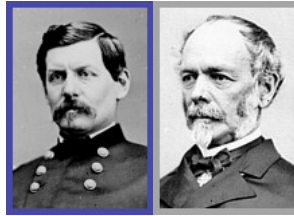


Union Strategies in the On To Richmond! Advanced Game

by Ed Beach, co-designer of On To Richmond!



As mentioned in my On to Richmond! designer's notes, it is quite difficult to win the Peninsula Campaign scenario as the Union player -- especially the first few times you play that Advanced Game scenario. I suggested a handicap of 30 to 50 Victory Points for a novice Union player in the Designer's Notes (p.26 of the Advanced Game Rules). There is, however, one alternative that I think should help, namely: read this article! For herein I plan to reveal the wisdom gained in my numerous playings of this campaign game. Once the Union player absorbs the lessons I learned through painful trial-and-error, he should have at least an even chance of prevailing in this campaign.

Advice on Union strategy is divided into the following five sections:

- Overall Objectives
- Invasion Site Selection
- Phases of the Campaign
- Peripheral Theaters
- Operational Details

I do need to admit that I have so far concentrated the bulk of my efforts on developing Union strategies in this game, to some extent ignoring some of the options available to the Confederate player. I am hoping that the release of this article will help tilt the scales toward the Union player, effectively balancing the scenario. I then hope players will work to devise some interesting Confederate counterstrategies to foil these Union plans. That's what I've found most interesting about this campaign game -- there are still many strategies on both sides I have not yet been able to explore despite repeated playtesting. Please let me know how your games come out. Send me email or post a message to our mailing list. There are so many strategic options available to both sides that I would love to hear if I have missed a winning approach.

OVERALL OBJECTIVES

A careful study of the Victory Conditions makes it clear that the Union Player must take and hold one of three primary objectives to win this Advanced Game. The three objectives are:

1. Richmond
2. Drewry's Bluff
3. Petersburg

Ideally the Union player would capture one of these objectives by the end of June and hold it until the end of the game. If McClellan's troops are able to accomplish this feat, the game

should be theirs. At first glance, it would appear that 112 turns allows plenty of time to achieve this goal. But as we shall see, the clock can run out on the Union Player in several different ways.



View towards Confederate Capitol in Richmond, 1862

Capturing one of the three objectives typically requires that the Union player establish a reliable supply line to the vicinity of the objective in question. There are four main supply routes available to the Union player. Gaining an understanding of these supply routes is the first key to good Union play. The supply routes available and their relative merits are summarized in the table below:

SUPPLY ROUTE	PROS & CONS
Rail Supply from Fredericksburg	Depots may be built at either Chester Depot or Hanover Junction if the Union can trace a RR Hex Path to N0801. Achieving this goal is typically only possible with the Tappahannock invasion site. Hanover Junction is the preference of these two since it provides supply all the way to Richmond. Overall, this is a great way to get supply to the Confederate capital. Unfortunately the Union player rarely gets such an opportunity.
York River	Supply from a depot on the York River is the most reliable supply path to Richmond. It does not require the capture of Norfolk or establishing a route to the Fredericksburg rail line. If the Confederate player guards Norfolk heavily and the invasion site is not Tappahannock, you must assume that this will be your source of supply to Richmond. My favorite location for a final depot on the road to the Confederate capital is Eltham Landing. Nestled in a crook of the river, it is easy to defend. If you can rebuild the railroad bridge over the Chickahominy, the siege artillery unit can be moved to Eltham and supply its bonuses throughout Henrico County. You will have to capture both Yorktown and Gloucester Point to get supply this far up the James; these two Confederate forts should be your main objectives early in the campaign.
James River	Opening up the James River to the Union navy unveils a slew of opportunities for the Union Player. All three main objectives, Richmond, Drewry's Bluff, and Petersburg, lie on the James.

