

For me the American Revolution has always had a certain fascination. Cowpers, Monmouth, Bunker Hill and Saratoga have long held their place in American folk lore.

Particularly in the bi-centennial year we saw in the media a good deal of myth and superstition surrounding the war come to the surface.

Of all the dozens (hundreds?) of wargames available, only two currently are on the American Revolution, the SPI game of the same name and 1776 by Avalon Hill, (Minute man by SDC is out of print and 'Princeton 1777' is not unfortunately widely available over here). I would be very pleased if SPI did a Quadrigame on four of the more notable battles of the conflict.

# The American Revolution / 1776

1775-1783

## COMPARITIVE EVALUATION

PAUL HIRST

I will attempt here to analyse the two games in comparison with each other, and the historical situation.

For those who have not played either or both, 1776 has certain vague similarities to 'Frederick the Great' and American Revolution (referred to as 'AR') is mechanically similar to 'Fall of Rome' (but much cleaner).

The differences between the games are evident as soon as you open the box. 'AR' has the large accordion rules folder, 17"x22" map with play aids printed on it (facing the same way for solitaire players) and playing pieces in tints of white, red and blue.

1776 has a 29 page rule book, a map about twice as large as AR and scenario charts, TEC charts, etc. The counters come in shades of blue, red and green.

Designers notes in 1776 cover five and a half pages, while backing up JFD's comments in AR is an excellent article by Al Nofi in S&T 34.

The maps are most interesting, AR's is divided into provinces and areas. The provinces (or regions) are important for raising Tory Militia (TM) Rebel Militia (RM) and Continentals (CA). In a sense the board has similarities with Diplomacy.

1776 on the other hand is divided up into standard hexes and further into 'strategic areas' which function similarly to AR's regions except that there are only four.

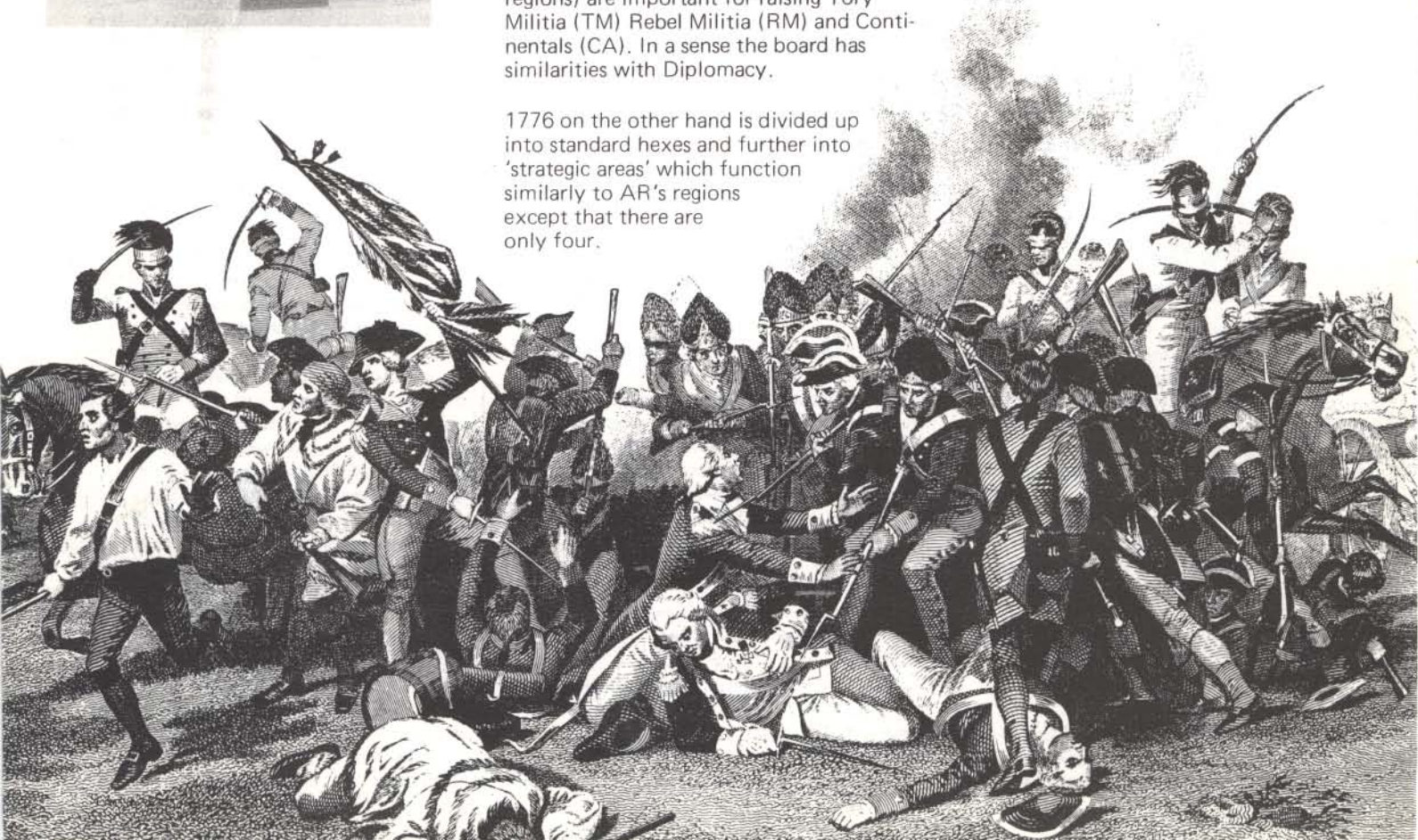
Terrain is entirely different, 1776 has three classes of river, clear terrain (coloured green), mountain hexsides, strategic towns, regular towns, Indian villages, swamps, ferries, fords, bridges and assorted esoteria. AR however only has clear and wilderness terrain.

