Terrible Swift Sword, 1ˢᵗ Edition
Rules Review by Russ Gifford

Terrible Swift Sword The Battle of Gettysburg, 1ˢᵗ Edition, 1976

(Game history comments and 'How to play TSS' provided by Russ Gifford)
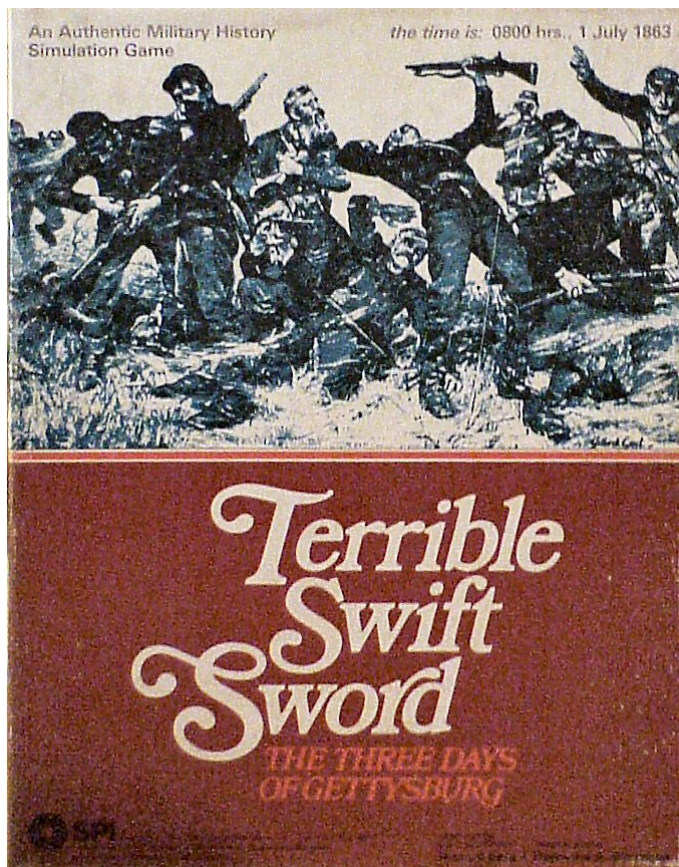
Game History

The game that changed everything. Small arms with various ranged weapons and lots of artillery in separate sections by gun type. The game required leaders, command control, morale checks and incrimental step losses, units in various formations, and terrain with hills, valleys, ridge lines, woods, and orchards - All BEFORE *Squad Leader* ever thought of half those things!

In many ways, *Terrible Swift Sword* was the culmination of what SPI set out to do with their TAC series games. Just as Panzerblitz brought wargames from the Strategic to the Tactical level for armored vehicles, *Terrible Swift Sword* did the same for men with small arms and artillery. And the skeleton put forth in SPI's earliest TAC games – *Renassaince of Infantry* and all the early games of *Centurian, Dark Ages,* and the many *PRESTAGS* games are present in *Terrible Swift Sword*.

The key was the combination of everything, in a beautiful presentation, with detailed rules that made it all very compelling, and very playable. Unlike the previous games I mentioned which cut corners using generic 1 or 2 color maps and drab counters, *Terrible Swift Sword* worked into the package a map that made you see the rolling hills of the battlefield stretching out before you. Like Heth, you were determined to push your men down that road!

The Playable Monster

With three maps and 2000 counters, it was the first of SPI's tactical monsters. It also was a manjor change in the idea of monsters. Most, like *War in the East*, were big, but the rules were 'dumb' in the venacular of the day. They were at their core simple Move-Fight game systems. Not so with *Terrible Swift Sword*. It was detailed, with formation changes, ranged fire using differentiated weapons, various leader qualities and the need of leaders to allow units to change

formation, engage in melee, or to rally from morale failure. *TSS* was clearly the game many of us who had been playing wargames for a decade or more were looking for. And we liked what we got. And we proved it.

People often say monsters were bought but not played. Certainly not true in the case of this game. *Terrible Swift Sword* would create a legion of followers who would play the campaign game and the many scenarios over and over again, and want more. The single map Litte Round Top scenario was the perfect introduction to the system, and I likely played it 10 times in the first two or three months. Ironically, with an opponent, which was not always easy to come by, but this game invited people to play.

As this replay will show , *Terrible Swift Sword* is as accessible and enjoyable today as it was 45 years ago. Only a handful of games can say that.

Getting Started

That 'quick start' will certainly be seen in this replay. The game begins as the battle of Gettysburg historically started. A handful of Union Cavalry under Buford arrayed along the road leading to Gettysburg, and a few brigades of Confederates coming on board the first turn. Fewer than 20 counters on a side for the first few turns – but more marching on every hour.

