The American Civil War

By Steve List

Moves Footnotes, Issue #15

The game *American Civil War* is a strategic level game; indeed, with Game Turns representing three months, it is hard to validly reflect any tactical considerations. The designer, however, has allowed the mechanics to be dominated by a device originally invented for tactical games, with turns a few minutes to perhaps an hour in length. This device is dearly beloved by the designer and therefore used almost indiscriminately. The device is the "Command Control" Rule, whereby units are subject to random motion, or in this game, to immobility, depending on the index number of the hex they occupy.

The players are in the positions of Presidents Lincoln and Davis, that is, Commanders-in-Chief of their armies. Like those men, the players "issue orders" to their troops, only to see them often totally ignored. In this game, this is due to Command Control. In the war, it was because the civilian Presidents all too often deferred their own judgment to the supposedly superior military judgment and technical expertise of their own advisors and field generals. The idea of attaining political objectives by military means was only slowly grasped, and even as basic a concept as unified command structure was only slowly adopted. Thus both sides muddled along.

One of the classic features of our style of wargaming is the premise that now "you command the forces used". Players who wish to steep themselves in the authentic Civil War milieu to the point where they are willing to allow arbitrary rules representing intransigent generals and blatant political interference to hamstring their operations are welcome to do so. However, since the players are in a position of ultimate power, they should be allowed to cut through the mass of boondoggle, to shake things up by cashiering disobedient officers, and generally make their armed forces more responsive to their wills.

This is of course an example of changing history, of using historical hindsight to do differently things the actual Presidents may not have known could or should be done. Thus it is at best an option for those who want to get out from under the Command Control Rules: here is a historical rationalization to allow you to do so.

Command Control can be dispensed with entirely; this is not a very satisfactory approach as it upsets the whole nature of the game, and ensures a Union Victory.

Command Control levels may be arbitrarily reduced, e.g.; start the Rebels off at level 2 and the Federals at level 3. This too is not wholly suitable. I think the best approach is to make the Command Control determination a two-step procedure. The player will first roll the die and compare the number rolled to his current CC level. If the number rolled is higher than his level, he goes no further; none of his units are affected, all are active. If the number rolled is the same or lower than the Command Control level, then the die is rolled a second time and the chart is consulted. Both players should use the level 3 column of the chart for the entire game, however. By use of this procedure, the effects of Command Control stay the same while reducing the impact from Game Turn to Game Turn.

Another aspect of the game which could stand some modification is the role of leader units. The Command Control level of a given leader is the level of its army minus the leader's bonus number, e.g.; for an army at level three, a leader with a value of 1 has an effective level of 2. This effective level of each leader is compared to the first die roll in the procedure given above. Thus, a leader may be immune to CC effects because its level is lower than the die roll, or because it is not on a hex due to suffer command Control effects. If a leader is subject to CC effects and is rendered inactive troops in adjacent hexes are inactive only if this is called for by hex number and the CC chart. If the leader is active, then troops on adjacent hexes are active regardless of their hex numbers.

Leader units can also give a bonus in combat. Leaders with a value of 2 or 3 increase the total

adjusted combat strength of any stack or unit they are on by one, in both attack and defense. Leaders with a value of 1 can give this bonus only when defending; leaders with a value of 0 provide no combat bonus. This bonus is to the adjusted combat strength, after all other effects have been figured. For example, two Combat Strength Points on a swamp hex with a "3" leader have an effective strength of 5 in defense (2 doubled plus 1), 3 for attack when supplied (2 plus 1) and 2 for attack when out of supply (2 halved plus 1).

To reflect the greater ability to learn "on-the-job", demonstrated by Union Generals, it takes only the loss of two Confederate Strength Points to promote a Union leader. These can be earned either in attack or defense, not just in attacks.

A minor matter that can be straightened out is the utility of riverine forces. They increase by one the effective Defense Strength of a land force on a hex adjacent to the riverine unit whether or not there is a port or fort present.

The changes to leader and Command Control Rules given above will open the game up a little, and let the players do more with their forces. A wrinkle can be added that will slow things down again, due to indecision by the players, rather than due to arbitrary rules. This is the use of inverted counters and dummies.

The Federals start the game with 3 dummies, and get one each Game Turn as reinforcements. The Confederates start with 6 dummies, and get one each Game Turn with the reinforcements. The dummy can be brought on in any replacement city, while anyone group of replacement cities can bring on two real Strength Points so the location of the dummy reinforcement will not be compromised.

Inverted units are revealed only when combat is resolved, or a player wishes to try a double match. When using double match against the intrinsic strength of a town, the phasing player need only show that he has two Strength Points in his stack. If a dummy unit -is turned upright while not stacked with a real unit,

it is removed from play. If a dummy is stacked with a real unit, it is not removed from play unless all the real units are eliminated due to combat. Dummy units may not enter any enemy primary Zone of Control unless stacked with a real unit. Dummy units are treated as real units of strength 1 for attrition and foraging purposes, except that a dummy cannot be removed in place of a real unit under the attrition rule.

Finally, Leader units themselves are never inverted.

- Steve List