

# INSIGHT INTO GETTYSBURG '88 TOURNAMENT PLAY FOR THE NOVICE

by Bill Thomson

## OVERVIEW:

**GETTYSBURG '88 (G88)** is a simple game, similar to baseball. To paraphrase what Sparky Anderson once said, the manager's role is to make decisions to give the players the opportunity to win. A third of the games you will lose no matter what you do (die rolls), a third you will win, the manager can influence the outcome of other third. Once can win and lose by the dice in **G88** or so it seems. Putting the odds consistently to your advantage and receiving probable outcomes can greatly increase your chances of 'dicing out' your opponent. Although one can consider **G88** to be a 'dice game' the records show certain players consistently win. The same is true in other 'dice games' such as **WAR AT SEA** and **VICTORY OF THE PACIFIC**.

To assist a novice player to accelerate their learning curve toward proficiency in this title, I have provided the following insights into the game, such as they are.

## COMBAT SYSTEM

One of the keys to success in **G88** is to fully understand the nuances of the combat system.

- The combat value of the attack is simply counting the combat factors. However any excess over 10 is counted as 10.
- For the defender, sum the combat factors, terrain die roll modifier (DRM) of defense and add in any supporting artillery. As for the attacker, any excess over 10 is counted as 10.
- When possible, one of the attacking units, even if it provides no additional combat value (already maxed out at 10), can be used to negate defensive terrain advantages or to engage supporting artillery via counter battery/direct attack.
- Each side adds its value (maximum of 10) to their die roll. It is not the differential of the combat values in all cases
- Hence a 13-9 attack is not net +4; as it is counted as only 10-9 or net +1.
- If a CSA has a stack of 10+ combat points, it can be attacked independent of terrain and supporting artillery as its value cannot be higher than 10.
- A 10-10 attack is 50/50 outcome, with a slight advantage to the defender due a painless tie. Given enough 10-10 attacks, the CSA should expect to lose some.
- On the attack, the CSA can expect to see a fair share of 10-# attacks where # is a number less than 10. This differential is typically greatest on Day 1 with the result of the CSA consistently winning battles.

## UNITS

### Cavalry:

Other than being faster, most cavalry are weak combat units, typically 1 CV. Most are still one CV when stepped. So in effect, they are worth 1 point to the enemy's VP total regardless is stepped or eliminated. The opposing force receives no additional VPs for eliminating a stepped cavalry unit, hence they are expendable. They can be used as cannon fodder to support an offensive attack, to be used to take any required loss. Their speed makes them useful to block an enemy's path, deny entry hexes or gobble up terrain VP at the end of the day. For both sides, most of the cavalry arrives late in the battle. The exception of course is Union Buford's cavalry, which is used to delay the initial CSA advance. CSA Jenkins arrives late in the first day and is typically quickly consumed to extend the lives of any CSA infantry units.

### Artillery:

Artillery is similar to cavalry in that they are expendable and best used to take losses. Artilleries value relative to cavalry is its ability to enhance defenders through double range support fire. The one step Union artillery is best used in this supporting role. It is important to know which Union artillery has a single step.

### CSA Infantry:

Someone called the CSA army as 'The Army of Elephants'. The nine infantry units are often used with the four CSA leaders to create four Panzergruppen of 10 CV each, with one division in reserve. These are the most powerful combat stacks in the game. As they are brittle; the CSA strength is rapidly attritioned away as these units are stepped and eliminated. No need to look at the board edge; there are no more.

In the first day, the Panzergruppen will enjoy considerable attack modifier advantage, but the dice often forget they are assumed to be victorious. In attack, cavalry/artillery-supporting units should participate to take any unexpected losses. For most of the first day, they can defend themselves with a defensive advantage. At some point, infantry may need to be paired with a support unit to negate the threat of an infantry step loss. The lower offensive capability of such a mixed step can be remedied by multi-hex attacks.

How long these units survive intact is a measure of the game's outcome. Their point value when eliminated is the highest for any unit type.

### USA Infantry:

The Union Army can be called 'The Army of the Ants'. True, they are weaker than their CSA counterparts, but there are a lot more of them. The loss of any or the loss of many is not crippling as long as some CSA attrition is achieved.