	Furthermore, a supply base backed up to the James is easy to defend since the Confederate player has no capacity to bridge this river except near Richmond. The plethora of Union avenues of advance along the James towards major objectives should convince the Confederate player to hold Norfolk at all costs. However, when the threat to Richmond becomes too great; those 10,000 or more men from Norfolk are awfully tempting to recall.
Overland from Norfolk	As with the James River routes, an overland supply route from Norfolk will only be available if Norfolk itself is captured. So the Union player can not open the campaign with this as his strategic plan. However, if Norfolk falls early, an overland route towards Petersburg (which is difficult to defend) should give the Union player a relatively easy win, though it will not be a decisive one since the victory point award for Petersburg is lower.

Depending on the selection on invasion site (discussed extensively below) and the success of the Union advance during April, a choice of supply route is typically thrust upon the Union player. You should move decisively to establish your army's presence in front of one of the three objectives as soon as possible. Getting a supply depot (and if possible the siege artillery) within striking distance of one of the objectives is your primary objective for at least the first two months of the campaign. If this goal is achieved early enough, you should win comfortably. If it doesn't happen until June, you are probably too late, for the Confederate army receives reinforcements at a faster rate than the Army of the Potomac. By June, the Union player can actually be outnumbered -- just as McClellan feared.

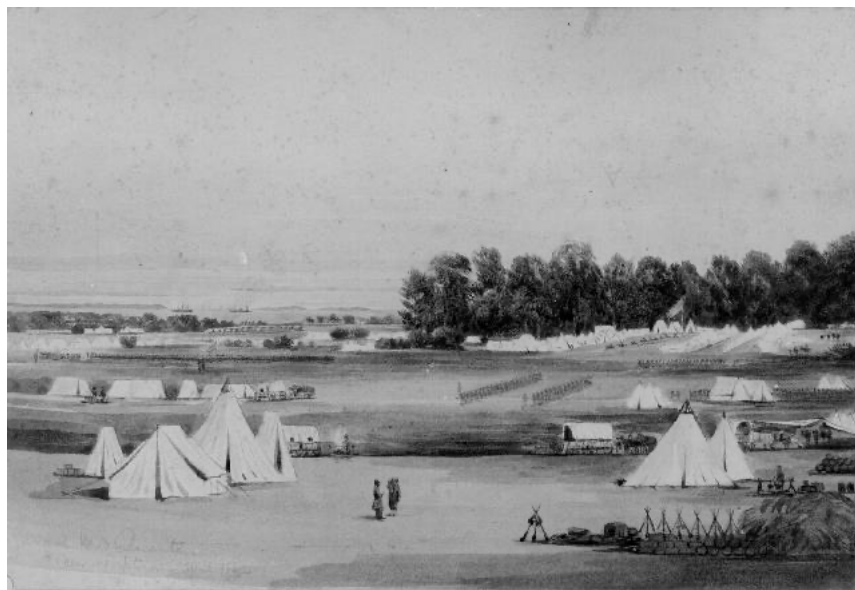
INVASION SITE SELECTION

However, I am getting ahead of myself, for I have not yet discussed the first decision of the game, namely the Union Player's choice of invasion site. As you will see below, I have two sites that I prefer. Each location does have its merits however, so before I tip my hand, let us look at the advantages of each invasion site:

INVASION SITE	MERITS
Peninsula	A historical invasion offers the best chance of breaking the Warwick River line in Week 1 of the campaign. However, it is not nearly as easy in the campaign game as in Scenario 1, and certainly not a move for the Union Player that is feint of heart. The Union can often lose 10 more manpower than the Confederate in that first week alone if an aggressive assault over the Warwick is attempted. Make sure to send troops after Gloucester Point with an amphibious move as soon as possible so you can fully open the York to Union navigation.
Mobjack Bay	Invading on the north side of the York yields Gloucester Point in the first few days of the campaign. Next, transfer Turn 1 troops back to the south side of the York amphibiously and bring the Turn 7 reinforcements across the Peninsula with off-map movement from Fort Monroe. Soon you can try and take Yorktown as well. However, this will not be until Week 2 or 3 and the Warwick Line will be well fortified by Magruder's Rebels. The Union advance can easily be stymied until the siege artillery can be brought to bear on the Warwick River line.

