

# GRAND CHANCELLORSVILLE

## Standard Union Prudence or Optional Risk

by Arnold Hendrick

*The Blue & Gray family is a hardy group of games that promises to provide opportunities for enjoyable competition for years to come. I have two favorites out of the nine games in the system and they never seem to wear out their welcome with me. Arnold Hendrick has been a contributor to this magazine for a number of years [he used to work here, too!] and has here provided us with another of his well-considered analyses. Over to you, Arnold.* —RAS

*Grand Chancellorsville* is a combination of two *Blue & Gray II* folio games (*Fredericksburg* and *Hooker & Lee*). It combines two of the folio maps, and thus provides more room for maneuver and tactical variation than most of the small quadrigames. *Grand Chancellorsville* virtually demands use of the attack effectiveness rule, since otherwise the much stronger Union army can steamroll over the Confederates.

However, *Grand Chancellorsville* has two special options of its own. One provides for higher level leader counters, whose main function is to allow units stacked with them to suffer "Ar" (attacker retreat) results without losing attack effectiveness. The other presumably represents Hooker's indecision in the actual battle by requiring each Union Corps (in game terms, every three infantry divisions and one artillery unit) to roll a die each turn, with a 50-50 chance that the Corps will be immobilized that turn.

The leadership rule actually favors the Union, even though the Confederate Lee and Jackson counters are very powerful, since it allows the Union to use their leaders with their powerful infantry divisions in 1-1 or 2-1 assaults without fear of losing attack effectiveness. Therefore, it is necessary to use both optional rules to retain any sort of game balance, since once command control ("Hooker's indecision" rule) takes effect on turn 7, for the last 14 turns of the game, the Confederates can make big troop shifts, and conduct aggressive attacks, gambling that Union immobility will hinder the normal counterattacks.

Although the game does have victory points for terrain, the destruction of two big Union units or six of the more modest Confederate units equals the total value of all terrain in the game. Therefore, destroying enemy troops is the prime objective. If the enemy is unobliging enough to not serve up his men on a silver platter, it is necessary to threaten or capture terrain points, which will then force him to fight.

### THE SITUATION

The Union player, at the game's start, is already committed to a wide sweeping flank attack with half his army, which arrives on the

far western edge of the map. The other half, meanwhile, is deploying on the eastern half in the Fredericksburg and Deep Run area, against the Confederate fortified positions in that sector. The flank march has surprised the Confederates, who have three divisions (four to six infantry brigade units, and one artillery unit) marching on from the east edge on their first move, while most of the remaining three Confederate divisions already on the map are in the east facing Fredericksburg and Deep Run.

Both the Union and the Confederates have two "pivot" formations. The Union has the two strongest divisions of the II Corps (1st and 3rd), plus artillery, in the center of the map, able to join the flank march by crossing U.S. Mine ford, or prepared to attack over Bank's or Scott's ford into the rear of the Confederate Fredericksburg position. The Confederates have half of Anderson's division ready to cover those two key fords, while the other half (two lonesome brigades) are posted out at Wilderness Tavern, hopefully to delay the Union flank march, or at least stop the cavalry of the flank march from advancing too far, too fast.

The Union Player's actions are the key to the game. His army is the one with the big offensive potential, and his flank march assures him of at least a draw if he can hold onto the western edge of the map (not as easy as it looks, since Stuart's Rebel cavalry arrives in his rear, in that very sector, on turns 8 through 10). Because Union infantry units are double to quadruple the size of the Confederate units, even though the latter can stack (two-high) while the Union cannot, the Union is still stronger—often so strong that the Confederates can't get better than a 1-1 attack against an infantry division in the open! Furthermore, although the flank march cuts the Union army into two completely separate bodies, which will probably never join, it also spreads the Confederates dangerously thin, especially in the first half dozen turns, before the three reinforcing divisions can get up into the lines.

### STRATEGY:

#### WITHOUT OPTIONAL RULES

In this version, the Union can afford to pursue a careful, circumspect game. There is no need to take big risks to expose strong units at any point. The Fredericksburg force, including the I, III and VI Corps (as well as the 2nd division of the II Corps) should get over the river, and while threatening initially in the Deep Run area, can usually make profitable attacks throughout the first day against Marye's Heights, and F1512 or F1711.

Meanwhile the pivot group of the II Corps can initially strike over Bank's and Scott's fords.

