

Leadership in Victory Games' "The Civil War"
Comments and Variant Rules

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"The Civil War", a strategic game of the War Between the States published by Victory Games, features a system of command in which the development of leaders is an important focus of attention. A large part of playing the game is making sure the right leader is in the right place. For the Union especially, a top priority is shunting of the likes of Butler, Banks, and Halleck to obscure commands, and putting Grant and Sherman where the action is so that they will gain promotions. The leader ranking and hidden entry system ensures that the players have to consider the equivalent of personal antipathies, rank pulling, and similar maneuvering.

This attention to leadership issues is not misplaced. Many books have been written on just that subject. For example, Douglas S. Freeman's Lee's Lieutenants traces the evolution of leaders in the Army of Northern Virginia, and Thomas L. Connelly chronicles, in Army of the Heartland and Autumn of Glory, how command problems tore at the effectiveness of the Army of Tennessee. It seems as if the leaders gave more attention to personal vendettas, undermining authority, accusations of incompetence, and placing each other under arrest than to the functions portrayed in the typical war game. For the subject war this was particularly important since neither side started with a command structure, giving full scope for wide variance in competence, experience, and cooperativeness.

Within the game, certain leaders, including most of those who rose to prominence, are represented by a counter. Each has a tactical combat rating from -2 to +2 and an initiative rating from 2 to 4 (low is better). Leaders designated by one star(*) can command a division (up to two strength points); two star(**) leaders can command a corps (up to 6 sp's), and three star leaders can command a corps or an army (with a maximum strength depending on the particular army). Army commanders use a third rating, from -3 to +3, that gives reroll options during combat. A force is always commanded by the senior officer present. ~~Seniority~~ numbers give precedence among leaders of the same rank. Only in an army do leaders other than the senior one affect combat.

Unwounded individuals who survive a battle are all eligible for promotion on the next turn, up to a maximum level for each leader. Grant and Sherman can reach four star rank, allowing command of groups of armies. Interestingly enough, some commanders change ability with rank. For example, Sherman starts as a 2.0*, becomes a 2.1**, and 222*** with promotions. D.H.Hill goes from 2.1* to 3.1**, and Hood from 2.2* to 2.1** to 2-11***. Generally, the Yankees get better and the Confederates get worse. Optional *** leader markers are provided for Lyon and Jackson, to provide for the possibility that either survives long enough to reach that rank. Otherwise, the counters provide only for the ranks various leaders reached historically.

The command system is clean, easy to remember, and slows play very little. Nevertheless, for the gamer who is particularly interested in the development of command, there are some aspects which are troublesome. Perhaps the most important of these can be called "predestination": the player knows which leaders are scheduled for greatness, should they survive. As a consequence, leaders can be carefully assigned where they will get experience if they have potential, regardless of immediate utility. For Grant, Sherman, Lyon, and Jackson, all of whom have great potential, the player can deliberately expose the leader to only one battle at each rank, so as to reach *** status with minimum time and risk. (*, **, and *** leaders have 1/12, 1/18, and 1/216 chance of being killed in a battle, respectively.) If one of these leaders is killed, the effect on the game is enormous, especially for the Confederates, who have only three *** leaders with positive army ratings, Lee, Jackson, and J. Johnston. Some officers who might have attained army command had their rivals not survived, or if political maneuvering had gone differently, cannot do so. Other officers who led corps level units, including F.J. Porter, G.W. Smith, Reno, Patterson, Granger, and Cheatham, are not represented at all. Only a few division level leaders are represented. These are mostly those who were particularly talented (for example Cleburne 3.2*) or untalented (Huger, at 4.-2, is the worst * leader) or have advancement potential.

Another bothersome aspect is that bad leaders are worse than no leader at all. (In fact, Lee assigned Huger to Norfolk to replace someone worse!) Bad leaders, especially at * and ** levels, serve no useful purpose, other than a surprise hazard when they are drawn from the leader pool. Consequently, one of the first orders of business for the Confederate player is to send Huger to command the depot at Bonham, Texas. The Union player similarly finds obscure assignments for Fremont, Butler, Sigel, and such. (Howard, at 3.-2**, may be worth suffering for one combat to promote him to 30-1*** an army commander inferior in value only to five other Union leaders.) Rules make it difficult to get rid of an unwanted army commander; it takes two command points instead of one. But in none of these cases does the player need to wait for action in the field to determine who is worthy of such banishment.