Urbana	An invasion at McClellan's original preferred site of Urbana offers maximum flexibility. Sending two divisions south to Gloucester Point will yield that strategic objective, while the other three divisions can threaten to cross the Mattapony. A race to Fraser's Ferry and the other Mattapony crossings can sometimes pay off. If the Union player does not actually cross before the Confederate arrives, he can often at least prevent the Confederate destruction of the ferry in question by occupying the eastern shore.
Tappahannock	An invasion at the northernmost site of Tappahannock affords the best chance of establishing a firm bridgehead on the west side of the Mattapony in the first week of the campaign. This site is also the only one that makes a Fredericksburg rail-line supply strategy feasible. The downside of this site is that it is often difficult to take Yorktown and Gloucester Point from here. It is also unlikely that the Union player can successfully shift to a James River strategy once his army is heavily committed to this northern route.

Obviously all four sites have their strengths. The key discriminator between them is the speed at which they can deliver the Army of the Potomac to the doorstep of Richmond. The fastest routes to Richmond are the ones where the Union Player suffers through the fewest and shortest delays. The Virginia Peninsula, only 7 hexes wide at several spots, is a bottleneck that can be easily defended in strength by Johnston's Confederate army. Since both the Peninsula and Mobjack Bay invasion sites utilize the Peninsula as a primary path to Richmond, they are too prone to these damaging multi-week delays. The Urbana and Tappahannock invasion sites, however, force the Confederate player to defend both the Peninsula and the Mattapony River line. As we will see below, the Confederate can not defend everywhere in strength. The dispersion of Confederate forces along the Mattapony will eventually permit the Union to break through the combined Warwick/Mattapony river lines and press on further toward Richmond.



"General Headquarters near Yorktown, Va., April 1862." Watercolor by William McIlvaine.i>

PHASES OF THE CAMPAIGN

It is time to offer very specific advice. I will do this by dividing the campaign into three phases and listing some of the key Union activities during each of these portions of the game. The

information here assumes that either the Tappahannock or Urbana invasion site has been selected so that the Confederate Player is forced to defend along the Mattapony.

Phase 1: To the Warwick and Mattapony

The first phase is the Union approach to the Warwick/Mattapony line and the Union endeavors to punch across this defense. The length of time the Union Player spends in this phase will go a long way toward determining the eventual winner of the campaign. If the Union Player can move into Phase 2 in the first three weeks of the campaign, he is in great shape. If it takes until early May to open up the York River (as occurred historically), it will be a tough road into Richmond.

The first week of the game is a race to the Mattapony. It is a race that the Confederate Player should easily win, but even if the Union Player arrives second, there are often opportunities to exploit. Ideally, the Confederate wants to get to the river first, guard all of the crossings, and destroy all of the bridges and ferries before the Union Player arrives. It is the destruction of bridges and ferries that can often be the key. Even a Union cavalry regiment across the river from a Confederate brigade makes it impossible for the Confederate to destroy a crossing. And if a large Union infantry division can reach the river shortly after the cavalry, you might be able to push across the river against the smaller Confederate brigade. That is the goal for the Union player during this race -- establishing a bridgehead on the west side of the river. You won't be able to get supply there until the York River is open, but that is fine, you can always forage. You only need to defend the bridgehead in strength and wait for supply to come from the south. When it does, the Confederate will have no choice but to pull back toward Richmond, at least as far as the Pamunkey River.

The chance of establishing an early bridgehead will depend on the random events rolled and your first few movement rolls. It is also a lot easier from Tappahannock (though that site makes taking Gloucester Point tougher). Don't fret if you don't achieve it right away, for there are several ways across the river. You can move your troops up river, where it is easier to cross. Break some of the big Union divisions into three 5+ manpower brigades to threaten to bridge the river at multiple locations. Especially in the north where it is a minor river, you will eventually succeed at some spot since a single Union unit can threaten to bridge into at least two hexes. Some of these bridging attempts will be wiped out before you cross if the Confederate moves first in the Action Phase after the bridge is created. Be patient. You only need one of these bridging attempts to work. If you can just create one enclave on the west side of the river, the defensive value of the river is compromised.

