

## OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS/DOCUMENTED PLAY

# LEETOWN or CURTIS

## Objectives and Strategy in Pea Ridge

By Jeffrey Marshall Bishop

Of the recent wave of TSS games (preceding the very latest, *Jackson/Corinth* twin game), *Pea Ridge* seems to have inspired the most actual play and attention. Its relative compactness and its maturation within the TSS system is partly responsible, but its support probably derives more from the interesting *uneven* quality of the situation. Just as with most cases that turn into perennials, one side is cast in an essentially defensive role and the attacker faces a set of hard choices as to how to best crack the defense. Literal balance is rarely a good thing for any game — usually the dynamics of desperation are more interesting. — *Redmond*

In *MOVES* nr. 50, *Drive on Washington*, one of the first of the games in the Great Battles of the ACW series, was reviewed (before it was published, in fact). A companion game, *Pea Ridge*, has also been offered to the devotees of Civil War fandom. Personally, I've been keenly interested in this battle for some time, given its rather unique circumstances and personalities. The egotism of the Confederate generals, the Southerners attacking towards the south, the Indians scalping slain Yankee soldiers and the steadfast bluecoats are all faithfully reproduced in this fascinating little game.

Pea Ridge presents one of the more unusual strategic situations encountered in Civil War battles, i.e., both the armies are in each other's rear. The Confederates, under the overall command of the dashing Major General Earl Van Dorn, had seized the initiative from Brigadier General Samuel Curtis' advancing bluecoats. Marching by night around Curtis' right flank, Van Dorn hoped to fall upon the rear of the unsuspecting Yankees and destroy them by the weight of his superior numbers and their inevitable confusion. Thus, the Southern soldiers were treated to the spectacle of advancing toward their own homeland.

The Confederates arrive in strength from the northern edge of the map and must try to destroy the Union forces as they arrive from the Federal reserve off map. The game is spiced with geographical objectives for each side that inevitably influence strategic decisions. Since Elkhorn Tavern usually falls easily under the weight of the initial Confederate assault, Curtis' HQ and Leetown are the objectives that will decide the battle. If the Confederate can take either of these positions, he has a leg up on winning the game.

A comparison of the two armies points out the difficulties that the Rebels are likely to encounter in securing either of the above

mentioned goals. First of all, the greybacks are faced with limited melee initiative, which, in this game, is the great equalizer. A quick glance at the countermix should convince anyone that "the biggest battalions" belong to the grey. However, given the unwieldy nature of the Rebel force (which, incidentally, is historically accurate), the Confederates cannot use this factor to best advantage.

As an adjunct to this problem, the Confederates have very few leaders (eight) with which to control this mass of humanity. Thus, the grey commander is faced with the dilemma of whether to commit his leaders to combat (insuring melee ability) and thereby exposing them to destruction or to keep them behind the lines and trust to luck (1's and 2's on the die).

Offsetting these problems, the Confederates have a large force (57 "effective SP's" to 48 for the Union) with average to good morale and the strategic and tactical initiative. Thus, he can stretch the Union lines and attack when and where the situations appear promising.

The Yankee player, on the other hand, has an entirely different set of problems. He has a smaller army (although it should be large enough to handle most contingencies) and limited offensive capability. Thus, he must put up a spirited and pugnacious defense to keep Leetown and Curtis' HQ out of Confederate hands. Otherwise, he may lose them for good.

On the positive side, the Yank is on the defensive which should mean that the Confederate must assault artillery emplacements. Artillery is a very poor offensive weapon in TSS-series games (as it should be), particularly in the games with heavy woods. It is, however, a very potent defensive weapon. Union artillery must therefore be sited very carefully to insure that they lie exactly athwart the Confederates lines of advance.

What then does one do to win the game? For the Confederate: take Leetown and/or Curtis' HQ without losing your army doing it. For the Yank: hold both of the above mentioned objectives and make the Confederate player pay a heavy price (no pun intended) in his attempt.