As the troops close on each other, you make choices in formation, in tactical choices, in where and when to attack or defend. It is an easy game to start, with less set up required of the campaign or the first day battle scenario than the single map Battle for Little Round Top!

It was also an easy game to teach people. They would see the map and the counters, with their sillouettes and differenciated weapons, and see the brigrades stretching out over the fields, or marching in long columns on the road, straining to get to the front. Just like those troops, would be players intrigued by the scene wanted in – and said so! You could give someone a 4 or 5 regiment brigade, and by the time they had marched them to the front, they were experienced enough to handle more. I am hopeful that the great pictures by TC evokes the same interest in you. In case it does, I have added an addendum on the end with a brief review of the rules for TSS.

IF you want more, I have links in those rules to my 'classes' on how to play TSS/GBACW. And the Rules, CRT, charts, and other free downloads that might be useful in this replay are available here:

https://www.spigames.net/GBACW_PlayerAids.htm

If I choose to add a comment, I will place my comments in brackets. [like this.]

But right now – let's get started.

[**From the Scenario / Rule Book]:**

On the afternoon of June 30, two brigades or Union cavalry under General John Buford were camped in the hills west of Gettysburg. To the far west they could just barely see a column of Confederate infantry trudging through the steamy heat toward the small Pennsylvania town. A brief exchange of shots from Buford's pickets caused an immediate withdrawal of the Southern troops (Pettigrew's Brigade from Heth's Division, supposedly looking for supplies). Buford, a capable and resourceful officer, immediately sent word by courier to Major General John Reynolds, in command of the Union I Corps - the nearest body of troops- for Buford was not fooled by this quick Confederate disappearance. He knew that the Army of Northern Virginia would be back -and in force- the next day. With only 2900 troopers at his command, Buford decided to hold the ground, for a quick look around told him that those hills would afford an excellent position for receiving an attack.

General Robert E. Lee received the information of this brief encounter from Major General Heth stoically. Heth was convinced that the force encountered had been local militia. He was ordered by Lee to reconnoiter in force the following morning. So, at about eight o'clock in the morning of July 1st the brigades of Brigadier Generals Archer and Davis tramped down the Chambersburg Pike from Cashtown into one of the most decisive clashes in the history of warfare.]

A Quick Review of How to Play TSS!

By Russ Gifford

Below is a thumbnail review of the rules to help you enjoy this replay to the fullest!

Movement

Movement costs depends on Formation, on Leadership, and on Terrain. Unit spend points to move, and the cost depend on their formation. (Formation changes also cost movement points.)

Infantry must be in **line** formation to fire but can move in either formation.
They have to be in **column** to get the advantages that roads allow
– specifically, Inf in column or limbered artillery or mounted cavalry pay road costs, NOT terrain costs.

It is more important for Artillery. **Artillery** must be **limbered** to **move** but must be **unlimbered** to **fire**. (And artillery of the day is not a tank. **Artillery that entered a new hex that turn cannot fire**, even if it spent the movement points to change from limbered to unlimbered.)

Formation notes here: https://www.spigames.net/GBACW_PDF/GBACWMod2Units%20and%20Formations.pdf

Movement Notes here: https://www.spigames.net/GBACW_PDF/GBACWMod5Movement.pdf

Facing

Units have facing. They can only fire or move through their three front hexsides. They also only project a Zone of Control through those hexsides if in line (Infantry) or unlimbered (Artillery).

Facing and ZOC notes here: https://www.spigames.net/GBACW_PDF/GBACWMod3Facing%20and%20ZOC.pdf

This means *maneuver* is important. Allowing an enemy to flank you – getting past your front and attacking from behind – increases the damage they can do by a shift on the Fire Chart, or a cost to the morale. And see what happens during a rout! (See Morale below.)

Fire Combat

Units can only fire out their three front hexsides (defined in the Facing segment above.)

Fire is mitigated by weapon type, distance, and terrain.

While most successful fire combat results costs a strength point if the fire is effective, it also requires a unit to check morale, which can cause the unit to rout.

Fire notes here: https://www.spigames.net/GBACW_PDF/GBACWMod7FireCombat.pdf

LOS

Toughest thing to remember in TSS is SLOPE hexes are MOVEMENT issues, NOT LOS issues. 1. So ALL the GRAY slope hexes DO NOT AFFECT LOS. [See 10.71]

2. Ridge hexes are the ones with gold on both sides. In essence, these block LOS THROUGH the ridge hexside, UNLESS the unit is ADJACENT to the ridge. (In a hex with a ridge on the hexside.)

