

Preface to the Digital Edition

In the twenty years that have elapsed since *Rifle Wars*' original publication I have learned a great deal about game design . . . enough to see that I would design a game on this subject quite differently if I were to start from scratch now. Nevertheless, I have chosen not to make significant alterations to the design, partly because I still think it works quite well just as it stands, and partly because that would initiate a new and lengthy round of iterative playtesting and fine-tuning. I have restricted myself to some light editing for clarity and consistency (changing, for example, the original's measurements in inches to Base Widths, which will allow the rules to be used with any figure basing system), the insertion of *useful* illustrations (in keeping with my aversion to "eye candy" photos, which take up valuable space without adding anything to the understanding of the text. All photos except those illustrating individual Brigades in specific formations are from actual games-in-progress, not staged.) and the addition of designer's notes, which I have keyed to the numbered sections of the rules and collected in an appendix, where they will be easily accessed by those who are interested in my reasons for doing things in a particular way, without getting in the way of those who just want to play the game.

I think I should mention that the original print edition was actually the third version of the rules. The first two were rejected wholesale as not adequately reproducing the dynamics of a Civil War battlefield. After each rejection, the process was started over from the ground up rather than just attempting to twist the existing system into something more effective, which method seldom produces anything like a satisfactory result. The first was based on a previous design (Napoleonic Command) which worked well enough for battles in the early 19th century but was entirely inappropriate for the state of warfare in 1860s America. The second was built on a command system with a robust and detailed model of weapons performance which yielded, as I should have been able to predict, a slow and clunky player experience with many intricate mechanics and lots of modifiers. The third (this one) started with a model of unit behavior on the battlefield and focused on the factors that had the most significant effect on that behavior. This proved to be the approach that gave me the most satisfying result.

I have chosen to go with a digital edition rather than a second print edition for the same reasons that I did with the 2nd Edition of *Napoleonic Command*; having it printed as hard copy and then dealing with shipping and distributing it (or contracting those services out) would absorb time and resources that I would rather put to other uses. By using a digital format and distribution I can make it available to a geographically widespread audience without being unduly distracted from other projects. This edition comes in two versions: a 32 page Full Version with all the color illustrations and commentaries, a 15 page Essentials Only version with just the rules and the black-and-white illustrations, plus a separate file consisting of just the charts for easy printing.

Special thanks are due Elliott James for helping to prepare this edition. Any errors or inconsistencies are the result of my stubbornly ignoring his good advice.

Jeffrey Knudsen
Minneapolis
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Design: Jeffrey Knudsen

Development: Lance King

Graphic Design: Robert G. Henderson

Playtesting: Kampfgruppe Cleveland: Lance King, Tom David, Bob Henderson, Ken Hall,
Duane Seelinger, Gregg Sadler and Dennis Zwagat.

Proofreading: Elliott James

Introduction to the original print edition:

Toward the middle of the 19th Century the Industrial Revolution began to change the face of battle. The general outlines of warfare remained recognizable to those familiar with the battles of the Napoleonic Wars, but the advent of rifled firearms and the use of technological wonders like observation balloons, the telegraph, steamships and locomotives signaled the transformation of the colorful pageantry of the horse-and-musket era into something which began to resemble the modern warfare of the 20th Century. Along with these innovations, the increasing use of field fortifications accompanied a rise in the dominance of the defense, and drove minor tactics in the direction of dispersion and individual initiative.

All of these changes did not proceed apace in each nation, and the geography of the theatre of war was a major influence on the way in which each nation's technology and tactics progressed. For this reason, Rifle Wars has been separated into Parts, each dealing with a separate theatre, and a different group of combatant nations. For Part I of this ongoing project, we have chosen the North American continent, partly because of the popularity of wargaming the American Civil War, and because we perceived the opportunity for a fresh treatment of command and grand tactics in this period; but mainly because it was the earliest major conflict that included a majority of the new elements of warfare.

Rifle Wars shares with other Crusader projects a number of key design criteria: no bookkeeping, a minimum of counters, caps, or other incongruous markers to detract from the aesthetics of the miniature battlefield, minimal die rolling, so that the players' decisions drive the action, simple mechanics to keep the scale time as close to real time as possible and an emphasis on resolving the conflict of formations of units instead of individual units, to better demonstrate the outcome of players' command decisions at a higher level of command.

The heart of the system is the Status Check, which combines the more traditional and separate fire and morale procedures with the most important situational factors to create a single, brigade-level test of the entire formation's reaction to its local perception of the battlefield.

The brigade was chosen as the smallest organization represented on the table because it was the basic grand-tactical maneuver element of American armies in this period. Brigades were seldom broken up unless well away from expected enemy activity, and organizations of less than a brigade were rarely committed to battle. This is also in keeping with the expected role of the player in Rifle Wars; that of a Division or Corps commander.