The set-up for *Pea Ridge* is probably the fastest of all war games — there is but one regiment on the map. The 24 Missouri starts at hex 2413 in line. After the Confederate's two consecutive turns of marching onto the northwest edge of the map, the 24th should be moved toward (and eventually occupy) hex 2644. This one regiment is able to set

up blocking positions where only two hexes are conveniently reached by the Confederates from which they may assault. This should give Dodge and Carr plenty of time to reach the field. On the western side the Union cavalry under Bussey should take up a blocking position just north of Leetown (hexes 1008-1011). Advancing towards the Rebels with this small force is suicidal. Osterhaus and Greusel will follow shortly to bolster this position. From this point, then, the Union commander must react to Confederate initiatives (just as Curtis did).

### Confederate Strategy

The Confederate player must make a choice; he must decide whether he wants Leetown or Curtis HQ. If Leetown is to be the ultimate objective, McCulloch must press the enemy forces with abandon while Van Dorn tries to siphon off Union reinforcements. If Curtis' HQ is the goal, McCulloch must dispatch forces to undermine the Union defense of Elkhorn Tavern and to threaten Curtis' HQ early in the game. Van Dorn can't do it alone.

Personally, I prefer the latter objective. Although Curtis' HQ has less point value, the Union defense can be dislocated somewhat more easily in this area. Since Van Dorn can't do it by himself, the question then arises, "Who should McCulloch send east?" Only Hebert or McIntosh can fill the role since Pike's Indians are basically useless. McIntosh is my choice since most of his regiments are large and they all have good morale (4's and 5's), offsetting the lowered morale of detached units. Hebert's brigade would have questionable morale and is probably not big enough to do significant damage to the Union reinforcements that will be flooding to the scene. He is large enough, however, to threaten Leetown and to outflank the Union troops in their Leetown positions. Since most of the Union reinforcements arrive from hex 0115, a blocking force in the person of Hebert could be most uncomfortable.

McIntosh's horde, on the move east, should be enough impetus for the bluecoats to evacuate the Elkhorn Tavern area. If not, a stiff charge can gobble them up from behind. Either way, the ground is captured. Once this is accomplished, McIntosh should be attached to Van Dorn to pursue the Federals with alacrity, using Little, Slack and McIntosh. Price should be kept in reserve as the battering ram that will pry open the way to the final objective.

On a tactical note, whenever possible, go after independent units with your biggest and best regiments. Each independent strength point destroyed is worth virtually twice its value, particularly since they can roam the battlefield at will. Additionally, try to wheel your artillery into the battle as a means of softening your opponent's position. In particular, use them as counterbattery weapons. Charging 3 TB's is a lot better than charging 4. Finally, go ahead and use your leaders as cannon fodder. The units that your leaders are stacked with will probably be the only stacks capable of melee. Since melee is of the utmost importance to your effort, you will need leaders up front. You will probably lose nearly all of them, but c'est la guerre!

Don't use Van Dorn as a melee initiator, however; he can only give you a 33% chance of melee anyway. He's much more valuable in the rear.

As for the Leetown attack, I don't think it can work (except in one situation). Neither does Earl Van Dorn. Neither wing of the Confederate Army is really large enough or strong enough to take the positions immediately in their front. McCulloch will continuously and sanguinely attack the troops defending Leetown until McIntosh's and Hebert's BCE are destroyed. (In 12 turns McCulloch will average 28 casualties to Federal losses of 10 casualties. Meanwhile, Van Dorn will lose 1 casualty per turn for every 0.6 Union losses as he attempts to slug his way out of his ravines east of Pea Ridge.) Price's troops should be sent on the southeasterly road in either strategy, but even so they can't overwhelm Elkhorn Tavern until turn 12-15. By that time McCulloch will be torn to shreds.

