

Rifle & Saber

TACTICAL COMBAT 1850-1900

[12.0] HISTORICAL COMMENTARY

Each scenario in *Rifle & Saber* is based on actual incidents during the period covered by the game, roughly 1850 to 1900. In some cases these situations have been slightly modified to permit them to fit more easily into the framework of the *Rifle & Saber* rules, but in most cases, it is those very rules which have been modified. At the end of the brief descriptions of the events which actually occurred during the battles in the game is a short explanation as to how the players may factor out a battle themselves.

Fatehpur (7 July 1857). This was an action during the *Sepoy Mutiny* (1857-1858) in India, when the native Indian forces under British control rose in rebellion. A considerable British garrison was locked up in Cawnpore, and a column of about 1,500 British troops with artillery, but little cavalry, was sent out to attempt a relief of that garrison. At Fatehpur, some 3,500 mutineers attempted to destroy the column, or at least to destroy the supply train with it. The action was a one-sided British victory, with the Indians being badly crushed, while very few British casualties were incurred. Cawnpore, however, was not relieved.

Varese (26 May 1859). During the *Austro-Sardinian War* of 1859 (also known as the *Italian Second War for Independence*), Garibaldi, famous as a leader of irregular and revolutionary troops both in Italy and Latin America, commanded a light infantry division operating on the northern flank of the Italo-French armies as they advanced into Austrian-held Lombardy-Venetia. At Varese, Garibaldi's *Cacciatori d'Alpi* successfully repulsed several Austrian attempts to take the vital crossroads town from them.

Palestro (30 May 1859): Attack of the Allied Vanguard. During the *Austro-Sardinian War*, a large Italo-French army prepared to advance into Lombardy. The advanced guard, comprising the Italian 4th Division, successfully negotiated a river crossing under fire at Palestro. As the main allied forces began to move up, the Austrians fell back. The action, quickly and efficiently carried out, was preliminary to the great battle of Magenta (4 June 1859).

Magenta (4 June 1859): The Struggle for Ponte Vecchio. At Magenta, primarily a French battle, the Ponte Vecchio position (it was a small village just behind a river line) covered the allied right flank. The French made several fierce assaults, several times taking the village but each time being forced out by Austrian counterattacks. Finally, using all available reinforcements, the French cleared and held the village, forcing the Austrians in that area to fall back, and threatening to turn the flank of the entire Austrian army. Faced with certain annihilation if they held, the Austrians retreated. Weeks later they were again defeated at the Battle of Solferino (24 June 1859), the greatest battle

since Leipzig in 1813. After Solferino, an armistice and uneasy peace was concluded. Within a decade, Italy was to become a united kingdom.

First Bull Run (21 July 1861): The Stonewall. The *American Civil War* (1861-1865) was a bloody, confused affair most of the time. The tone was set by First Bull Run. A small Confederate force was attempting to block a Union advance on Richmond behind Bull Run, a tiny creek. Through confused command procedures and incompetent leadership the Union forces began badly, advancing piecemeal. Part of the Union right flank, however, managed to cross the creek and badly maul the Confederate troops opposite. As the Confederate line looked like it was going to crumble, one brigade, General Jackson's, stood firm. Some reinforcements of infantry and cavalry came up and these, coupled with considerable confusion in the Union ranks, crushed the Union attacks and created a panic. The battle ended in a Confederate victory. Meanwhile, Jackson became known as "Stonewall" for his determined defense.

Shiloh (6-7 April 1862): The Destruction of Prentiss' Division. The *Civil War* in the west was the scene of many critical actions. The bloodiest of these was Shiloh, named after a tiny church on the battlefield. The Union army, under U.S. Grant, was badly surprised by the Confederates under Albert Sidney Johnston. Through hard fighting, the Union line held, but elements of several divisions, notably that of General Prentiss, were isolated and surrounded. For nearly two hours Prentiss and his men held out against extremely heavy odds. Although they were eventually forced to surrender, their resistance enabled Grant to reform his lines and bring up reinforcements. When the Union troops counterattacked the next morning, the Confederates were forced to retreat hastily.