In summary, the knowledge of the leader's precise values and potential allows unrealistic and unhistorical opportunities, especially for the Union, to quickly dispose of leaders with poor potential and rapidly promote those with good potential. Some variant rules are offered here to address the problems cited above. These add some additional complexity to the game, but may be worthwhile if more fidelity in treatment of leadership is desired.

The most important change is a substitution, for the game's "Leader loss Table", of a table giving not only casualties but also promotions, and change of value. One roll is made on this table for each leader in a force involved in combat, as with the Leader Loss Table it replaces. When promotion is indicated, the next highest ranking counter is entered into the leader pool as before. (Optionally, if the leader rolls a promotion and has already had his promotion counter selected earlier, the promotion is immediate.)

roll	*	** or *** not army cdr	*** army 6-10 sp	*** army more than 10sp
1 -	captured	captured	dismissed	dismissed
2	dismissed	dismissed	killed/captured	killed/wounded
3	relieved	killed/captured	wounded	relieve if no win
4	killed/captured	wounded	dismiss if -	dismiss if -
5	wounded	relieve if loss	relieve if loss	relieve if loss
6	-1, may rel.if -	-1, rel.if -	-1, rel.if -	-1, rel.if -
7	promote 1861			
8	+1, promote if win	+1	+1	+1
9	promote if +1,2	promote if win		
10	promote if no loss	promote if +1,2		promote if win
11	promote if +2	promote if no loss	promote if win	promote if +2,3
12	promote	promote if +2	promote if +2,3	promote if +1,3
13	+1, promote	+1, promote	+1	

relieve: The leader may be demoted, and in any case is removed to the leader pool

dismiss: Roll a die and add to the leader's rating. If 3 or less, the leader is removed from play. If 4 or more, reenters leader pool after 2 turns and is demoted if possible.

killed/captured: Roll a die. On 1-3 the leader is killed. On 4-6 he is captured and may be exchanged. Leaders are exchanged in order of capture without regard to rank or rating until 1864.

promotion conditions:

1861: Only promotes leaders during turns 1,2

-1, etc: Leader must have at least rating shown to be promoted

if win: Leader must be in force retaining field if attacking, or must have suffered fewer losses if defending

if no loss: Leader's force must have sustained no more casualties than opponents, likewise for demoralization

note: a *** leader is only eligible for promotion if in command of an army

If a promotion is rolled for a leader having no promotion counter, roll a die. If a 1 is rolled, a ** leader is eligible for promotion anyway. A * leader is eligible with a 1 or 2. The promotion is effective in the second turn following the current one, and must be noted on a separate piece of paper due to the absence of an appropriate counter. The leader has the seniority number of one greater than the senior leader of that rank when the promotion becomes effective. A *** leader is likewise promotable with a roll of 2 or 3 with 2 dice after turn 8.

-1 : Roll a die. On a 1, one is added to the initiative level of the leader, to a maximum of 4. On any other roll, one is subtracted from the leader's tactical or army rating (whichever was being used), subject to a minimum of -2 and -3 respectively. Record of these changes must be maintained on a separate paper due to the lack of appropriate counters.

+1 : Roll a die: On a 1, one is subtracted from the initiative level of the leader, to a minimum of 2. On any other roll, one is added to the tactical or army rating (whichever was being used), subject to maximums of 2 and 3 respectively. As with other such changes, this must be noted on paper.

Note: Add 1 to die roll on table if win, subtract 1 if lose, subtract 3 if elim.

Each turn, each player may, at some one time during the turn during his own action phase, point to an enemy stack for a "Leader overstack check". If there are more leader stars than strength points in the stack, the owning player must remove any extra leaders and place them in the leader pool for placement in the next turn. For purposes of this rule count a fort, fortress, or depot as one strength point. The senior leader in each theater is exempt from this rule, since he has duties as theater commander. This rule prevents accumulation of a large stack of worthless leaders in a single obscure post. The threat of reentering the leader pool, where they would become mixed with good leaders, should motivate keeping these leaders spread out. The use of counting stars is to ensure that the leaders have commands appropriate to their rank. An army commander may not be forced to leave his army by this rule.