The one situation where a Leetown attack is possible requires a combined Confederate force. This will entail a contingent of Confederates marching to the east to open up the Elkhorn Tavern defense. Then, with the Union forces in retreat, the pursuing Confederates can make a choice as to their final objective. McCulloch plus Price could conceivably overwhelm Leetown. This strategy, however, can be time-consuming with a great deal of marching and countermarching. It does leave the Federal guessing as to the final assault objective, which is probably the best "fog-of-war" situation that this game can generate.

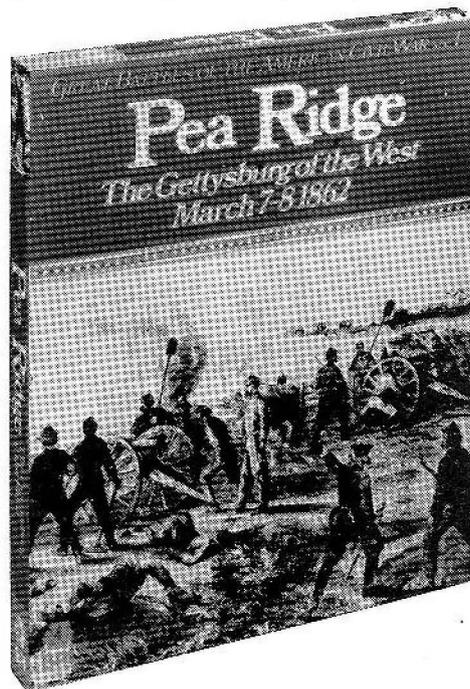
### Union Strategy

Basically, the Union's lot is to react to Confederate initiative. A player must be alert for either Confederate assault plan and distribute his reserves accordingly. If Leetown is the objective, pour the reinforcements into the line as quickly as they arrive and then watch McCulloch's forces wither away. Dodge, Vandever and Carr will have to hold their own as best they can. If they can give Osterhaus 5 hours to repulse Confederate assaults, the game should be over.

The second Rebel gambit is a bit trickier for your defense. A Confederate force moving east toward Elkhorn Tavern pretty much spells doom for your position. It then becomes a situation wherein you must decide when to evacuate. If you do it too soon, there isn't enough iron and flesh available to de-

fend Curtis's HQ. If you leave too late, Dodge and Carr are lost outright. Usually a blocking force of Vandever and Bowen's independent force can hold the gate open for Carr and Dodge to escape. If you hold long enough, the Confederates will draw up to your newly established lines south of Rud-dick's Field. Then it is a question of slugging it out. However, by this time, most of your reinforcements will have reached the field.

The combined HQ feint and Leetown assault can be very troublesome. It's important that your reinforcements reach Curtis' HQ but if Leetown becomes the final objective they must hie to that locale. The pursuit of your retreating forces should tell the story. If the force from McCulloch's army and a Van Dorn brigade lay back, be ready to man the Leetown defenses. If they mix it up with your defenders, Curtis' HQ is the goal.



Tactically, your mission is clear: make the Confederate assault into the teeth of your artillery and destroy Rebel leaders as rapidly as possible. Offensive operations should be attempted only when necessary (Curtis' HQ or Leetown) or when a lonely, *small* Confederate unit presents itself. You're definitely on the defensive.

*Pea Ridge's* outcome is largely dependent upon the Confederate player. He is faced with the problems of where and how to attack. He must attempt to dislocate the Union defensive by stretching out the Federal lines, focusing on the final objective at the last possible moment. The ultimate Confederate victory will turn the Yankee into the attacker. (See how he likes charging artillery with double canister.)

Although the Union player can make grievous errors and surrender Curtis' HQ without a fight, the average player can usually come up a winner by holding an intact defensive line. The restrictions on the Confederate player generally will insure that the greybacks will never get to his objective (I've come within 2 hexes several times). Don't let anything slip in behind you, and when it

comes right down to it, throw your troops into the line and hold.

### Playthrough

The following is the commentary of a typical game of *Pea Ridge* using many of the precepts described in the foregoing article. The action has been described in hourly or half hourly blocks of time, depending on the amount of fighting. Hex and hexrow references have been included to help visualize the flow of combat on the map. This "after action" sequence is the result of several playtests.