Normally the Confederates will deploy Perry's and Wilcox's brigades on F0825, while Wright's and Garnet's occupy F1327, which means the II Corps cannot do better than a 1-1 attacking over the fords. If these attacks succeed at all, the Confederates will be in deep trouble, and during turns 4 through 6 the Union can even reinforce the II Corps with one or two weak divisions from the Fredericksburg area. If the attacks fail, the II Corps simply countermarches toward U.S. Mine Ford and joins the flank force.

The flank group cannot expect the Confederates to give away Posey's or Mahone's brigade at Wilderness Tavern. Instead, these will slowly fall back, preventing the Union cavalry from advancing too fast. In all likelihood, the two forces will converge on the road junction slightly southwest of Salem Church on the second day, where a "second front" will form.

If the Union plays their hand properly, the Confederates will be gradually forced back into an ever-shrinking circle between Salem Church and Telegraph Hill, losing troops gradually all the while. The Confederates really have only two alternatives to this distressing situation: concentrate east, or concentrate west, both of which are gigantic gambles. Concentrating east means the abandonment of both Marye's Heights and Salem Church during the second day, running eastward and forming the entire army in the woods and fortifications around Hamilton's Crossing and Telegraph Hill. With proper positioning, the Union can be reduced to making only 1-1 or 2-1 attacks. The advantage of this strategy is that it retains Hamilton's Crossing, worth 25 of the 60 total terrain points. The disadvantage is that some low-odds Union attacks are bound to succeed eventually, and these may cause serious Confederate losses.

The running westward strategy requires early implementation to take advantage of the increased Confederate speeds on turns 2 and 3. Here the Confederates give up all their terrain and concentrate the entire army around Chancellorsville and Wilderness Tavern, hoping to destroy the flank force before the Union Fredericksburg force can come up behind them. This is a very risky gamble, since the Union can rapidly shift on the north bank of the river, cross at U.S. Mine Ford, and appear in the early parts of the second day. It is possible to position the army on the second day for implementation of this strategy, but it is very tricky to get enough force far enough west to provide a good head start, without losing the rearguard about Fredericksburg in the process!

### STRATEGY: WITH OPTIONAL RULES

Here, the command control effect beginning turn 7 is the critical aspect of the game. The Union *must* be in a winning position after the first 6 turns. However, by stacking the leader counters with strong divisions, the Union can launch many 1-1 and 2-1 attacks in the first few turns in the Fredericksburg area, hopefully killing enough for a decisive victory point advantage.

On the other hand, the flank force is now extremely vulnerable. It is too small to cover a large area of ground, since a couple well placed 1-1 or 2-1 Confederate attacks could open a hole that may prove unstoppable due to command control effects! Therefore, this force normally must cover in the far west, among the woods, trying to hold the maximum amount of point value terrain. The amount of terrain it must hold is dictated by how many casualties the Fredericksburg attacks can cause. Fortunately, on such a limited front, it is usually possible to detach the cavalry and part of the XI Corps to cover the arrival routes of Stuart's Cavalry, thus preventing an attack in the rear.

The II Corps pivot is really needed in the west, to reinforce the flank group. It is possible to attack over both Bank's and Scott's Fords on turn 2 with this group, but after that they must shift westward, regardless of success or failure; so unless the Confederate force guarding the fords is enticingly weak, there isn't much point in attacking (if weak, the Union might be able to cause casualties to the ford guards before they shift west).

### THE U.S. MINE GAMBIT

There is one dramatic alternative to the "hide in the west, banzai in the east" strategy outlined above. The entire Union army can march westward—the I, III and VI Corps around Fredericksburg undertaking a gigantic migration and joining the flank force in the plains between Chancellorsville and Salem Church. The majority of the troops should probably use U.S. Mine Ford as the crossing point, but the II Corps can lead a small elite group over Bank's Ford to help insure the capture of the key crossroads at F2027.

The advantage of this gambit is that with the entire Union Army in the Salem Church area, all seven Corps, on a front so narrow that no more than half can be profitably put in the line at once, command control difficulties are minimal, since there will always be somebody mobile in the secondary lines. The Confederates will be faced with the unhappy prospect of a slug-fest on a narrow front against troops more powerful than their own. As long as the Union guards U.S. Mine Ford and Bank's Ford, there is no chance of a Confederate flanking maneuver. Union cavalry and elements of the flank march corps can remain behind to contain or perhaps even destroy Stuart's Cavalry, and insure control of the point value terrain in the west.