If an army does not contain leaders totaling twice as many stars as the army has strength points, one reroll is given up for each missing star. This motivates using the 'bad' leaders to command troops as subordinate commanders pending arrival of better replacements. During 1861 and 1862 each union army has 4 implicit stars for commanders present but not represented in the game, with the exception of the Armies of Tennessee, James, and Southwest.

The senior leader in each theater is the theater commander. If he is not in a victory point city, on a railroad, or commanding an army, the senior leader meeting these conditions will be acting in that capacity as his deputy. Only *** leaders may act in this role. The army command rating of the theater commander, interpreted as an administrative rating, affects the acquisition of command points (cp's) in that theater. A -3 leader, or absence of a suitable leader, results in a loss of 1 cp each time the table is rolled, for his theater. A +3 leader adds one for each cp table roll. A -2 or +2 leader likewise affects cp acquisition, but only on the second and subsequent use during the turn. A -1 or +1 leader causes a loss or gain only on the third or last cp table use. A theater commander who also commands an army has one subtracted from his rating to reflect his preoccupation with those more immediate duties. In addition, a *** leader in or adjacent to the capitol serves as an advisor to the President, and has a similar effect on acquisition of discretionary cp's. A leader serving in this role who is also the Eastern theater commander is reduced one in rating to reflect his divided attention. If he also commands an army, he would be penalized by two. The senior officer in or next to the capitol may give up the role of Theater commander to the second ranking officer in the theater to avoid filling both roles. He will grab command of an army if it comes within reach, however. This rule reflects the importance of the administrative duties. Before he appears as a counter in the game, Lee was busy with this kind of business in Richmond. If this rule is used, players should consider allowing all *** leaders to enter the game on turn 1, including Lee.

Certain generals were retained in positions of command because of political reasons. Therefore, removal of these from play should cost victory points, since they would work against Lincoln in the 1864 election or cause similar troubles in the South. McClellan, Fremont, Banks, Butler, Sigel, and Polk should all cost a victory point to remove. Optionally, the cost could be equal to the number of stars. Victory points could also be gained by appointing these folks to Army or theater command. Count one point for command of a minor army (James or Southwest) or three for a major army.

A stack having no leader, if involved in combat, is treated as if it has a leader with a negative tactical rating one greater than the number of strength points. This motivates the assignment of leaders, even poor ones, to significant sized forces.

A force in friendly territory may move for a cp cost equal to the number of strength points, as long as no attack is made. This prevents a force from being penalized for having a leader present.

A force other than an army which has more than one leader includes half of the value of other leaders, rounded in the enemy's favor. Thus, a junior -1 leader adds one to the enemy die roll, as does a -2 leader. A junior +1 leader would add nothing. If the number of stars of leaders exceeds the number of strength points, the opponent decides which leaders to count, up to a stat total equal to strength points. This rule prevents masking the effects of a poor leader behind a good one, and allows division commanders in an independent corps to have an effect.

A force other than an army has a limited reaction ability. A force commanded by a ** or *** leader of 3 to 6 points can react if an enemy force moves from one adjacent hex to another or into the hex occupied by the unit. The reaction move is similar to that of an army, except the force cannot move into the hex being entered by the moving enemy force. Thus, this form of reaction is an escape mechanism. If the force includes a cavalry unit (commander), it benefits the leader's chance of reacting just as for an army. A force of one or two strength points commanded by a * leader can attempt to react if an enemy force enters its hex. It may react only away from the moving force, into a hex not adjacent to the hex from which the enemy is entering. A cavalry leader's chance to react is increased by his tactical factor, less the tactical factors of enemy cavalry leaders in the moving force. Cavalry leaders in a stack give benefits similar to that for a corps. An infantry force cannot react away from cavalry. Leaderless strength points react individually as if they each have a 4 initiative leader. This rule allows some reactive exercise of command by independent forces which are not part of an army. Without such a capability, Jackson could be easily crushed in the Shenandoah in 1862.

These rules are offered as ideas for improving what is already an excellent game on a difficult subject. I hope they add pleasure to the game, and perhaps inspire better approaches to treatment of leadership in the future.