

GETTYSBURG '88, A UNION OPENING STRATEGY

by Ray Freeman

I have discovered an opening strategy for the Union player that uses the fact that the first Confederate forces to enter the board come on in a corner. By carefully arranging his cavalry, and taking some early risks, the Union player can severely limit the Confederate player's ability to maneuver to gain reasonable attack odds.

The defense sets up as follows (see Diagram 1):

- Buford: P3
- Gamble: Q2
- Devin: R2
- Reynolds: 06
- Wadsworth: 06

Here are three reasonable Confederate replies (all others are similar or worse):

- Option A: Heth: R1
- Option B: Heth: R1, Pegram: S2
- Option C: Heth and Pegram do not enter the board.

Option A isn't pleasant. There is a 21% chance that Heth will be annihilated plus a 16% chance of a Heth step loss by the end of turn 2. How does this work? If Heth wins the combat, but causes less than 2 step losses, he can be counterattacked at even odds. If he retreats as a result of his attack, it must be to S1. Again he can be attacked at even odds, plus now he is pinned against the board edge with no avenue of retreat. Any adverse result will cause casualties. If he suffers losses on his attack, he now gets hit at +2, and is likely to die. Finally, even if Heth suffers no losses, there is a 19% chance that the position will be functionally similar to option C after 2 turns.

Option B isn't so wonderful either. Heth will get a +3 attack on Gamble (with a 28% probability of failure), but to get that Pegram has to attack Devin at -1 and will take casualties 36% of the time. Plus, there is a very real danger (18%) that Heth and Pegram could interfere with each other's ability to retreat and cause additional losses. The probabilities are too complicated to spend the time coming up with exact numbers, but it looks pretty scary to me.

Under Option C, the Confederate player simply loses a turn, and then has to face this defense (see Diagram 2):

- Wadsworth; R2
- Devin; Q2
- Buford; Q2
- Gamble; Q2

The best Confederate move then is to bring on Hill, Heth and Pender to S2 and attack Wadsworth at +4. This is fine, but

Pegram and McIntosh must stay off the board as there is a 21% chance that Hill will be repulsed, so S1 must be kept open as a retreat square.

What is particularly frustrating about this is that if the Union sets up his cavalry on turn 1 in say R1 and S2, Heth and Pegram could enter at either P1 or S4, according to rule 3c. This is a hell of a lot better than any of the three options listed above. The Union defense I have shown cleverly uses the rules and the limits of the board to force the Confederate player into making poor odds frontal assaults or losing a lot of time. The additional risks for the Union player over other defenses are negligible. Light Union forces are relatively expendable, Confederate infantry is not. Note that none of this would be possible if the Terrain Chart hadn't lopped off that corner of the board.

This aggressive defense is part of an overall strategy designed to take advantage of the very poor coordination of the Confederate forces early in the game. If the Union can slow the Rebels coming down the Chambersburg Pike enough to allow the Union army to occupy the line Oak Ridge - Q5 - McPherson's Woods on turn 3, then Ewell and Rodes face a rather scary entrance to the board. As in the real battle, an aggressive but intelligent delaying action by Buford's cavalry is the key to disrupting the Confederate's timetable on the first day, with potentially far reaching consequences as the battle continues.

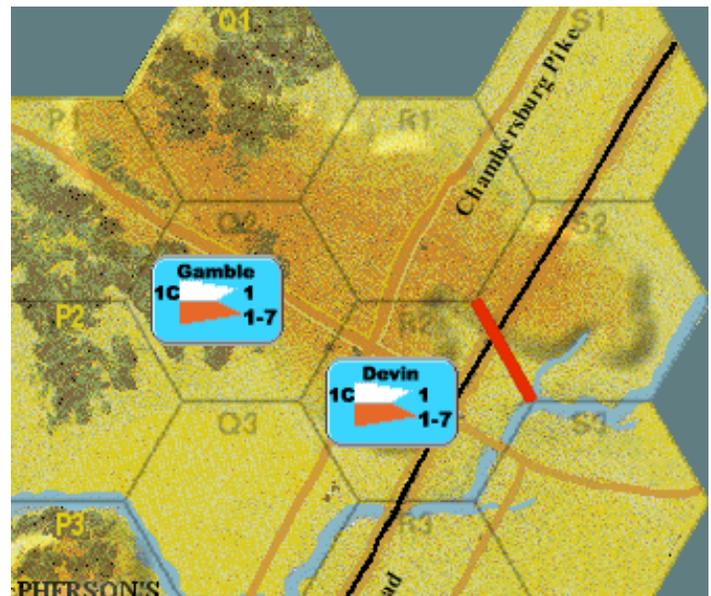


Diagram 1. Turn 1 Union Defense



Diagram 2. Turn 3 Rebel Attack

fourth turn. So far the dice have been pretty even. The Rebs have lost one step of infantry, while the Yanks have lost one of cavalry and one of artillery. Note that the Union forces occupy very solid defensive positions on both fronts and have prevented the army of Northern Virginia from uniting Hill and Ewell. For now they are unable to support each other. If Ewell and Rodes enter the board, they can be attacked at +2 or perhaps more. A cautious Gray leader may wait until turn 5 to bring on Ewell and Rodes. This is a very unpleasant situation for the Confederates.

Obviously the Union will not get results like this in every game. In some games he may get his cavalry whacked without causing any casualties. Less probable, but still a reasonable possibility, is for the Union to get lucky and crush Heth before Hill arrives. Whatever occurs, excepting for disastrous die rolls, I believe this approach will give the Union player a superior position to what he might achieve by more passive defense. Gettysburg '88 has a combat system that rewards the aggressive, offensive minded player. There is no reason for the Union to wait for the victory point areas at Culp's Hill and Cemetery Ridge to be threatened before counterattacking.

AN ILLUSTRATIVE BATTLE

To illustrate the Union strategy of constricting the entry options of the Confederates coupled with aggressive tactics to intimidate and/or cause casualties, I have played out a game through three turns using the basic rules.

TURN 2

- The Union forces set up as advertised on turn 1 and the Confederates choose option B as being "safe but not wimpy" as far as protection of Heth goes.
- Heth attacks Gamble at +3. The DR is C5/U7, net +1. Gamble retreats to P2. Heth advances to Q2.
- Pender attacks Devin at -1. The DR is C9/U8, net Pender retreats to S1. Doubleday to 15. Wainwright to H5. Robinson to H4. Barlow & Reynolds to G4. Howard, Osbourne & Schurz to L6. Gamble to P1. Wadsworth to Q3. Devin to R2.
- Gamble, Devin & Wadsworth attack Heth at +0. The DR is U6/C2, net +4. Heth loses a step and retreats to R1. Gamble advances to Q2.

TURN 3

Heth to S1; Hill, Pender & McIntosh to R1. Hill, Pender & McIntosh attack Gamble & Devin at +3. The DR is C311.13, net +3. Gamble loses a step and retreats to P2. Devin retreats to R3. Hill, etc. advance to Q2.

Doubleday to S5; Wainwright to R5; Robinson to R6. Reynolds & Barlow to S8; Wadsworth to R2; Howard, Osbourne & Schurz to Q3; and Buford, Devin & Gamble to P2.

Union groups at R2, Q3 and P2 attack Hill at +2. The DR is U3/C9, net -4. Osbourne loses a step. Wadsworth retreats to S3. Howard retreats to P3. Buford retreats to O2.

Hopefully, the readers have been following this play on the board and can view the position at the start of the Confederates