A point to make here is the scale of the game 1776 uses monthly turns and 18.6 miles to the hex. AR uses seasonal turns, the areas vary in size but 600 miles from Nova Scotia to Georgia comes out to about 20".

From this it should be clear that 1776 is the more detailed while AR will portray the overall situation with more impact.

While minor, the turn sequence is interesting, both games set up with the British besieged in Boston, 1776 gives the British first turn. AR gives the Americans first turn. Since the British attacked at Bunker Hill I feel 1776 is correct, however the British did, through their own bungling, allow the initiative to pass to the Americans later in the war.

The scale of the two games is really the crux of a comparison between them. In AR one turn (a season) could see a unit move from





Yorktown VA to Newport RI. In three turns (a season) in 1776 a unit would be pushed to get from Yorktown to Philadelphia PA without using forced march. I feel 1776 to be superior here since 18th century campaigns had a tendency to be very slow affairs, and the American Revolution proceeded more slowly than most since the British had to bring supplies from Great Britain (which meant they had to do a good bit of foraging) while the Americans were noted for the shortness of their logistical toil (even more foraging).

Command control is an interesting factor coupled with movement. AR has an idiocy factor rule applying solely to the British, which works as follows: In any movement area at the beginning of a turn two groups of British units may be formed. Either or both or neither group may leave, pursuant to a die roll '1-2' and the group does not move, '3-6' and it may, rolling each time it tries to leave an area. Both the American and British units however have the same movement allowance. In other words, roughly one third of the British players attempted movements will not work.

In 1776 however no such restrictions apply. The British are unrestricted by command control instead a different tack is taken. American combat units have a movement allowance of eight (eight clear terrain hexes per turn) British units have a movement allowance of seven. This is not seemingly very important, but it can become so, due to the 'feint and manoeuvre' quality of the game. The Americans can lurk just out of range of a British move.

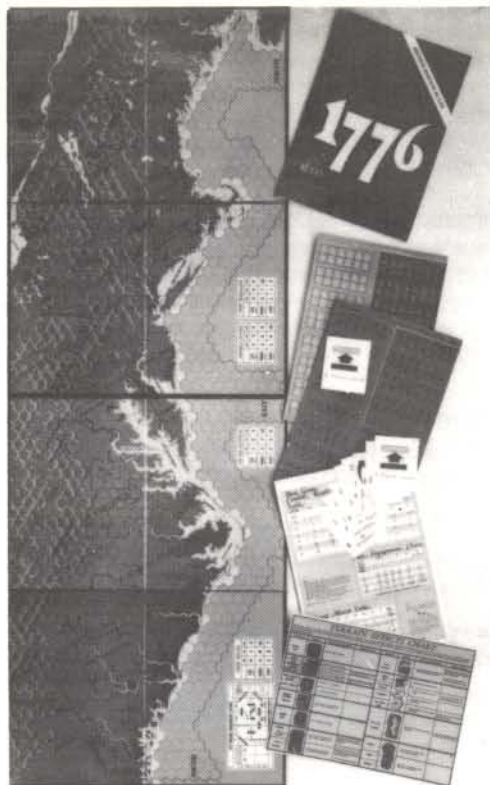
I do feel that an idiocy factor for the British improves the simulation since, with the exception of the Howe brothers and Admiral Rodney, British strategy and technique was woefully inadequate.

In 1776 however the British are often in a situation where no clear answer shows itself, giving rise to a sort of self imposed idiocy, similar to the SPI 'Blue and Gray' system. There, a unit takes two hours to get a mile and a half. Time enough for it to wander off before repeated despatches from division put it back on course.