The 10-point USA attacks are achieved by attacking from at least two hexes. Therefore, attacking with pure infantry is unnecessary. A double infantry stack of 6+ points is only warranted to hold a key position, preferably a woods/hill to add its +3 terrain DRM. By math, the 3-5 and 4-5s are the more valuable Union infantry units (stronger on attack, greater CSA VPs when eliminated).

### Leaders:

This is actually a Union advantage. The CSA has four main ones, Lee and the three corps commanders. Longstreet has no purpose on the board unit several turns later, when elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps arrive on Turn 8. This limits the CSA stacks to three for the majority of the first day. Unnecessary loss of a CSA leader is crippling as single units in a hex lose any CV strength advantage on defense and become obvious targets.

The Union has a lot more leaders but also has some additional advantages. Hancock is treated as the Army leader through turn 8, stacking any two units. Wing Commanders received many stacking options as well as they can stack any two units of its divisional units, or any two units in its three division wing. Overall this gives the Unions greater stacking flexibility and loss of a few leaders typically only happens the corresponding division loses its last units. Try to retain your Wing Commanders, as they are useful even when their last division unit is lost.

What to do with Buford when his turn one units are lost is a philosophical question. He could retire to benefit his turn 20 unit, but what is the point. It is always possible that bringing in his last division on turn 20 can tip an otherwise balanced game.

### TOURNAMENT BIDDING:

In both FTF and PBEM tournament play, bidding is part of the normal format. Most consider the CSA as having the inherent advantage for victory. However, some players will bid (or not bid) to ensure to play the Union. For most, the bid range for two players wishing to play the CSA side is likely in the 3 VP range. Vince Meconi (GM for most organize G88 play) keeps detailed bid history statistics both by actual bid and by players (i.e. who always plays Union). Personally I like a bid of at least 2 to play Union. Being thrifty, I like to play CSA with a low bid or USA with a higher bid. The statistics are made available at most events in published form. (I will post a version onto the G88 tournament website when available in softcopy form.)

Either side can win in the first day. The CSA will win about half of its victories in the first day, but a bid of 3 or higher makes that unlikely as the bid itself is also doubled when comparing the first day VP totals to determine if Sudden Death Victory has been achieved by the CSA.

Be aware the CSA can also lose on the first day by concession if they fail to successfully enter the board and/or several infantry

units get eliminated. The USA can win the first day by psychologically 'breaking' his opponent, who may be expecting to roll to an easy victory. Often the challenge for the Union player is to think long term and simply survive the first day; similar to playing the Russians in 1941 in *WAR IN THE EAST, RUSSIAN CAMPAIGN, RUSSIAN FRONT, NO RETREAT!*, etc.

### STRATEGY

**CSA:** Use your CV advantage of your Panzergruppenes to pound down Union infantry stacks and seek to eliminate stepped units. The goal is to pile onto your first day victory total and prevent the Union from having infantry strength to mount a counterattack. As the CSA has no turn 1, the CSA will spend 2-4 turns to plough through the USA sacrificial units. This leaves only have about 1-3 turns to capture terrain VPs while eliminating USA forces. Achieving Sudden Death Victory is your goal unless you posted a high bid to make this unlikely. As there is no voluntary combat on turn 8 and CSA units must retreat out of USA ZOC, Gains must be made early beyond the terrain VPs have to make your gains early. Make sure support units are used to absorb unexpected losses so your infantry can stay full strength. Union counterattacks can be withstood if they lack intact infantry stacks. If you don't need the defender's position or if the defensive terrain DRM is redundant, replace front line double infantry stacks with mixed stacks so infantry hits can be avoided during the Union turn 7 attacks. Starting on turn five, count the VP tally every turn to see if Sudden Death Victory is possible. This may affect any decisions regarding taking step losses or advancing after combat.

**USA:** Delay the CSA entry as long as you can to minimize the time they have to assault the VP hexes. Deny access to a VP hexes by sacrificing a unit if it cost the CSA a turn. There is no Automatic Victory during the movement phase, a sacrificial unit's presence and ZOC will stop the enemy's march. Much of your day one force will be eliminated or stepped; it's just the way it is. Your strongest defense of the point of Cemetery hill is 2x3-5 with 2 points of supporting artillery. This gives the defender a slight edge in the 10-10 battles, as the attacker retreats on ties.