In a game which seeks to coordinate the actions of several corps over a large area, it is necessary to maintain a fairly strict turn sequence; but it is also desirable to avoid breaking the action up too much into discrete chunks, and to maintain a sense of "flow". Therefore, the turn sequence is interleaved, with activities and interactions of both sides in each step so that there is a minimum of sitting and waiting.

It is our sincere hope that Rifle Wars will provide the players with some insight into the difficulties and challenges of battlefield command in the age of the Industrial Revolution, in the context of a simple, fun and historically colorful activity.

-JK
1998

1.4 TURN SEQUENCE

Initiative Phase

Action Phase

First Movement Step

First Status Check Step

Second Movement Step

Second Status Check Step

Command Phase

Corps Command Step

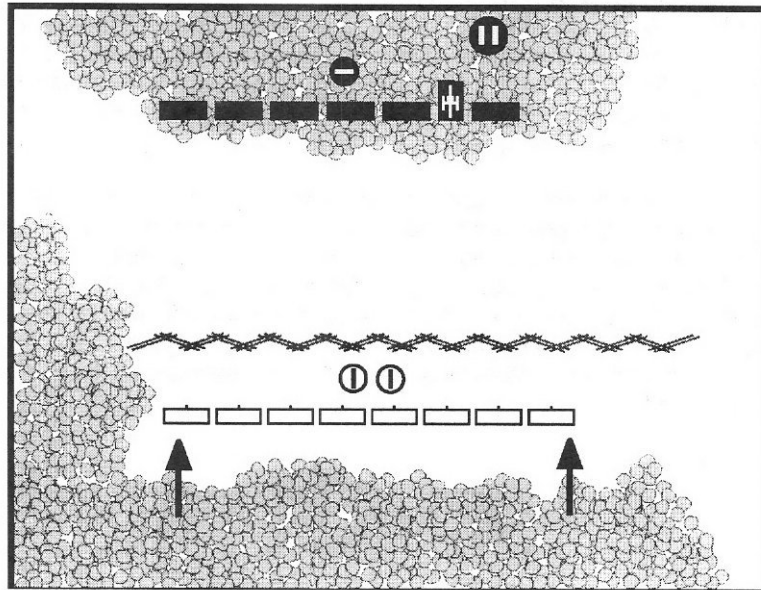
Divisional Command Step

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9.0 APPENDIX B: SAMPLE COMBAT

At 10:00 AM on the morning of a battle, a veteran Union brigade of six elements (Current Status of 0), with a section of 12 pounder Napoleons is occupying the edge of some scattered woods, facing an open pasture. The Divisional commander is present, but not attached. A rebel brigade (Current Status of +2) consisting of 8 elements of green troops is seen advancing into the field from the opposite wood line. Other Rebel Brigades of the same Division are advancing off to the right.



10:00 AM

Initiative Phase:

The Union players have 9 brigades on the field, and the Rebels have only 7. The Union commander rolls 1 (4 and 3), giving an initiative score of 9 (the brigade in our present example not counting towards the total, since it is not at a positive Status), and the Rebel commander rolls 0 (5 and 5), giving a total of 7. The Union wins the initiative, and chooses to be First Player...

Action Phase:

First Movement Step: ...but chooses not to move this particular Brigade.

First Status Check Step: The Union Brigade is not engaged, so it does not check.

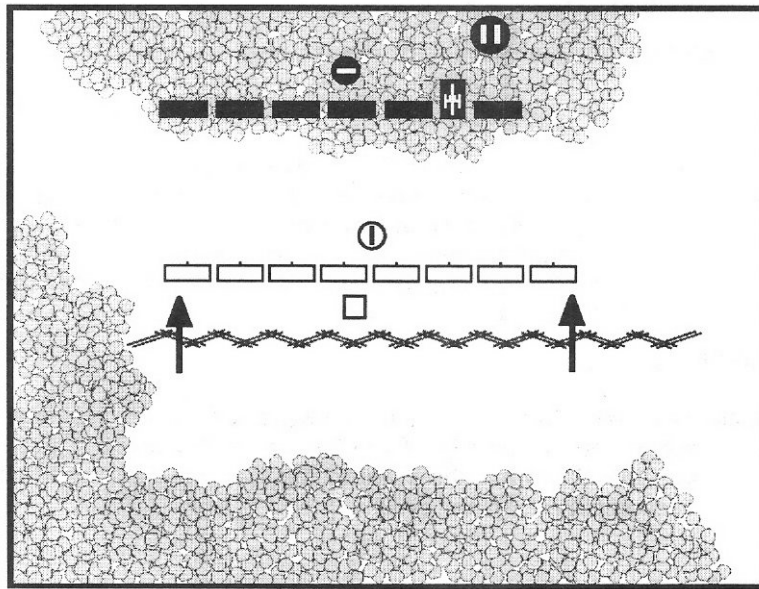
Second Movement Step: The Rebel Brigade (emerging from Solid Woods, class 2) advances 2 Base Widths into the field (class 0).