Gettysburg (1-3 July 1863): Little Round Top. Gettysburg was the "turning point" of the *American Civil War*. The battle was a meeting engagement, with contingents of both sides blundering into each other more or less accidentally. As the battle raged, additional forces arrived on both sides. Little Round Top was a craggy hill at the southern end of the main battle line, on the Union left flank. Possession of the hill would have permitted the Confederates to enfilade the entire Union front for some distance. By chance, the position was not held by either side during the initial phase of the battle. Fortunately, the Chief of Engineers of the Army of the Potomac chanced on the site and realized its importance. He hastily commandeered two brigades of V Corps and ordered them to occupy the hill. At about the same time the Confederates realized the potential of the position, and Hood's "Texas" division dispatched troops to occupy the hill. It was a race of sorts, and the Union troops made it to the top minutes before the Confederates. A bloody hand-to-hand struggle ensued, with the Union eventually gaining control.

Gettysburg (1-3 July 1863): Pickett's Charge. On the final day of the battle at Gettysburg, General Lee realized that the battle would have to be won soon or it could not be won at all. He gathered together some 15,000 troops under General Pickett and pressed them forward against the center of the Union line. The Union troops, of II Corps, were well positioned, on the top of a considerable ridgeline, and poured a heavy fire into the advancing Confederates. This was answered by the Confederate batteries, but these were really too far away to make a serious dent in the Union position. Finally, a small contingent of the Confederates made it to the ridgeline and broke into the Union position, only to be driven back by some reserves. This action has been termed "the High Water mark of the Confederacy." It certainly was one of Lee's greatest tactical mistakes.

Langensalza (27 June 1866): Prussian Rear-guard Defense. During the *Seven Weeks War* (1866) Prussia and Italy attacked Austria and her South-German allies. The main theater of operations was in Bohemia, but, at the same time that the Prussians were conducting their campaign in Bohemia, they were also conducting operations in Northern, Central, and Southern Germany against Austria's allies, Hanover, Bavaria, and other petty states. The small Hanoverian army, realizing that they were badly exposed, wisely retreated southwards in an effort to join with the Bavarian Army and the VIII Austro-German Corps. At Langensalza, however, they were forced to give battle. The Hanoverians occupied strong positions and the Prussians were repulsed in several attempts to crush them. The Prussians then fell back, behind a small rearguard. The Hanoverian cavalry pursued — several Prussian squares were ridden down, and their batteries captured. This is the portion of the action depicted here. The Hanoverian victory was fruitless because the Prussians, although defeated, had managed to trap the Hanoverians between several rather strong forces. Soon after their victory at Langensalza, the Hanoverians surrendered.

Worth (6 August 1870): The Struggle for the Niederwald. The *Franco-Prussian War* (1870) was the final war for German unification. Worth was the first major battle of the war and set the pattern for the rest of the conflict. The terrain over which the battle was fought was amenable to a successful defense but at the southern flank of the French position was a badly exposed forest, the Niederwald. It was too close to ignore but not close enough to incorporate directly into the effective defense line which the French had established. A weak French division was assigned to hold the forest and the Germans prepared to attack it in an effort to flank the French main line. The battle which resulted was extremely bloody, with the Germans eventually having to commit two divisions. After nearly five hours, the French finally fell back. This resulted in a general retreat. The French had lost the battle, but tactically the Germans had come off second best.

Mars-la-Tour (16 August 1870): The Attack of the Cavalry of the Imperial Guard. Mars-la-Tour was one of the final French efforts to break out of the encirclement at Metz. The action was ferocious and German resistance was tenacious. Thinking that they detected a weakening in one portion of the German line, the French threw against it a brigade of the cavalry of the Imperial Guard and a division of

regular cavalry. The Prussians countered by throwing in a mixed force of light and heavy cavalry, supporting it with heavy infantry fire. The French charge was broken and their cavalry streamed back in considerable disorder. The battle ended in somewhat of a French rout.

