

Rules conversion of Columbia's Sam Grant / Bobby Lee to new Action Cards style.

by Alan P. Marian

Some very good older Columbia block wargames such as Sam Grant/Bobby Lee have rules in which each player can attempt all the actions they want and can afford every turn, with multi-phase combat fought on a separate battle board with its own sub-rules. This article does not suggest that the original rules need to be done away with for those who still like them. It does however suggest that because the new generation of Columbia wargames driven by Action Cards and with quick generalized combat are so popular, that their style of play can be retrofitted onto the older titles. The goal is faster smoother play as in the newer card-driven games Liberty, Crusader Rex, and Hammer of the Scots. Elements of those games form the basis for these proposed rules updates, and players familiar with them will have a head-start. A few comments are at the end for those interested in the thought process.

These proposed rules merely follow current Columbia Games designs. The “unified rules” for Sam Grant / Bobby Lee are 30 pages including charts, tables, and index. In the card-driven games, the rules for Hammer are 12 pages including index and credits; the rules for Crusader and for Liberty are 8 pages including set-up, index, and credits. The unified rules for Sam Grant / Bobby Lee on page 2 predict 3-4 hours playing time for just one game-year. In the card-driven games, Crusader predicts 2-3 hours to play the entire 6-year game, while Liberty predicts 2-3 hours to play the entire 9-year game. The trend is obvious.

The first crucial game mechanism are Action Cards which in the newer games brilliantly replace most of the usual layers of rules about command and control, politics, leadership, logistics, diplomacy, and initiative. A simple draw and comparison of numeric cards means that no one knows who goes first each turn, and there is no bidding to get your way. Numeric cards also mean that the number of actions allowed per turn is unpredictable, whether playing first or second. Crusader Rex, Hammer of the Scots, and Liberty each have 25 cards, most of which allow 1, 2, or 3 groups of blocks to move with each card played. The remaining cards in Crusader and Hammer are Events, while in Liberty are Supply.

This conversion is specific to Sam Grant/Bobby Lee which have unified rules 1.0 on the Columbia website that supersede any other rules or charts. References below are to those unified rules which still apply unless changed herein. I follow the 1, 2, or 3 Actions pattern with the remainder being Supply. In this conversion for playing either of the two Civil War games, we need *20 Action Cards and 5 Supply cards*. Columbia sells Liberty cards under Bits & Pieces which match our needs here. Or, from two standard decks of playing cards with the same back designs, select a total of six 1-cards (aces), eight 2-cards, and six 3-cards (unfortunately one deck doesn't have enough). Then select three queens as Supply-2 cards, and two kings as Supply-3 cards. Or create your own cards.

Units 2.0 is altered as follows:

2.2 Ignore all references to Field HQs which will not be in play. One Supreme HQ for each side will remain in play. (For convenience, players may use a Field HQs block only to represent a Group of blocks too large to fit into one map hex during the time they stay together. Ignore any factors on the HQ block.)

2.3 The Unit Data chart is only valid for speed of units. (Ignore Firepower and Replacement costs per rules changes below.)

Play Sequence 3.0 is altered as follows:

3.0 Each year of a scenario or of the campaign game has 6 Game Turns unless the game ends by Victory. (See Comment 2 at end.) Winter effects under unified rule 4.4 are deleted. Instead the 6th Game turn each year is a Winter turn described at rule 4.4 below.

3.1 Card Phase: Each Year begins with the card deck being shuffled and each player being dealt 6 cards face down. Each player can inspect his own cards. Cards are either Action or Supply. Each Game Turn begins by both players revealing one card at the same time and the higher-number card is Player 1. In a tie, the USA player is Player 1 since USA has the burden of the offensive to win.

3.2 Action Phase: *A plain numbered card is the number of Actions that the drawing player can take that turn.* For each Action, a player can make one Group Move, OR activate supreme HQ for Strategic movement per existing rule 5.4, OR Build one full strength replacement block. A player with a 2 or 3 Action card who wants to Move and Build must do all Moves before Build to avoid creating and then moving units in the same turn. Neither cards nor actions can be accumulated for future use. Build is the creation of one new full strength block from the pool of unused or eliminated blocks. If there are no such blocks, this Action is unavailable. (There are no more cadres or Replacement Points from unified rules 12.3 and 12.4 or the data chart on the board.)