See the example below:

By the TSS rules, the two rifle units here can see each other.

The T4 can see almost everything in this picture to hex on the other side of the ridge running from 0919 to 1523.


He can see the USA Rifle unit in 1223. He can't see the other CSA unit because he can't see down the ridgeline.

He can't see into the railroad cut.

He could NOT see hex 1821, because the woods hex in 1722 would block.

And I think it goes without saying, but a unit can fire INTO a blocking hex – but not THROUGH it. That's why in the first example the arty can see "to the hex on the other side of the ridge running from 0919 to 1523."

Crests are the splash slopes around a hex, which denotes a HIGHT change.
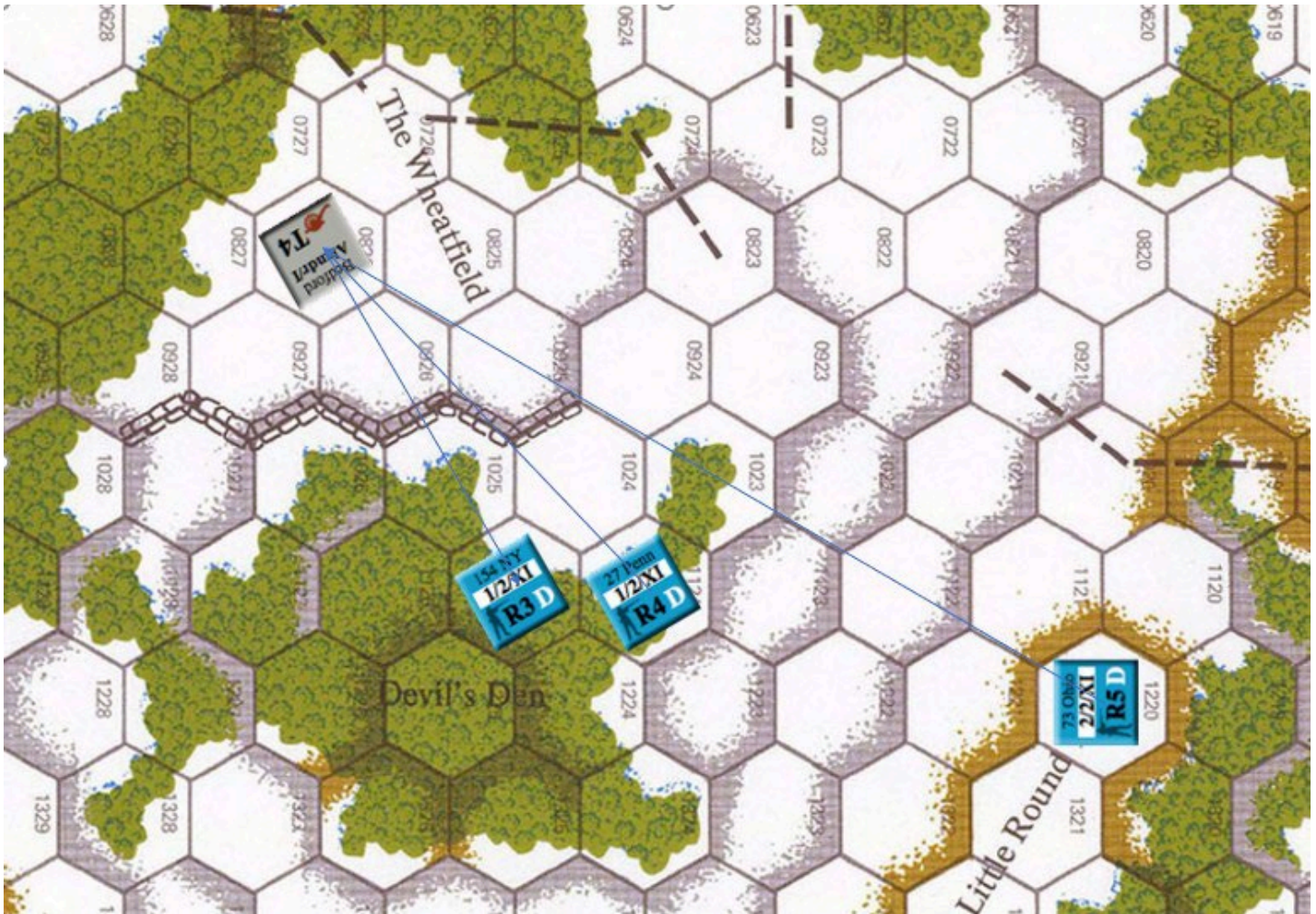
In this picture, the Union unit in 1220 is on the Little Round Top Hilltop, and all the rest of the units in the picture are at the lower level. IF a unit was in 1121 it would be at the LOWER level as well.