**1000-1100.** Federal videttes report to Curtis that Confederate soldiers are advancing in strength from the north. On the western wing, McIntosh's brigade leads Pike's and Hebert's brigades toward Leetown. On the eastern side, Little's brigade is marching toward Elkhorn Tavern followed by Slack and Price. Price takes the southeasterly road in hopes of flanking any opposition that may impede Little. Pickets from Gates' dismounted cavalry report the presence of the Union 24 Mo. Both Gates and 1 Mo spread into line formation. Meanwhile Dodge's 3 Ill Cavalry arrives and takes up line formation to the southeast of the 24 Mo (hex 2046).

Near Leetown Bussey's cavalry has established a defensive line just south of Oberson's Field and are awaiting the arrival of Osterhaus and Grusel who are nearing Leetown from the southeast.

**1100-1200.** As Price continues his march to the southeast, Little's regiments (Gates c, 1 Mo, Cearnal) ready their assault lines. Dodge arrives just to the rear of the 24 Mo with two regiments of infantry as the 3 Ill Cav advances to the northeast in an attempt to slow the Confederate flanking maneuver. Little assaults the 24 Mo and takes heavy losses in Cearnal's regiment. A second assault is repulsed again as Cearnal's regiment virtually ceases to exist. However, this time the 35 Ill infantry takes part in throwing back the Rebels as the 1 Mo heads for the rear. Dodge looks on approvingly as a message arrives stating that Vandever and Carr are nearing the field, having passed Curtis' HQ.

To the west McCulloch detaches McIntosh and 2 batteries to help Van Dorn, while Hebert and Pike advance toward Leetown with six batteries.

**1200-1300.** Gates Cav, the 2 Mo, Hughes and Rosser assault the 35 Ill and the 24 Mo. The 2 Mo runs into withering fire and breaks for the rear, but Gates, Hughes and Rosser drive the 35 Ill to cover and the 24 Mo takes heavy losses and retreats precipitately. Jones' four rifled guns play effectively on the Confederate ranks, virtually destroying Hughes' regiment. After rallying the 1 Mo, Little throws them into the fray, personally leading them against Jones' battery and overrunning it with little loss.

To the east Price shakes out the 5 and 8 MSG regiments to attack the 3 Ill Cav. The 5 MSG takes severe casualties from the carbine-carrying troopers and they flee to the rear helping the wounded Price along. The 8 MSG fares better, driving the troopers to ground. Confusion reigns, however, as no one knows who is in command.

To the west, McIntosh readies his men by assuming line formation. On the far right, Hebert and Pike close on Oberson's Field and the artillery unlimbers just north of the field (1508-1510). Immediately, the artillery pieces go into action, knocking out two guns of Hoffman's battery.

Meanwhile, McIntosh unlimbers Good's Battery in Cox's Field and they execute well, inflicting casualties on Vandever's 9 Iowa. Dodge's Yanks counterattack as Gates Cav shoots off all its ammunition and the 1 Mo loses more men.

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## Leetown or Curtis [continued from page 11]

**1300-1400.** The battlelines sway back and forth as Little's and Dodge's men attack and counterattack. Casualties increase and ammo decreases as the 2 Mo runs out. Carr is killed by a minie ball while overseeing Dodge's dispositions; Dodge immediately takes overall command.

McIntosh gets into the fray, sending the 9 and 11 Texas Cav against Hayden's Battery and the 9 Ia (on the northeastern edge of Cox's Field), making little headway and taking heavy losses. Hayden's Battery limbers and retreats 250 yards. Artillery continues to play on the 11 Texas which loses 200 men in 30 minutes. McIntosh widens his assault, going after Hayden's Battery A on the east fringe of Cox's Field with the 2 Ark Cav and the 1 Ark MB. Casualties increase as the Union cannoners blast holes in the Confederate ranks with grape and canister. Running out of ammo the 11 Texas Cav rushes the 9 Ia and captures over 100 prisoners.