The second goal during this phase is to open up the York River by taking Yorktown and Gloucester Point. Use your Turn 7 and 14 reinforcements to achieve this goal. You won't have very good corps integrity with all three corps divided by the York River, but you can reorganize later in front of Richmond. The plan is to exert enough offensive pressure along the Mattapony that the strength of the Confederate Warwick River line is seriously compromised. Yorktown is the key hex to take since you only want to open up the river to allow supply an amphibious movement; you don't really need to move your entire army up the Peninsula. Don't forget to move against Gloucester Point simultaneously; it is annoying to have Yorktown fall but still be shut out of the York until you can make the amphibious movement die roll to cross and take Gloucester.

Confederate Players that read this article may try and keep strong defenses along the Warwick to foil this Union plan of opening up the York. This still works to the Union Player's advantage. In this case, you should be able to easily cross the Mattaponi. If you do and are still faced with a tough Warwick River line, it is time to throw caution to the wind and go straight for Richmond. The Confederate Player can not be strong everywhere. Despite your lack of supply, if you outnumber the Confederate Player by a large margin in the north you can threaten Richmond early in the game. You may not take it, but you can often force a Confederate withdrawal from the Peninsula. You might also be able to open up a path to the RF & P rail supply line. If so, you'll be in great shape for a strong push on Richmond from the north.

Phase 2: After the York River is Open

It is after the York River is open to the Union navy that the Union player really hits his stride. Now all of the weapons in your arsenal are available to you. Any Confederate along a major river shore should be immediately subjected to bombardment. You should also be using amphibious movement as often as the dice will permit. It is the fastest way to move toward Richmond and the best way to collapse any defensive line the Confederate tries to establish. If you open up the York before getting across the Mattaponi, the Confederate player may try and hold that line for a few days. However, with the Union's ability to land troops behind that river in the West Point region, it is only a matter of time before he must pull back. Ultimately you should be able to use your gunboats and the threat of amphibious movement to force the Confederate player back to at least White House Station (where the Pamunkey starts to narrow into a minor river).

Besides advancing on Richmond, there is another goal to keep in mind during this phase of the game. You need to be sure you are setting yourself up for Phase 3 by establishing a supply depot that can reach Richmond. Pick a landing hex in New Kent County (Eltham is my favorite) because you can use the York River RR to get your siege artillery to Richmond. If you can build this depot, it should be the last depot you need. Just be sure and guard it well! You don't want to let Stuart slip through the front lines and destroy your siege artillery and only depot at the front...

The final move that is necessary before a significant push on Richmond can be started is to cross the Chickahominy. Be cautious here. Anytime you cross a river, you are very vulnerable to rain. I have lost many a crack Union division in the swamps of the Chickahominy after a sudden rainstorm has washed out its chance of retreat. Make sure to cross in force and follow up the crossing by the reconstruction of a bridge or ferry to ensure a safe route for reinforcements or retreat.

Phase 3: In Front of Richmond

You've made it to the final phase and have supply and siege artillery that can reach Richmond. If it is still May, congratulate yourself on a job well done and get ready for the final battle! This phase is where the game can become a real slugfest. To equalize the odds, you need to have the siege artillery in place and safe from Confederate raids to the Union rear. If you need to wait a week or so for the siege artillery to reach Fatigue Level 0, consider staying in Passive Posture and saving your Command Points. This situation is one of the few cases where I

recommend saving Command Points. With the siege artillery, the redoubts around Richmond have little effect on play. Just as important, your corps commanders will now receive a +2 on all assaults. In this one case, your corps commanders attack as well as those lofty Rebel leaders with 4 tactical values. In addition, you will have between 5 to 7 such leaders (depending on the situation with McDowell and Burnside), as opposed to the 3 or 4 such leaders the Confederate possesses. This is a rarity for the Great Campaigns series, namely a situation where the Union Player can attack the Confederate at equal or better odds. If it is early enough that the Confederate has not received all of his reinforcements and you have conserved enough manpower, the capital should fall.