Ewell's Corps units are vulnerable until they can unite with the rest of the CSA army. They can be surrounded and attacked on a 10-10 battle with no retreat. If the USA wins the battle, the CSA will need to use the initiative for a reroll. (I lost two sequential games in 20 minutes as Ewell's Corps took three hits on both the battle roll and reroll in both games (two hits plus one for no retreat). In contrast, I also lost a game when the CSA couldn't get onto the board as lost the initial battles despite a favorable die differential. We could talk about probability but things happen.

Your targets will always be 10+ point CSA Panzergruppenes unless an unsupported infantry is left exposed. This is especially true if the Union holds the initiative. CSA prospect wanes with each infantry hit taken. An alternate strategy is to take all easy kills of

support units offered. At some point in Day 2, only the infantry will remain making all additional hits painful.

### USING THE INITIATIVE

The CSA starts with the chit. Like flamethrowers in *SQUAD LEADER*, it is no longer valuable once consumed; it doesn't come back. My view is it should first be used, if ever, to reverse a Union turn 7 attack, which would otherwise recapture a VP hex to deny Turn 1 sudden death victory. The other accepted use is to consume the initiative to negate a double infantry hit, it probability indicates a better result is very likely.

For the Union, once you have gained the initiative, NEVER use it. Exception would be to grant a USA victory or deny a CSA victory at the end of day victory condition. While the USA holds the initiative, the CSA must accept every infantry hit. It is not critical for the Union to avoid double infantry hits as there is lots of infantry and they are often interchangeable due to leader flexibility. Although painful to accept a double infantry hit as the Union, it is catastrophic for the CSA. While the USA holds the initiative, the CSA may be required to be more cautious and to avoid even up attacks that would otherwise be risked. However in some games, the initiative is passed back and forth like a hot potato.

Murphy's Law typically applies to re-rolls. If you seek to reverse a bad die roll, it will be repeats, with a worse result if possible. Also, when seeking to reverse a two-step loss, you will likely see another two-step loss. Probability does not seem to apply to a re-roll. One factor to keep in mind is what the likely outcome. If you are seeking to reverse a 10-10 attack, it's a 50% shot to get a better die roll. If you get a bad outcome while faced with a -6 die differential, you should expect to get a bad outcome.

### PLAYER TACTICS AND FINESSE

This must be learned through both victory and defeat. Consider every losing effort a learning experience. It is not necessary to concede early because you are losing. Immature 'winning' players will get frustrated if you do not concede a lost cause. You simply state that they can either concede themselves or continue playing. Then watch them do stupid things. Some players lose sight of what they are attempting to do as they focus on killing things. In one game, victory was pulled out of defeat in one tournament game when the Union play sallied out to kill off the CSA army and forgot the Victory Conditions. The CSA 'retreated' to all the VP hexes at the end of Day 3 to secure an unexpected victory.

### PUBLISHED ARTICLES

A good way to improve play is to read the published articles. All exist in WGA archives in softcopy.

### THE GENERAL (THE AVALON HILL GAME COMPANY)

- Taylor, Cluck, Martin; Series Replay, GETTYSBURG '88; GENERAL Volume 25 Number 5, page 6.
- Boeche, Thomas; They Led at Gettysburg, The Confederate and Union Generals; GENERAL Volume 25 Number 5; p15.
- TAHGC Staff; GETTYSBURG '88 Contest # 147; GENERAL Volume 25 Number 5, p16.
- Blumberg, Arnold; Horse Soldiers, Cavalry Operations during the Gettysburg Campaign; GENERAL Volume 25 Number 5; p17 [Variant Map Insert].
- Marian, Alan and Brown, Jim; Intermediate GETTYSBURG '88; GENERAL; V25 No. 5; p19.
- TAHGC Staff; "GETTYSBURG '88 QA"; GENERAL Volume 25 Number 5; p58.
- TAHGC Staff; GETTYSBURG '88 Contest # 147 Solution; GENERAL Volume 25 Number 6, p 59.

### THE BOARDGAMER (BRUCE MONNIN, EDITOR/PUBLISHER)

- Freeman, Ray; GETTYSBURG'88, A Union Opening Strategy; THE BOARDGAMER; vol. 2, no. 1, p27.

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