Little's and Slack's brigades maintain pressure on Dodge, forcing him back despite their heavy losses. Brig. Gen. Green finally takes command of Price's troops, thus restoring order.

On the far right flank, McCulloch begins a flanking maneuver to cut the roads east of Leetown. Pattison's and White's brigade of Jefferson Davis' Division arrive to the southeast of Leetown and are directed toward Curtis' HQ.

**1400-1500.** Dodge begins a concerted withdrawal from Elkhorn Tavern as Vandever attempts to stove off McIntosh's large brigade. Hayden's two batteries are severely shot up and the 25 Mo loses heavily under McIntosh's assaults. Little and Price continue to press Dodge's troops as they retreat to 300-400 yards south of Elkhorn Tavern. The 1 Ark MB and Whitfield's Cav suffer heavy casualties as they assault Bowen's Cav and battery on the southeast side of Cox's Field, but the 25 Mo (Vandever) ceases to exist and the 24 Mo loses heavily from Confederate assaults. Price's 2 MSG loses 100 men.

Pike nears the Leetown-Curtis HQ road and threatens to cut it. The Leetown defense begins to shift to the east in response to the Confederate maneuver. Pattison and White draw near Curtis' HQ as Dodge's troops appear on the north edge of Ruddick's Field retreating before Little, Price and McIntosh.

**1500-1600.** Becoming part of the eastern flank, McIntosh attaches to Van Dorn and reports casualties to his brigade in excess of 1,200 men killed, wounded and missing. His men have virtually surrounded the remnants of Vandever's brigade east of Cox Field (hex 1939). Little and Price continue the pursuit of Dodge as the 9 Ia is cut down virtually to a man. The 2 MSG loses heavily from the fire of the 3 Ill Cav.

To the west Asboth's command arrives on the field southeast of Leetown, assuming position on the right flank (hex 0516). Smith's and Jenks' independent regiments take position on Asboth's immediate left. Hebert cuts the road to Curtis HQ as Greusel's brigade continues to shift units to the east of Leetown.

To the right the 4 Ia loses over 200 men in a half hour to the pursuing Confederates as it covers the retreat of Dodge's brigade. Good's Battery executes well as it plays havoc on Bowen's independent regiment.

**1600.** Hebert and Pike launch an all-out assault on Osterhaus and Asboth. Within one-half hour, over 400 Confederates are missing from the ranks. The 2 Mo takes heavy casualties from the musket fire of the 3 La but holds the line gallantly.

To the east McIntosh, Little and Price attack together but the withering fire from Dodge's and Davis' brigades send them reeling back with heavy

losses as they are driven to cover. Casualties mount for the bluecoats too as the 2 Mo and the 4 Ia lose 200 men and Welfey's Battery is overrun.

Sigel's troops arrive and bolster the beleaguered eastern flank. Vandever is wounded and taken to the rear as casualties mount on both sides.

**1700.** The Confederates attempt to move their batteries closer on the northwest side of Leetown and take heavy crew casualties from the fire of the 22 Ind. Action slows near Leetown as both sides see that night is coming on. An artillery barrage sends Stand Watie's Indians streaming to the rear.

On the left flank the Confederate assault is almost played out. McIntosh's casualties have disheartened his men. They will advance only with great difficulty and they retreat after short periods of fighting. Van Dorn pulls McIntosh from the line and sends him to McCulloch. Little and Price continue their assaults. While leading a charge of the 2 Mo, Little takes a bullet in the leg and is helped from the field. Col. Gates assumes command and immediately presses the attack. Bowen's and Peoria's batteries each lose a gun from Rebel counterbattery fire as Union supply wagons arrive to distribute ammunition.