Plevna [20 July—10 December 1877]. Plevna was the focal point of the *Russo-Turkish War*. A small village dominating an important crossroads in Bulgaria, it was occupied by a small Turkish army under Omar Pasha on 20 July 1877, hours before a Russian force was to have moved in. A series of battles raged around the town for the next six months, with the Russians losing far more men than the Turks. On 30 July, after considerable entrenching on both sides, the Russians attempted to storm the Grivitza Redoubt, covering the northeastern corner of the Turkish position. Some 30,000 to 40,000 Russians took part in the general assault, against 20,000 to 25,000 Turks, but at the redoubt proper only about 15,000 Russians were involved. The Russians stormed forward several times, each time being driven back by steady Turkish rifle fire. When they finally gave up, the Russians had lost 5,000 men and the Turks 2,000. A more serious effort to storm the town in September cost 15,000 Russian and Roumanian dead and 5,000 Turkish dead out of forces of 75,000 and 45,000 respectively. After this slaughter the Russians decided to starve the Turks out and gradually blockaded the entire position. On 8 November, General Skobelev, the most intelligent and original of the Russian generals, led a limited attack to clear the Turks off several small hills in the southern sector of the position. This was a well-planned, night action having limited objectives and the position fell rather quickly. Fully blockaded, the Turks attempted a breakout on 10 December with 35,000 fit troops against some 150,000 Russians and Roumanians. Their efforts failed with over 4,000 dead and they surrendered. The war itself dragged on for some months, but ended with both sides losing: the Turks territory and the Russians prestige.

Tarapaca [28 November 1879]. During the *War of the Pacific* (1879-1883) Chile successfully defeated both Peru and Bolivia in a series of land and naval actions culminating in the taking of Lima in 1881. At Tarapaca, a small Chilean force of all arms was surprised and defeated in a hand-to-hand battle lasting about four hours, by a badly equipped Peruvian army composed entirely of infantry. This was one of the bloodiest battles of the Nineteenth Century, with fully 27% of the forces engaged becoming casualties. The Peruvian victory was, of course, fruitless as the Chileans were generally so superior that the war ended in a humiliating peace settlement.

El Caney [1 July 1898]. During the *Spanish American War* (1898), the principal land operations were the landing in Cuba and the siege of Santiago. Neither of these was a particularly brilliant operation. At Santiago, however, the northern flank of the Spanish position was covered by a small blockhouse, surrounded by trenches and barbed wire. Some 500 Spanish troops held the place, equipped with magazine rifles. Fully 6,600 American troops (mostly equipped with single shot breechloaders) were sent off to take the place and the operation was expected to last no more than two hours. The Spanish resistance was not overcome for ten hours.

Modder River [28 November 1899]. During the *Boer War* (1899-1902) the British Army uncovered numerous flaws in its fabric. Not the least of these was deflation of their considerable confidence, overblown by decades of fighting savage enemies with little concept of discipline. At Modder River, during the British drive to relieve Kimberly, some 10,000 British troops attempted to oust about 6,000 Boer irregulars from hastily fortified positions. Several frontal assaults were attempted, all ending in bloody failure. Finally the British broke off the action and settled down for the night. During the hours of darkness, the Boers mounted their ponies and rode away, permitting the British to claim a victory.

South Africa [1900]. By the end of 1900 regular Boer forces had everywhere met with reverses. But guerrilla resistance proved more than the British could handle. This scenario depicts a Boer raid on a British supply column heavily guarded by both infantry and cavalry, with some artillery as well.

[13.0] DESIGNER'S NOTES

Essentially, *Rifle and Saber* is built around the same design concepts as *Grenadier* (another SSG). A number of simplifications have been made, due to dissatisfaction with the *Grenadier* methods, and differences in the period.

The Sequence of Play has been changed to reduce the previously allowed Offensive and Defensive Fire Phases in each Player-Turn. The extension of unit's range due to the introduction of rifling gun barrels in the 1840's meant that there were no cases where a unit could "rush" the defenders without taking fire, when each side was using similar weapons. Thus it was possible to increase the effectiveness of the Combat Results Table, and eliminate firing outside of a Friendly Player-Turn.

One of the most important abstractions in the game that may help Players understand apparently unreasonable game mechanics is the constant presence of fire. Merely because no unit on the map may be engaging in fire does not mean that projectiles are not buzzing across the field of combat. Rather, there is simply no organized fire. Thus individuals within any unit are always engaging in haphazard, unorganized, and even unordered fire. Thus it is possible for units with breech-loading rifles to rush a muzzle-loading unit simply because the breech-loaders find it much easier to move and fire, and then keep reloading. This unorganized fire effectively pins the muzzle-loading unit, and prevents it from organized volley fire, the only way of stopping such a rush. This is because the men with the muzzle-loading rifle must stand to engage in any more than a single shot. The same tactic is not nearly as effective against an opponent with breech-loading rifles, since they may lay down and return fire, thus not being affected by the running fire of the rushing unit.