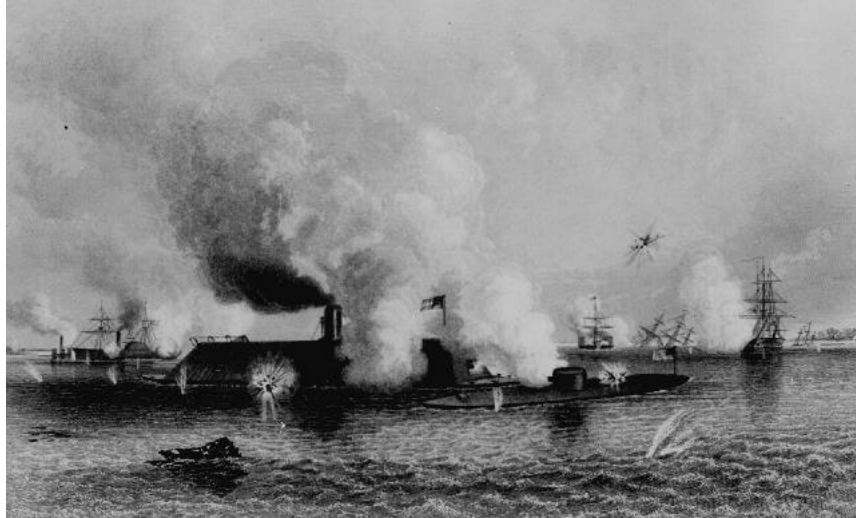
"Battle of Gaines Mill, Valley of the Chickahominy, Virginia, June 27, 1862." Artwork by Prince de Joinville.

PERIPHERAL THEATERS

Unlike the on-board activity, which is largely driven by the Union Player's strategic plans, the activity in peripheral theaters such as Norfolk and the Valley are dictated by Confederate choices. Accordingly, I will keep the discussion brief on these items. For the Union Player, these theaters remain static until the Confederate Player withdraws troops to fight in front of Richmond. At this point, opportunities do begin to present themselves, as described below.

Norfolk and the James

Although the Union Player can start assaulting Norfolk as early as Turn 14, it is best to wait until the Confederate Player has withdrawn troops or Yorktown has fallen. With Huger's 19 manpower at the start of the game in Norfolk, the Union would need to commit 38 manpower for a 2:1 attack that has only a 1 in 6 chance of success. In addition, the Union Player will on average lose 2 or 3 manpower more in the attack than the Confederate. For such a large commitment of troops, I don't find the chance of success high enough. However, once Yorktown falls, things look much brighter. First of all, with the Warwick Line cracked, you can often spare some troops from the front. In addition, the +1 bonus for control of York County means that a 2:1 attack will succeed 10 times out of 36. If in addition the Confederate withdraws troops, the chances go up even higher.



Battle between the C.S.S. Virginia and the U.S.S. Monitor, Hampton Roads, Va., March 9, 1862.
Engraved in 1863 by J. Davies from a drawing by C. Parsons.

However, either a strong Confederate commitment to Norfolk or poor Union luck can conspire to keep Norfolk in Rebel hands for a significant portion of the game. As a result, a good Union player will make his way to Richmond without relying on opening up the James. If Norfolk does fall though, take advantage of that boon quickly! You can now threaten all three objectives. Just keeping a strong division posted on the shore of the James to threaten Petersburg and Drewry's Bluff should draw off Confederate troops from in front of Richmond. If Norfolk falls early enough, you can even create your supply base for the final push on Richmond along the river. Note however that since there is no rail line to Richmond from Charles City County, you must place the base in Henrico County if you want the siege artillery to function there. The exact plan will depend upon the disposition of troops when Norfolk falls and the time remaining in the game. Just be sure and reevaluate your objectives when Norfolk falls; you may have several wonderful new opportunities for victory points in front of you.