Second Status Check Step: They are still outside of engagement range; the Union troops are not yet visible (only 11 Obstruction points for the terrain, but the Union is in scattered woods at Status 0, and therefore is under cover.) No check is performed.

Command Phase:

Corps Command Step: Union elements have now sighted a previously unsighted Rebel Brigade, triggering an opportunity for an order change, if their Corps commander chooses to do so.

Divisional Command Step: No actions are taken.



10:15 AM

Initiative Phase: This time the Rebel player rolls better (3 and 5, for an initiative score of 9), but the Union commander matches him (1 and 3, for a total of 10). The Federals win the Initiative this turn, and again choose to be First Player (so that he can threaten the Rebels in the Second Status Check without having to take return threat until the following turn).

Action Phase:

First Movement Step: The Union player chooses not to move this brigade.

First Status Check Step: The Union Troops are still not visible, therefore are not engaged and need not check status.

Second Movement Step: the Confederate commander advances boldly across the field (3 Base Widths, due to the class 1 terrain at the fence line) toward the apparently empty woods opposite, and now only 300 yards away.

Second Status Check Step: The Rebels are now engaged by the Federal troops, and must check Status. They are currently at Status 2.

The Union troops count a total of 17 Threat points (6 for the artillery, 2 each for infantry elements, except for the one opposite the Rebel Brigade HQ which only counts 1.) There are 8 Rebel elements, plus the die roll (4 and 3) gives a cohesion of 9. 17 divided by 9 yields a Threat Modifier of -1. The Rebel Status drops to 1.

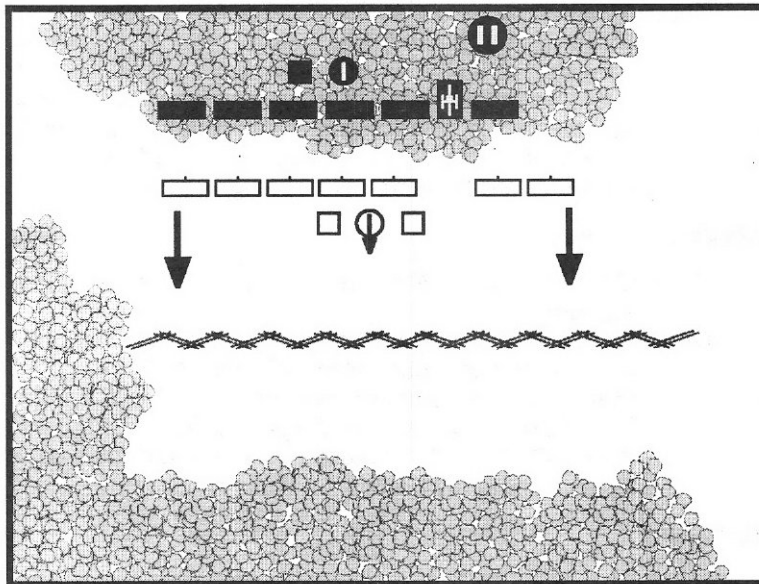
They have no Fatigue markers, and are in class 0 terrain, so the Modified Status remains at 1. The rating for Green troops is 0, so that doesn't alter the Status either, and there is no higher HQ attached, so there is no Leadership Modifier.

End result: no bases lost, Current Status drops from 2 to 1, and one Fatigue marker is placed with the Brigade.

Command Phase:

Corps Command Step: The Rebel Brigade has now sighted a previously unsighted Federal Brigade, which triggers an order change opportunity for the Rebel Corps Commander.

Divisional Command Step: The Rebel brigade was engaged, so the Divisional Commander cannot remove its Fatigue marker. He decides (somewhat rashly) to attack with this brigade next turn, so he adjusts its Current Status from 1 up to 2 (the maximum increase allowed by his Leadership Rating of 1).



10:30 AM

Initiative Phase: The Union player rolls 3 (2 and 5), which is enough to beat the Rebels total of 10 (7 brigades, plus a roll of 1 and 4). The Union has the initiative this turn, but chooses to be Second Player, so the Rebels move first.

Action Phase:

First Movement Step: The Rebel brigade moves in to the attack, but its Status of +2 will only allow it to approach within 1 Base Width of the enemy. (They move up, and then settle into a firefight with the Federal troops at about 100 yards.)