It is readily apparent that the Nineteenth Century witnessed an enormous technological acceleration in the personal firearms of the individual soldier, but little advance in the range or apparatus of artillery units, nor progress in cavalry doctrine. Only the machine gun was an innovation, and that had more potential than actual effect. Essentially artillery was still the same weapon as in the Napoleonic times, but the extension of the individual

man's weapon-range meant that artillery was comparatively less effective at long ranges, and infinitely more vulnerable. Only the cannister shooting was still devastating. This was less so than in the Napoleonic Wars, again because infantry no longer advanced in the dense columns or lines as in those wars.

It is quickly noticeable that the infantry units have large differences in Movement Allowance and Defense Strength. Essentially the differences are based on what might seem to be minor things. It is simply impossible for a man with a muzzle-loading rifle to reload while moving, while it is easier (though hardly easy) for a man with a breech-loader. Again, the fact that muzzle-loaders must be loaded in a non-prone position, for any rapidity of fire means that these units are much more vulnerable to fire. The late breech-loaders had faster reload mechanisms, and began to introduce multi-shot magazines, so their firepower is much superior to the early breech-loaders. The range increment is primarily a factor of training; as the century wore on, the various training programs began to include the novel idea of just how far the range of weapons could be used effectively. This was also abetted by the greater time to aim than was permitted by faster reload mechanisms. The concept of an individual soldier aiming his weapon was completely novel. Only the elite units ("sharpshooters") did this previously.

Even more than artillery, cavalry was at its low point in this period. All the armies had plenty of it, but no one quite knew what to do with it. Despite a tremendous variety of names and types among real units, essentially it boiled down to whether the mounted troops carried rifles and could dismount and use them or not. In game terms, the cavalry is useful only for a high-morale force, or to disrupt a particular position at great sacrifice to permit the infantry an easier advance.

This is somewhat ameliorated by the optional rules on Morale. This was truly the most important factor in hand-to-hand combat. As bloody as individual actions were in the Nineteenth Century (the bloodiest since the "no quarter" days of the Religious Wars), it was a rarity to see a defense to the death. Rather, units gradually lost men and became increasingly skittish, until it reached the point that men would gradually drift away, and units would no longer be able to sustain cohesion, i.e., they would simply permit the soldiers to be "ferocious" and to some extent ignore otherwise crippling losses. Much of this of course was in the eyes of the defender.

A portent of the future was the ability of units to field-fortify themselves, without using the natural terrain, such as woods and towns. Thus the Improved Position and Trench rules show this. It became quite effective in certain wars, especially the American Civil War. Still this was again a matter of promise rather than actuality.

The Nineteenth Century stands between two ages when the individual soldier was basically fodder. In Napoleonic times he was part of a moving mechanical mass which was usually destined to be shot to pieces by artillery that he himself could not touch. In World War I he was destined to become merely a cipher in the enormous casualties caused by the domination of siege warfare and the all powerful machine gun. Only in the Nineteenth Century in all the history of warfare with firearms has the individual soldier dominated the battlefield.

Rifle & Saber

[15.0] TURN RECORD CHART

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20

Rifle & Saber Errata as of 30 April 1973

As a result of post-publication playtesting, the following errata has been assembled to clarify and correct various errors or ambiguities in the original game components.

[1.1] GAME SCALE

Each hex in *Rifle & Saber* represents about 50 meters from side to side. Each unit type represents about 100-150 men, or four to six guns. Each Game-Turn represents five minutes.

[5.1] FIRE COMBAT

The reference to an HZ unit in the example paragraph was intended to read an MZ unit.

(G) Units may always fire into and through Occupied hexes (hexes containing Enemy or Friendly units) which are located on lower terrain than the firing unit. Thus units on

slopes may fire through ground-level Occupied hexes, but may not fire through other Occupied slope hexes. Regardless of elevation, units may never fire through *two* hexsides (or hexside junctions) of Woods or Village Blocking hexes.