Force march is also a factor in 1776. It often does not work, and sometimes loses strength in the units making the move. AR, given the different scale cannot afford such a rule, it becomes submerged in the system. Given the fact that force march is a rarely used procedure anyway, it may be as well.

Moving on to combat, more interesting differences between the games surface. The first point to be made is a similarity. Both games use a historical strength point system, five one strength units equal one five strength unit, like American Civil War or Frederick the Great. Since the largest regular command element was the regiment, this is optimism, on a game of this scale the number of regimental counters would be prohibitive.

The actual mechanics of combat differ in both games. AR uses a more or less standard system odds computation and CRT resolution. The CRT is interesting, since it is very bloody particularly for the defence, combat



occurs within the same area. In 1776 combat occurs within the same hex and starts with each player choosing a particular deployment secretly from among eight (Left or Right Enfilade, Frontal Assault, Left or Right refusal, Stand and Defend, Recce in Force or withdraw). The two players deployments are crossed on a matrix which gives possible die roll change on the CRT of minus three to plus three. The CRT is then consulted, at the appropriate odds, the die rolled and changed as appropriate. The CRT runs from -3 to +10 which accounts for some strange results on occasion. Provision is also made for continued combat.

Which system is more realistic? The AR procedure is certainly more simple and realistic on this level, a very good blend of the two opposing factors, since combat over the season would tend to degenerate into a bloody slugging match (Saratoga being a good example). 1776 on the other hand sacrifices playability to give a good 'feel' for a battle at this level, as well as a fair amount of choice as to how the battle is to be fought. Given average luck with deployment choice and die rolling, over the game, the results tend to be historical (such situations as Trenton and Princeton can occur).

Various assorted esoteria also surface in both games with regard to combat. Both simulations have rules governing forts and entrenchments (in 1776, in AR entrenchment is called siege) AR do not give entrenchments a wide utility while 1776 tends to make both forts and entrenchments less effective, especially when artillery is handy for the side assaulting a fort or earthwork. Artillery is unique to 1776. It is slow and often gets left behind since its only use is in attacking forts and earthworks. AR is probably superior as both forts and entrenchments were difficult to break (as the Canadian invasion of '75 shows, and even the Yorktown position would have taken some cracking were it not for a lack of food and the Royal Navy for the defenders).

Supply is the next point to be raised. 1776 has supply units. These follow similar rules to the supply units in 'La Grande Armee' (SPI) they have, however, the same movement allowance as combat units of the respective side. They may not however force march. Combat is possible without them, at half strength, and no continued combat is allowed.

Supply units are used up by continued combat, but replacements are fairly plentiful. AR has a totally different system. Only the British need supply traced to a controlled area on the coast. If the British cannot trace a supply line at the turn's conclusion, that group is eliminated.

1776 also has provisions for magazines. These are simply immobile, unexpendable supply units, vaguely similar to 'Frederick the Great' depot units.

As to realism, both 1776 and AR have very abstract rules for supply, which is as it should be since logistics is one of the least interesting aspects of warfare. AR I feel falls down on this point for not indicating the terribly inadequate supply system of the Americans. From the '75 invasion of Canada, where the only commodity not in short supply was inexperience, right through to Nathan Green's brilliant campaign of 1780, the Americans had to operate through a logistical nightmare.



1776, on the other hand, tends to make supply units a little too plentiful, especially in winter. This does lead to the British being able to fight on when cut off from the coast. As in reality however, a conscientious British commander will avoid this situation most of the time. (Saratoga was one of the few occasions when a sizeable British force was isolated inland).

Winter is the next point of discussion. In the Eighteenth century few operations were undertaken in winter. A lack of adequate billeting facilities coupled with a very incomplete medical knowledge could lead to severe hardships and losses amongst the troops.

Both games handle winter differently. In AR the first turn (season) of any year starting in 1776 a certain fraction of continentals (CA American regulars) is eliminated. This fraction decreases by the year. Also the British may neither move nor fight and the Americans have their movement allowance dropped, from five to two.



# The American Revolution

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# 1776

1776 on the other hand has a table to consult for CA winter reduction, giving a certain percentage loss for CA units in areas under varying degrees of British control. This table gives no account, either of the severity of the winter, or the gradual increase in Americans preparing for winter. There is however an optional table which gives both these factors consideration. It adds realism and more complexity. Combat however has only minor restrictions and movement allowances for all units is halved north of the south central area.

1776 I feel, is superior with regard to CA winter reduction, particularly when using the optional table.

AR has the edge however with regard to movement and combat.

Operations such as the Lake Champlains campaign of 1776 were rare for the war and usually it was the Americans who fought in winter. French intervention was something in the minds of the Americans right from the start. They had little chance for full independence without it. AR keys their participation to a 'major success' by the Americans. This is simply obtaining a DE result when attacking five or more combat strength points of British Regulars (BR):

1776 has the American player roll a dice from April 1778 onwards with the chances increasing as the year goes by, and decreasing for every strategic area controlled by the British, that the French will turn up.

