m glad to see has returned. The effect of this rule neatly emphasises the importance of reserves and also prevents the unseemly continuation of a struggle to the last man and gun once all real hope has gone. BCE represents the point where the will to fight evaporates and units just melt away. This situation was particularly prevalent in the Civil War as the forces lacked the discipline of a long history of military service. This rule, however, should be used in all of the battles and its effect should be, if anything, more severe. I would suggest a combination of Brigade Retreat as used in *Pea Ridge* and the rally-only-on-a-die-roll rule of *Drive on Washington*.

Having considered the army as a whole, we will now look at each part in detail.

THE INFANTRY

As has been stated previously, you have to be well drilled for your infantry to perform adequately. The simulation rewards the correct use of line and column and the craft of knowing when you can safely and speedily change from one to the other. A formation not applied, however, is the skirmish line. Typically an ACW regiment of 10 companies would deploy two of this number forward in open order to harass the enemy. There is no facility in *Great Battles* to do this on a regimental basis and no incentive to use whole regiments in this role at brigade level. Skirmishers could be included by dispatching SP’s as in the *Wellington’s Victory* system, and players could graft these rules into *Great Battles*. I must confess though, when I played *Wellington’s Victory* I found the use of skirmishers fiddly and tiresome, so, bearing in mind my earlier remarks on the player’s workload, I will side with the designers in leaving them out.

The two Fire Phases per turn, with the high probability of rout before the Melee Phase, accurately produces a predominance of fire-fights over actual hand to hand combats within the games. In the real battles, infantry would rarely charge home, but would

draw up a line short of the enemy and both sides would blast away until one or the other of them broke. The susceptibility of units of this time to break, rally, break again, rally again, and so on was characteristic. This is reflected in a CRT which sees more clean heels than spilt blood and the automatic rallying ability of leaders. An enhancement of which I approve is the introduction of a greater involvement of a unit's morale level into checks. This gives us our "Stonewall's" and "Iron Brigades" that will stand through anything, as well as green doughboys full of passion and fear.

Moving on then from the "unseemly brawlers," how do the horse soldiers handle themselves?

THE CAVALRY

Much of the cavalry's role during the American Civil War was one of strategic importance. It was used to scout out the enemy whilst screening its own troops' movements. Raiders would disrupt supply lines, attack wagon trains, and plunder depots deep inside enemy territory. Sometimes, as in the commands of Stuart and Sheridan, large numbers of mounted men, five to ten thousand, would be used as either a potent strike force or as a diversionary threat to draw the enemy's strength. It was not, however, the tactical trump card on the battlefield.

The morale-crushing sight of shining steel of Napoleon's day was now more likely to be met with the cry of "Here are those fools coming again with their sabres, boys — give it to 'em!" Still, the part the cavalry played in the combined arms remained important. Its use in the field was a microcosm of its strategic function. It would be used to guard flanks, disrupt supply lines, and as a mobile reserve or strike force. This latter was possibly the most important. Cavalry were often flung forward to dismount and hold a position with their fast-firing carbines, the classic example of this kind of action being Buford's troops buying enough time for the Federal line to strengthen at Gettysburg.

Great Battles simulates these functions well. Cavalry does not have the power to break massed infantry and is frail in the face of fire. They are, however, sufficiently strong to worry unprotected wagons or artillery positions that can be outflanked. Most importantly, they are indispensable in the role of mounted infantry. Carbine-carrying troops, dismounted in favourable terrain, are very hard to dislodge. This is true almost to the point of excess, and I feel some handicap should be theirs to prevent them from dominating the scene. The obvious answer, as their power is based on their high rate of fire, is to increase their chance of ammunition depletion. Requiring the second roll on an initial roll of one or two should do the trick. Horse-holders too should make a come-back. The No.4's job in the troop was to retain the mounts in any action on foot. This was neatly simulated in *BA* by the loss of an SP from any unit of 4SP or greater when dismounted. This simple and realistic

rule, involving no book-keeping, should be a permanent feature of *Great Battles*. The Cavalry Panic rule of *Wilson's Creek*, whereby a dismounted unit that routs loses its horses, should also be standard.

