

HOOKER & LEE GAME NOTES

by Richard Berg

What follows are the game notes to Hooker & Lee that could not be included in the rules because of the space limits of the Blue & Gray II rules format. See also the Footnotes column in this issue for a couple of additional optional rules that were excluded for the same reason.

Anyone seeking to design a game on the battle of Chancellorsville is probably suffering from the same condition incurred by Union General Joe Hooker during that disastrous encounter—a severe blow to the head. The situation is one of the most eminently ungameable in the whole repertoire. The fact that this is not the first attempt to produce a viable game on the battle is a sure testament to the perseverance of game designers.

Essentially, the designer is faced with a situation that is fraught with anomalies. He has an army that is clearly outnumbered and even outmaneuvered, yet proceeds to reduce itself even further and then turn in a tactical victory. To turn this into a game, the designer is thus forced to resort to ideas that either take initiative from the hands of the Player or ignore history. In designing *Hooker & Lee* and the consequent *Grand Chancellorsville Option*, the designer was initially restricted by both the scale and style of the *Blue & Gray* system. The scale of approximately 400 meters to the hex defined the area that was to be covered in the *Hooker & Lee* game. This meant that the action at Fredericksburg could not possibly be covered by the map. This was not the great tragedy that it initially seemed to be, as Sedgewick's May 3 crossing quickly deteriorated into a holding action that had little, if any, effect on the battle proper raging around Chancellorsville. Thus, the designer was able to concentrate on that particular portion of the battle, leaving the Fredericksburg area to the "Grand Chancellorsville Option" (which employs additional map area from the companion *Fredericksburg Folio*). It was likewise deemed unnecessary to include Hooker's brilliant maneuvering prior to the battle, as this was more operational in nature and would be ill-served by the scale of the game. Thus, the situation that presented itself on the morning of May 2 was ideal: both armies were in position and about to close for battle.

The problem now became, how to represent the massive Union indecision and inability to

maneuver with any sense of tactical cohesion. Several ideas were considered and abandoned (although the original Union Command Control Rule found its way into *Grand Chancellorsville*) before the method used in *Antietam*—that of limiting the number of units that could move per Turn—was adopted. While this might seem restrictive to the Player, it does accurately reflect Union indecision while still enabling the Union Player to make the crucial decisions. Players can always ignore this rule if they want to see what a well-led Union Army could do; the 'game,' however, rapidly becomes a worthless exercise in black humor.

As an interesting sidelight, one of the more esoteric Union command control rules suggested involved a true "simulation" of actual events. Students of the Civil War probably remember that General Hooker was rendered senseless for a while—and helpless for most of the battle—when a cannonball slammed into a pillar on the porch of Chancellorsville House, bringing the entire roof in on his head. Junior officers were loathe to declare the seriously injured Hooker unfit for battle, and Hooker continued in command despite the fact that he often could not fully comprehend what was occurring. To simulate this, the designer had planned on having the Players sit on opposite ends of the table. The Confederate Player would then proceed to stand up, grasp a sturdy 2-by-4 and slam the Union Player on the back of the head. The Union Player would then proceed to play the game without medical attention. The rule (alas) was abandoned.

Further restraints were placed on the Union Player in a more subtle manner. The Union stacking restrictions are not present simply to reflect the sheer concentration of manpower, but, rather, they express another phase of poor Union command. The fact that the Union Player is forced to use these large, and often unwieldy, divisional formations, while the Confederates swarm around him with the smaller, but more flexible brigades, further reflects Union command deficiencies. When you roll an "exchange" with a '19' Point division, you will see what is meant.

The second major decision in terms of game design was the inclusion of the "Jackson Flanking Maneuver." The reasons for this are obvious; but the development was tenuous at best. Few are the games that allow units to leave the board and return freely, and early play testers were loathe to use this rule in any form. It wasn't until they discovered that without it the Confederacy was doomed to a slow death that they picked it up in its full bloom.

The third major design decision—to use a demoralization rule to the exclusion of the attack effectiveness option—was determined by the short span of the game (9 Turns) and the fact that the Confederate units were rapidly swamped by enforced low-odds attacks, a result totally opposite to history.