As Randy Reed points out in 1776's designer's notes it is difficult to fully simulate an American victory and the French were out to attack Britain independently of America anyway. However I do feel that Saratoga had a large influence on the direct participations of French combat units in North America.

Discussion of the French naturally brings us into Naval power. Both games give transport capacity to the British and French fleets. This allows units to be moved up and down the coast quickly.

1776 has combat fleets, off-map movement, West Indies considerations and variable forces, all lacking in AR. I like these rules, they add realism and complexity once again but it is worth it I feel, to see why it was that the navies tended to cancel each other out and also to get some idea of events happening outside the campaign you are running.

Moving on to reinforcements and militia appearance, more differences surface between the games.

Both sides more or less agree on British and French regular reinforcement make up, when the differences in the number of men per strength point and turn time is taken into account. Differences surface in Tory Militia (TM), Rebel Militia (RM) and Continental army units.

Starting with the TM rules, AR has a certain number of TM strength points being raised per region (it varies). TM units only appear once per region when British Regulars (BR) move in. (There are roughly twenty four regions e.g. New York, Roanoke Valley).

1776 has a certain number of TM strength points appearing once every three turns (season) in each of four strategic areas.

Generally the number fluctuates depending on the absence or presence of BR units the less BR units the more TM appear.

1776 has a similar system for both CA and RM. Both tend to appear in large numbers when the British are present but don't appear at all if the British control the region.

AR has RM appearing everytime the British move in and disappear when they move out of a particular region. These are the only units which may not exit their own region.

CA units on the other hand appear according to a die roll on a table. Usually only two of the twenty four regions will raise CA units on a turn with certain areas being of more use to the American by virtue of raising more units. No units appear in a British controlled region.

As to historical accuracy, I feel both simulations are less than perfect here. Both sides do not really indicate the enormous problems the American Congress faced in raising continentals. Most of the states felt themselves somewhat akin to sovereign states and often were not prepared to put men into the CA which would of course serve anywhere in America. AR also gives relatively little weight to TM. Part of this is the British government's fault for not treating the Tories correctly and alienating the population who were neutral (see S&T 34 page 30).

Nevertheless TM units were of considerable value, since they were usually part of the British government's 'Provincial Line' well trained inovative militia meant for fighting the French, and latterly the Indians.

RM on the other hand did not generally serve outside their own state and had a tendency to dissolve away without warning in one campaign only to fight as hard as any regular in the next. (Washington's attack on New York in 1776 is an example of the former while Saratoga is an example of the latter). AR tends to make RM too powerful much of the time, while 1776 has them marching up and down the nation freely (at least until the next season).

Victory is my last point. Both games have the British winning the war if they control a certain amount of America by the game's end. AR forces the British to control more regions for victory the longer the war drags on. In both games the Americans win by avoiding a

British win by the game's end. AR also has the provision of giving the Americans an automatic victory by gaining three 'major successes' (see French Intervention above).

Controlling regions (or strategic areas in 1776) is accurate for victory. It was the British government's objective throughout the war and the American's objective was to stop the British and bottle them up in enclaves near the coast (New York, Newport and Yorktown for example). AR is correct in forcing the British to control more territory as the war progresses. The Americans were actually able to extend and strengthen their authority in areas where the British were absent. (New England and the northern states being a prime example). However AR's 'major success' rule is a little too abstract.

If the Americans, for instance, were to destroy 5 points of BR strength in an area in their turn, only to be wiped out in the British player's turn and lose the region's control I would not class it as an American major success.

In conclusion then, both games achieve a realistic simulation of the revolutionary war. Both however are less than complete as I feel I have pointed out above. For simplicity and overall strategic clarity AR is the winner. For a detailed involved game, with tactical overtones 1776 is superior.

It is fascinating in 1776 to watch Tories and Rebels knock the stuffing out of each other and the British and French fleets feint, manoeuvre and fight each other to a standstill, but it is essentially pointless.

These and other points make 1776 a long game, while AR is relatively short, an important point for people with not a lot of time to play a particular game. 1776 does have a short basic game (useful only for getting into the system) and four advanced games which have something of a paper time machine factor, everything starts happening near the end. Two half campaign games are good, however, bringing out all the main points while being shorter than the full game. The following optional rules I can recommend; Bateaus, Forced March, Variable British Garrisons, Variable CA, Winter Reductions, and superior British Fire Discipline.

AR has many political scenarios, all full length and very interesting and informative ranging from an Irish Revolt through French attack on Harouet, weaker congress and inferior RM.

One final point in these days of economic woe. AR is a good deal cheaper than 1776.