**1730.** Despite the heavy losses, Little's 2 Mo overruns Peoria's Battery C, while on the far left flank Col. Green (Price's replacement) is wounded and succeeded by Col. Clark, but only after 30 minutes of indecision. Yankee batteries continue to lose guns to overwhelming Confederate counterbattery fire.

Fighting peters out as ammunition is distributed to waiting Union units. Nightfall brings calm to the field.

**Night.** Straggler recovery is only marginally effective as the Confederates can gather only 400 men while the Yankees manage to gather 200. New BCE's are:

### Union

Greusel: 7 of 8  
Pattison: 7 of 8  
White: 7 of 8  
Dodge: 10 of 14  
Schaefer: 3 of 4  
Coler: 12 of 14  
Bussey: 4 of 5

### Confederate

McIntosh: Exceeded BCE  
Pike: 6 of 9  
Hebert: 15 of 36  
Little: 11 of 15  
Slack: 4 of 6  
Price: 19 of 31

**0700.** McIntosh continues his westward movement as Price and Little launch a coordinated attack on the northern and eastern flanks of the Union arc. The 1 Mo and 7/9 MSG lose 100 men quickly, while 5 other regiments are thrown back by Union firepower. Their only gain is 100 prisoners from Dodge's 3 Ill Cav.

Hebert and Pike drive forward into Osterhaus and Asboth's lines. Pike is wounded and leaves the field, as does his entire command. Hebert manages to overrun Hoffman's Battery A and Elbert's Battery A. General McCulloch is shot through the head and carried from the scene of the carnage.

**0730-0830.** As though the death of McCulloch was an omen for every man on the field, the regiments of Hebert's brigade become increasingly more difficult to rally and direct toward the Union lines. McIntosh is only now arriving from the northeast. Once more the Confederates throw themselves at the solidly positioned Yankee lines, and after some initial success (300 killed and captured bluecoats), they are repulsed with 400 casualties.

Action in the east slows as Federal dominance asserts itself. Col. Gates is wounded and no one knows who shall command. Hebert assumes command of the right wing only to discover that his men will fight no more. Rather than risk a rout and uncontrolled losses, Hebert withdraws to the north.

**0830.** Only Price's brigade continues to fight as the other left wing units are too shot up to attack. Seeing that nothing good can come of continued fighting, Van Dorn orders a general withdrawal.

### STATISTICS

#### Confederates

Captured or destroyed: 27 guns  
Captured: 500 Federals  
Killed, wounded or missing Federals: 1600  
Killed: Gen. Carr  
Wounded: Vandever  
Captured: Elkhorn Tavern  
Vandever's BCE

**Total:** 113

#### Union

Destroyed: 1 gun  
Captured: 200 Rebels  
Killed, wounded, missing Rebels: 4500  
Killed: Gen. McCulloch  
Wounded: 5 brigade officers  
Held: Leetown and Curtis' HQ  
Hebert's and McIntosh's BCE

**Total:** 171

### Conclusions

The first two hours of this battle are relatively identical for all playtests, assuming that a Confederate brigade is dispatched to aid Van Dorn. The combat after 1200 hours, however, will vary considerably. In this sequence the Rebels receive a serious blow when Price is wounded in his very first attack. This, plus a replacement time of 1½ hours, virtually doomed the Confederate flanking maneuver. No less serious would have been Little's demise. Even so, the Rebs did pretty well. Vandever was completely wiped out, although McIntosh took serious losses in doing so. The most that can be said about this is that only units with less than 700 men should assault in the open. Sevens and eights take casualties too easily.

Confederate counterbattery fire was, as usual, highly effective. This will always be a bright spot for the Rebel since he can site them without regard for assaulting enemy infantry.

The Leetown assault was thrown in to show how useless it generally will be. If Curtis HQ is the prime objective, a player should be satisfied in cutting off Leetown and screen it. On the other hand, perhaps, Hebert can gradually shift to the east while Pike holds the Yanks at bay. Hebert's BCE should be kept intact, however, since that will keep the Confederates in the fight until the end of the second day. ■ ■