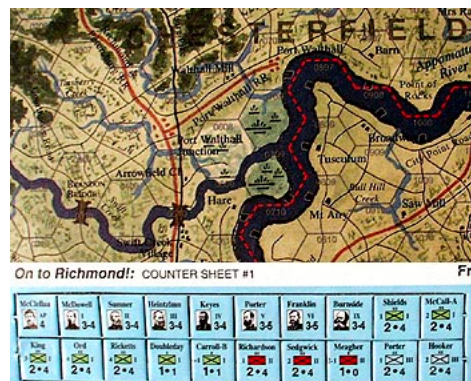
The Valley and Rappahannock

The Union Player has no control at all over Jackson's efforts in the Shenandoah Valley and his effect on the arrival of McDowell's I Corp. Once again, a smart Confederate Player will keep enough troops in this peripheral theater to stymie the Union Player from receiving any I Corp units. The only thing the Union Player can do to help the situation is threaten a major objective, which will force the Confederate to recall all available troops to Richmond. The Confederate may also withdraw his troops from the Valley as the game winds to a close if it is questionable whether McDowell's men can arrive in time to affect the outcome. Just be sure that you consider carefully whether to receive these men by land or sea. You should also consider attaching them to an existing corps upon arrival if McDowell himself may not be arriving in the near future.

OPERATIONAL TIPS

Finally, I tried to compile a list of tips and reminders that will help the Union Player. Here's what I came up with:

1. Use Your Naval Advantage: this is the Union Player's greatest edge. Use gunboats to keep Confederates off of the shore lines and allow your army to slip along the shore past his defensive lines. Use amphibious movement to outflank the Confederate defensive positions. Using the Union navy properly should ensure that you do not get bogged down trying to slug your way through a Confederate line.
2. Avoid Swamps, Cross Rivers Cautiously: a sudden rainstorm can be devastating to a small force that just crossed a river in front of a superior foe. You can easily lose any chance of retreat and have one of your 8,000 to 10,000 man divisions wiped out. Be cautious about any movement across unbridged rivers or into swamps.
3. Make Your Top Priority Moves First: the threat of a turn ending early should always be in your mind. Make your most important moves first. Do not wait too long to try amphibious embarkation. And once you get units embarked, move them before you lose the chance!
4. Move to Fatigue Level 3 if the Weather is Clear: the Union Player will probably move at less than full speed on close to half of the turns. When the weather is clear and there is no Union Command Paralysis, take advantage of it and push your troops to at least Fatigue Level 3. They'll have plenty of turns to rest later.
5. Use Substitutes to Cross Rivers: discussed above in the section on Phase 1 of the campaign. Remember that 5 manpower is the magic number.
6. Build the Minimum Number of Depots Needed: building too many depots is a mistake because after a while they become Victory Point targets for the Confederate. If you do it right you can take Richmond with the depot you start with and one more at Eltham. If you build others, consider dismantling them as soon as their usefulness declines.
7. Use Your Command Points: as mentioned above, I rarely recommend saving them. The only exception is if waiting for the siege artillery Fatigue Level to drop to 0 is crucial for your current plans.



CONCLUSION

The On to Richmond! campaign game offers a wealth of strategic options and high replayability. I've never had two games that played the same. Using the "Across the Mattapony" strategic guidelines from this article will stretch the Confederate defenses and allow the Union player to reach Richmond in a reasonable amount of time. However, strong Union play is still required; I believe that the tips from this article only balance the game and do not throw it into the Union Player's favor.

Go ahead and give the campaign a try! If you do, don't forget to send me email or post a message to our mailing list. The 112-turn length may seem daunting, but remember that at

least half of the turns will be skipped or end quickly. In addition, many games will be decided early on. You will have a few games that take several full days of play to complete, but those are the gems where it is still a close contest in June and July. An epic contest such as that is just what we all are looking for...