[6.0] DISRUPTION

(C) *Retreat*. Disrupted units which retreat into Friendly occupied hexes become the topmost unit in that hex and as such are vulnerable to fire attacks previously allocated against that hex.

[10.1] MORALE

Disrupted units in a demoralized force are returned to an undisrupted state after the normal interval as detailed under [10.1] (B) Duration, if their force is subsequently raised to a normal or high Morale level.

[10.5] ROAD MOVEMENT (Optional)

(A) Units (not in the Road Movement Mode themselves) must stop upon entering any hex within the Road Movement Space of an *Enemy* unit. This is an additional restriction to those already described in the original Case (A) rule.

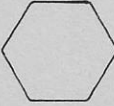







[11.1] Scenario #10

Prussian: (forces should read) (Blue): (a) 17 EB; 2 BA (b) 10 EB; 2 BA

[11.17] Scenario #17

Special rules: Limbers are only automatically eliminated if alone in a hex to which a Boer unit moves adjacent. Other British units stacked with the limber must be attacked normally.

[9.2] Terrain Effects Chart

Terrain or condition	Movement Point (MP) Cost to Enter	Effect on Defense Strength (Fire and Shock)
 Clear	1 MP	Normal
 Village	1 MP	Tripled
 Slope and/or Woods	2 MP	Doubled
 Ridge Hexside	+ 1 MP	Blocks Fire; No Effect on Shock
 River	3 MP	Doubled
 River Ford	2 MP	Halved
 Bridge	1/3 MP*	Halved
 Road	1/3 MP*	NA
OPTIONAL RULE EFFECTS		
Assume Road Mode	+ 1 MP	Halved Regardless of other terrain
Leave Road Mode	+ 1 MP	Returns to normal
Working	NA	Halved
Improved Position	NA	Doubled
Trench	NA	Tripled

TERRAIN EFFECTS CHART NOTES

(*) In the Standard Rules, units only use the Road Movement Rate if they are moving into a Road or Bridge hex through a Road hexside. When entering a Road or Bridge hex through a non-Road hexside, pay the movement cost dictated by the other terrain in the hex. When using the optional Road Movement Rule, a unit may only use the Road Movement Rate if it is in the Road Movement Mode; when not in the Road Movement Mode, the unit must pay movement costs and modify its Defensive Strength as if the Road or Bridge did not exist.

When a unit's Defense Strength is modified by terrain or Improved Position or Trenches, the total effect is resolved into one net figure (for example, if a unit were in a Trench in a Bridge hex, its Defense Strength would be halved and then tripled, resulting in a Defense Strength multiplication of 1 1/2).

"NA" = Not Applicable; do not take this terrain feature into account for movement (or defense) purposes.

[9.1] Combat Results Table

Die Roll	Probability Ratio (Odds) Fire Attack Strength-to-Fire Defense Strength								Die Roll
	1-3	1-2	1-1	2-1	3-1	4-1	5-1	6-1	
1	•	•	•	•	•	•	RD	E	1
2	•	•	•	•	RD	RD	RD	E	2
3	•	•	•	•	RD	RD	RD	E	3
4	•	•	•	RD	RD	RD	RD	E	4
5	•	•	RD	RD	RD	E	E	E	5
6	•	RD	RD	RD	E	E	E	E	6

Attacks at odds of less than 1-3 are treated as 1-3
Attacks at odds greater than 6-1 are treated as 6-1

FIRE COMBAT RESULTS EXPLANATION

• = No Effect.

RD = Defending unit retreats its full Movement Allowance and is then disrupted. If an "RD" is obtained against a unit which is already disrupted, the unit is eliminated instead. See Disruption and Retreat rule (6.0).

E = Defending unit is eliminated (immediately removed from play). If Defending unit is an undisrupted gun unit, the "E"

result is degraded to a "D" (no retreat) unless Shot fire is involved. If the Defending unit is an already disrupted gun unit, or if Shot fire is involved, then "E" result means elimination. See Fire Combat, Case H.

Remember, in Fire Combat (except Shot fire) only the topmost defending unit in a given hex may be fired upon and only that unit suffers the result. See Fire Combat, Case E.