First Status Check Step: The Union troops count up 21 Threat points this time. The Rebel player rolls pretty well (4 and 6, for a +2), but his Cohesion is just 10. This makes the Threat modifier 2, and a Rebel base comes off (the one facing the artillery section, logically enough, since 6 Threat points were counted against it alone.) The Modified Status is reduced to 0. The Fatigue marker acquired last turn drops it to -1. Terrain, Troop Quality, and Leadership add no more modifiers, so the end result is one base lost, a second Fatigue marker added, and the Current Status drops to -1, which will require a withdrawal of 2 Base Widths. The Rebel brigade falls back almost to the fence line. Since their Status dropped by 2 or more, the Federal Current Status is increased by one, to +1. (This loses them their cover bonus for the upcoming Status check . . . some of the Federal troops have apparently become somewhat careless upon witnessing the repulse of their opponents.)

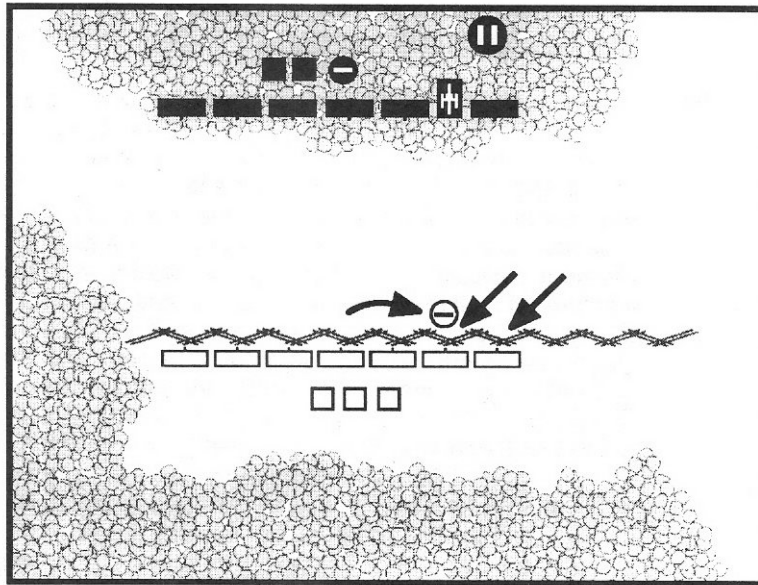
Second Movement Step: The Union player chooses not to move his brigade.

Second Status Check Step: The Rebel brigade counts up 13 Threat points against the Union Brigade, against its Cohesion of 8 (7 elements plus a die roll of 3 and 3). The Union's Status of 1 is dropped to 0 by Threat, left at 0 by the lack of any Fatigue markers, left at 0 again by the Terrain modifier, and moved back up to +1 by the veteran rating of the troops. A Fatigue marker is added.

Command Phase:

Corps Command Step: No order changes are triggered here this turn.

Divisional Command Step: The Rebel general (just out of sight to the right, but within 10 Base Widths) adjusts his Brigade's Status up to 0, halting their withdrawal. The Union commander adjusts his brigade's down to 0. This makes them fairly immobile, but they get their cover bonus back at Status 0.



10:45 AM

Initiative Phase: A good roll (1 and 5) versus the Union's (2 and 2) gives the Rebels the initiative for another turn. They choose to be First Player.

Action Phase:

First Movement Step: Hoping to keep the enemy in his front occupied a little longer, and to await developments on the flank, the Rebel commander chooses to stand. His right flank units close in to maintain cohesion with the rest of the Brigade, and the Commander moves over to the troops facing the artillery to steady them.

First Status Check Step: The Rebels are now at longer musket range, so the Union Threat is down to 15 points. A die roll of +1 (1 and 2) gives them a cohesion of 8, giving a Threat modifier of -1. Their modified status drops to 0. Their two Fatigue markers drop it to -2, and the terrain modifier leaves it at -2. There is no modification for Troop Quality or Leadership. They acquire a third Fatigue marker, and must withdraw again. As they reach the fence line (Class I terrain) their Status goes up to -1, and having already withdrawn 2 Base Widths (which matches the requirement for a -1 Status) they halt.

Second Movement Step: The Union commander does not move his brigade.

Second Status Check Step: The Rebel rifles count up 7 Threat Points, which is halved by the Union troops' cover. This is not enough for a Threat Modifier, so the Union Status is modified down only by their Fatigue Marker (to -1), and back up again by the Terrain (to 0), where it stays. They acquire a second Fatigue marker.

Command Phase:

Corps Command Step: No order changes have been triggered in this part of the field.

Divisional Command Step: The Rebel commander adjusts his brigade's Status back to zero, halting its involuntary withdrawal again. Neither commander can remove any Fatigue markers, since their brigades both checked Status this turn.