A game of *Hooker & Lee* will rarely follow the lines of its historical counterpart; no Union commander is *that* dumb! In that respect, the *Grand Chancellorsville Option*, with its increased complexity, command control and leadership rules, is a much more accurate reflection of actual events. Yet *Hooker & Lee* still depicts the major aspects of the battle with little, if any, harm to play balance. And that, in the general scheme of things, is at least a minor victory.

In the basic *Hooker & Lee* game, both Players are faced with several important decisions. Since it is the interplay of these decisions that will affect the outcome, there is no definitive "best" strategy. Players must simply learn to plan well and react quickly. The immediate option for the south is obvious: how many units should be sent around the Union right flank as per the Jackson Flanking Maneuver Rule? Or should he send any at all: Here, the Confederate commander cannot be faint- (or feint-) hearted. If he does decide to send troops around the flank he shouldn't just send several units. He must either decide to "guts" it out in a head-on fight with the Union, using his numerical superiority in unit quantity to keep the Union bottled up, or send a sizeable force to blow away the Union XI Corps. The Union Player, with the number of units he may move being restricted, will find it a hard choice to spend half of his movement ability for two or so Turns to get that XI Corps out of the way. This would leave him with poor mobility on the front on which he expects to make the most of his headway, opening himself up for possible counter-attacks. Because of the size of the Union units and the Victory Point Schedule, the loss of even two or three divisions can severely cripple the Union chances of victory.

Therefore, if a force is sent, it should contain at least ten, and probably more units. That leaves the Confederate Player with a severe tactical problem in the east, that of denying the Union Player without suffering extensive losses. If the Confederate Player can accomplish this, the arrival of Jackson will most certainly carry the day. But it will be close.

For the Union Player, he will have to watch what the Confederate commander does and then decide whether he can afford the loss of

the XI Corps or not. But his initial decision will be which portion of the Confederate line to attack. The Confederate right is dangling, but diverting troops to this area can take time and there is plenty of space to indulge in tactical retreats. There is no Attack Effectiveness Rule here; rather an accumulative morale rule is used. So, early in the game the Confederate Player may be willing to take chances on having to counter-attack at very low odds. Furthermore, exchanges will become the *bete noir* of the Northern Player, as he will quickly, and agonizingly, learn. The Confederate Player just cannot be left with a sizeable force in the east. So a decision must be made whether to hit the Confederate right and go for the exit hex or to try to split the Confederate center, isolating his forces. The latter is a bit harder to accomplish, given the terrain, but can produce better results in the long run.

Units must not be exited *too* quickly, even if this option presents itself. These units cannot be returned and only serve to give the Confederate Player an opportunity for a last-second counter-attack, which could easily turn the tide. As for the west, the Union Player will simply have to watch and see what develops.

Given two even Players, the game should be quite close; it is usually the Player who has the best position on the last few Turns who emerges the victor.

As for the *Grand Chancellorsville Option*, the Union Player must quickly decide what he wishes to do with his troops. Bank's and Scott's Fords seem obvious crossing places, but these can quickly-and easily-become death traps as units will find it hard to cross against an alert Confederate Player. Units that *do* cross oftentimes get cut off and chopped up. But it is the fastest way to hit the Confederates. If he can cross and hold, the Union corps sweeping in from the west should be able to close in on the South-if his command control doesn't leave his units dangling in the breeze.

The Confederate Player is simply resigned to plugging up the holes as they occur, unless the Union Player is foolish enough to allow him to cross the river in force. If the Union Player decides to make a direct frontal assault across the Rappahannock, he may find himself in for another Fredericksburg. In addition, the Union forces are somewhat split at the beginning. If the Confederate Player can isolate portions of the Union Army and concentrate at that location, a decisive victory may emerge quite early. The two brigades which begin the game at Wilderness Church can be used to disrupt Union Corps; Stuart's cavalry can then be used to disrupt Union movements west of Salem Church after the first day. Stuart's cavalry can be quite valuable, and often the Union Player will have to divert needed troops just to chase after them, as their increased movement capabilities make them quite a threat in terms of cutting off troops, fords, etc. In all, the *GC Option* is a grueling contest between two quite different armies.