The disadvantage of this gambit is that for the first 6 turns the Union army is moving, not attacking, and therefore cannot build up any

victory points advantage. Furthermore, if it loses F2027 near Salem Church, it will also have an inferior terrain points situation, and will undoubtedly lose. Therefore, the Union must hold onto the entire eastern half of the map, and avoid losing the inevitable battle around Salem Church, despite command control difficulties, in the later 14 turns of the game. This can be a difficult task, to say the least.

### UNION TACTICS

The key to this game is proper Union tactics. The Union can successfully attack at 1-1 or 2-1 and cause heavy Confederate casualties, even though the Confederates may not be surrounded, and the combat results are all "Dr" (defender retreat) or "Ar" (attacker retreat). The trick is to attack with big powerful infantry divisions, against rough or wooded hexes. If the Union scores a "Dr", it should advance after combat, into the doubling terrain. The just retreated Confederate will therefore still be in the Union zone of control, and forced to counterattack in its turn.

It is in these forced counterattacks that the Confederates suffer their losses, since they are hard pressed to get better than 1-5 against big Union divisions in doubling terrain, and a 1-5 attack means a 50-50 chance the Confederates will be wiped out. If the Confederates can bring the odds up to 1-3, they only have a 1/6th chance of being destroyed, and if they can bring up some artillery, this improved situation is often a possibility. Normally a 1-1 counterattack is out of the question.

Because the Confederate army is so small, and normally so widely stretched, a number of successful 1-1 and 2-1 attacks, that force Confederate counterattacks will mean that in some places the Confederates will just have to accept the 1-5, since they can't get enough troops to the sector fast enough; and some of these 1-5's will surely cost the Confederates troops. This is why broad front attacks, and sheer quantity of attacks, is the prime factor in Union offensive efforts.

### CHOOSING YOUR VERSION

The version without *Grand Chancellorsville* optional rules probably favors the Union, but does provide interesting action throughout the 20 turns of play. To play the Confederates is a challenge, not a hopeless task, although a little luck helps the Confederates a great deal here. If you feel unlucky, avoid playing the Confederates in this version.

If all the optional rules are used, the game is often decided in the first 6 turns. What happens then tends to set the tone for the "endgame" that follows. Therefore, this version is normally the shorter of the two, by a wide margin. The only exception is when the Union player tries the U.S. Mine Gambit, which leads to a long, slow struggle for all 20 turns. This can be very interesting, with the nimble Confederate lightweight trying to dance around and get in a telling blow against the huge Union heavyweight ponderously parked on the eastern side of the map.

### Opening Moves [continued from page 3]

critic is in deep water. In science, given enough time, it's usually possible to prove or disprove a given theory (although, for example, some areas of physics and cosmology contradict this statement). One can not so readily validate or invalidate a work of art. And it is more than a matter of simple opinion and garden-variety subjectivity at work. Art criticism/appreciation requires the application of aesthetic discipline focused through finely-tuned sensitivities. The aesthetics of game design are *not* highly evolved. The field is very new and small. It is not glamorous, nor especially remunerative. Exploring even one game, thoroughly, requires a great deal of time and effort. Because of its commercial nature, there may *never* be a well-developed game-design aesthetic. The aesthetics of television are also underdeveloped. Most of the operative aestheticism in that field is borrowed from film criticism. In any event, television criticism has demonstrably little impact on viewing habits. The audience watches what it can tolerate, and the producers produce what the audience will watch. Game design is actually a *higher* art form than commercial television, and this is mainly due to the *scale* of the former compared to the latter. In game design, production is still largely in the hands of the individual creators. Although they must play to their audience, they are not the slaves to mass reaction that the typical program director is. The gaming audience is also a more discriminating group than the television audience. Nevertheless, elements of the Nielson-rating mentality exist in game publishing because of the relentless pressure of having to sell the product profitability.

Why does it matter what we think of games as a product of art rather than of science? Doing so is a better approximation of reality (i.e., more *scientific*). It defuses the interminable debates over the possibilities of perfect games and disputes the mentality of the one-true-answer to simulating a given type of conflict. It disabuses us of the false notion that simulation designs spring from the application of precise formulae and computerized magic. To think of games as art contributes to the preservation of earlier treatments of a given subject (i.e., there is less pressure to think of a new game as something that makes an old game obsolete). It also demythologizes the game designer and the system of rules he sets forth in a game: he's not a chemist describing the reactions taking place when gunpowder explodes—he's an artist attempting to convey the force of the explosion.