The LOS from the Hilltop to the CSA battery is BLOCKED, because the Trees are a blocking Terrain, and it is exactly halfway between. If blocking terrain is at the halfway point, OR CLOSER TO THE LOWER unit, the LOS is blocked.

Thus the LOS from the CSA battery cannot hit LRT from that position. HOWEVER if it were in 0727, what about then?

It would be open then, as the range would be 9, and the blocking terrain would be 5 hexes from the LOWER unit.

The battery and the two Union Units in Devils Den are at the SAME height -- so can THEY see the enemy?

The ENTIRE HEX of 1025 is a BLOCKING HEX. So the unit in 1125 is certainly UNABLE to see or be seen by the CSA battery.

The one in 1024 is a question. IF the LOS passes through any part of 1025 - even if it is not touching the woods DEPICTION - then it is BLOCKED. As a VERTEX is not a block, it MIGHT be clear. Would need to check it.

But you say -- 'well, the stonewall blocks anyway!' No - only Ridges, Crests, Woods, and Towns are blocking terrain. Again, see [10.71].

And remember, the GREY slopes are only MOVEMENT expenses. the ground is sloping, and requires more effort to walk across it - but it does NOT block LOS.

Morale

If the fails a morale check, he must rout back 3 hexes. But if they are surrounded, the routing unit would be forced to surrender, costing the entire regiment of 3 or 4 strength points to be lost.

(Much of this is in the Fire notes above.) Units need a leader to recover from rout.

Leaders

Leaders have to be in Command Radius of their troops to exert their influence. If they are, the troop is said to 'be in command.' **Units must be in command to Move their full movement points, Change formation, or Rally.**

Leaders command ranges are differentiated by their ability. They also impact a unit's morale check if they are stacked with them. They also have to check for injury or death if they are stacked with a unit that suffers a combat loss!

Leader notes here: https://www.spigames.net/GBACW_PDF/GBACWMod4Command.pdf

Melee

A key part of the game is melee. If the moving player moves troops adjacent to the enemy, and survives the point blank defensive fire and the incumbent morale check it induced, they may melee the enemy unit, which is really where the overall battles are won or lost.

Melee is not a given, and there is usually a cost for both the attacker and the defender. The games are decided by casualties, and players get double casualty points for capturing troops – which frequently occurs in melee.

Another big Victory Point factor are terrain objectives, and melees can frequently open a door to the victory point terrain hexes.
A defending unit giving ground in a melee often undermines an entire defensive line. That forces them to fall back to a new position, but the enemy will be hot on their heels. However, as in history, should the attacker lose so many men closing with the enemy that his troops cannot carry the melee, the line can hold, forcing a new round of sacrifices from the attacker to again close with the line and try melee yet one more time. (See Pickett's Charge.)

Melee notes here: https://www.spigames.net/GBACW_PDF/GBACWMod8Melee.pdf

Wrap up items – Rallies, Ammo, Leader Replacement, etc:

Routed Units

Failing a combat-induced morale check, the unit immediately routs 3 hexes during the player turn.

Routed Units:

• Do not conduct fire attacks of any kind.

• Do not have Zones of Control, may not move into ZOCs.

• May move only 1 hex, and cannot initiate melee.

> ## Routed Units may only return to normal in their Rally phase:
>
> • **Must be within their Brigade Leader's Effectiveness Rating AND that leader must expend a Rally Point.**
>
> • *Or* **they must be stacked with any friendly leader.**
>
> *Units part of a Brigade that has lost Combat Effectiveness must also pass a morale check to rally. (See 18.0)*

The above should point out why TSS was so good: It integrates ALL THESE things into the ebb and flow of a battle, with what that the time was the most comprehensive rule set ever. (And FAR more user friendly than the Squad Leader rules that followed shortly there after.)

Putting it all together:

Terrible Swift Sword has the following symmetrical Player Turn sequence of play, repeated for each player. **The Phasing player's phases are in bold.**

- **Command**
- **Counter Battery (TSS only)**
- **Movement**
- Defensive Fire
- **Offensive Fire**
- **Melee**
- **Ammo Resupply, Command Replacement, etc**
- **Rally / Recovery**

The player turn now repeats for second player, who becomes the phasing player. After both are completed, a 20 minute turn is marked off.

I provided the links to the slide shows teaching TSS/GBACW above, but if you would like movie versions, with me talking you through it, both sets are at this web page. https://www.spigames.net/spi_gbacw_tutorials.htm

Now – go enjoy this great game!