Command control and rally rules have changed to allow the designer to subtly shade their use as he sees fit. Units deemed independent are like the cavalry of yore who can roam the map at will and self-rally if required. The rest now fall in line with the infantry needing normal command control. On balance I preferred the *Bloody April* system of requiring all troops to have command control when dismounted, but giving them a free rein when in the saddle.

Finally, the Union cavalryman developed during the course of the war from the amateur of '61 who could barely stay in the saddle to being one of the best by '64. Conversely, the Confederate horse-riding gentlemen gave the secessionists an early edge which was gradually eroded by poor mounts and the supply-your-own-horse system. There are no rules to show this. Why? It must merit at least a chrome rating and a place in the exclusive rules.

Third and final among the three arms of combat, we have the artillery.

THE ARTILLERY

Artillery, like the cavalry, suffered a decline from Napoleonic times in terms of its power on the battlefield. As with the mounted arm, its use became strategic. Thousands of pieces filled forts throughout the country or mounted defences of towns, ports, or bends in the river. Fearsome heavy weapons fitted out the new iron-clads that floated the bayous and the high seas. Some were even mounted on rail-cars. Many of these muzzles never spoke, though; their power lay as a "force in being" (a fact realised and cheekily abused by the use of logs as "quaker" guns to fool the distant eye). The role now was defensive. With the increased range and accuracy of infantry fire thanks to the minie ball, it was now suicidal to throw the guns forward. Close range grape-shot assaults to soften the enemy were a thing of the past.

We see this reflected in the rules. Guns used in the defence of a strategic location will prove deadly as the attackers close. The same weapons thrust forward aggressively will, unless protected by infantry, quickly become crewless relics. The other maxim of the day is also readily apparent, as the gamesplayer reaches the same conclusion as the battery commander of yore, that for any long range barrage to be even moderately successful one must mass one's pieces together.

The wide variety of artillery types is fascinating. The characters of the differing pieces seem fairly represented though I would argue that the 10-pounder Parrott (PA) should have a maximum range of 18 hexes. I should like to see a siege style game like Vicksburg or maybe an action against a fort where we could see the really big pieces and the mortars in action. The latter reminds

me of elevated fire, evident in *BA* but now dropped, if you'll pardon the pun. Whilst its use was almost ineffective, I still think it should be available as an option to the players. Similarly there are now no rules for prolonged action. Whilst there is a danger that a plethora of minor rules might overwhelm the system, these options should be made available for you to pick and choose as you see fit.

Whilst not worth a heading of their own, there are a variety of miscellaneous units so far encountered. The most common are the supply wagons. Their use seems reasonable enough and I like the idea of giving them a one SP guard. This makes for interesting little skirmishes when that roving band of cavalry attacks. The gunboats and ferries of *BA* were also adequately, if sparsely, covered. It would be nice to see their possibilities explored further in an amphibious operation, say the attack on Island #10.

No engineers have yet come to light. Maybe they will in a Petersburg. In the meantime, I do think we should have some representation, in defended positions, of the common chevaux-de-frise and abatis. The latter were often thrown up by chopping down the light brush and piling them, branches outward, as a hindrance to movement. They could be shown by some counter that would indicate a movement penalty (e.g., it takes a whole turn to enter such a hex).

Board-gaming has developed from having one or two classic games to having a number of classic systems. World War 2 has *Squad Leader* and *Panzergruppe Guderian*, for Napoleonics there's *Wellington's Victory*, and *TSS* has established itself as the system for the American Civil War. It was head and shoulders above its field when it started, and it has developed steadily ever since. It has still some way to go to reach perfection perhaps, but I feel it faces one with the same problems that a Sherman or a Lee would have had to face and furnishes one with the same tools to solve them. I look forward to seeing it develop through a host of famous fields and, who knows, maybe an abstract set of maps and counters to use as a tactical extension to some strategic game like *War Between the States*. I like *Great Battles of the American Civil War*. I'll keep playing *Great Battles* as they come out, but please, please give me that advance after combat rule. Otherwise, as Sherman would say, "War is hell!" ■■