3.21 A Supply Card provides 2 or 3 steps of reinforcements. These may be added to Friendly blocks with a valid Supply Line per unified rule 11.4. There is a maximum of two steps per block, not one as in other games. This is the only way to add steps to blocks already in play. (There is no more automatic addition of replacements to units each turn as in unified rule 12.1. Players must spend a Supply Card to do so.) When a Supply Card is played, it is always resolved before any Actions, and the player using it is Player 1 for rule purposes. If both sides play a Supply card, highest number card is Player 1. In a tie, the USA player is Player 1

3.3 Battle Phase: Battles occur when both sides have blocks in the same hex. Battles are resolved in any order selected by Player 1.

3.4 Supply Phase: The last phase after all movement and battles are resolved is a Supply phase per unified rule 11.1. The active player determines the supply status of friendly units and reduces them by supply attrition as necessary.

3.5 Pass is the player opting to do nothing that turn regardless of the card revealed and discarded. There is no penalty or effect if both players Pass in one game-turn.

Deployment 4.24 is altered as follows:

4.24 Historical CSA deployment for both the 1862 scenario and the Campaign Game now includes Van Dorn's Corps in the Smithville, Arkansas hex, consisting of an infantry 4, infantry 3, cavalry 2, and artillery 3. They are no longer reinforcements that enter after start and cost VPs to deploy. Bragg's Corps remains a reinforcement from the Gulf Coast, subject to VP penalty for entry. (See Comment 4 at end)

Winter 4.4 is **replaced** by this section only.

4.41 The 6th and final regular Game Turn each year is a Winter Turn with the following rules changes.

4.42 All units land movement allowance is reduced by (-1). Rail and Naval movement is not affected. Combat is permitted. See the Terrain Effects chart under Mud for hexside limits on attack, reinforce, and forage.

4.43 A Build Action is still permitted, as is playing a Supply Card to reinforce existing blocks. Any blocks being reinforced or placed as new Builds must be in a hex with a valid supply line.

4.44 The last step in Winter is Prisoner Exchange when players can negotiate for exchange of blocks eliminated by combat or forced marching for any bargain agreed upon. Such face up blocks are returned to the players' face down replacement pool. (See Comment 6 at end.)

Victory Points 4.5 is altered as follows:

4.52 The CSA VP for passage of time is awarded at the start of each Game Turn. The unified rule referred to the start of a "replacement turn" which has now been deleted.

4.53 Drafts/Conscription is deleted.

4.55 Emancipation is deleted. (See Comment 5 at end.)

The Movement rules in 5.0 are amended as follows:

5.1 Ignore all references to Field HQ. Supreme HQ rules remain unchanged for activation per unified rule 5.11 and strategic movement per 5.4. One Strategic Move can be ordered for one unit or for one Group Move for units together in one hex.

5.3 Move is of one or more blocks starting in a single hex, referred to as a Group. For one action, a player can move any number of blocks in one Group to all hexes within their maximum movement rate. Blocks can pass freely through hexes containing friendly blocks but must stop and fight upon entering a hex containing enemy blocks. (See Comment 3 at end.)

5.6 Pinning. Attacking blocks prevent an equal number of defending blocks from moving. The defender chooses which blocks are pinned. Any unpinned blocks may move normally except they cannot move directly across any hexside used by attackers to enter their hex.

The second crucial game mechanism is the generalized combat which in the newer games replaces the longer, more tactical battle board simulation from unified rules 6.0 and 7.0. There is no more battle board, but units can be moved out of the battle hex to any convenient place off the map to resolve the fight. (This section is based generally on Liberty.)

*Battles rule 6.0 is **replaced** by these sections only:*

6.1 Battles occur when the active player moves units into a hex or hexes where the defending player has units.

6.2 If units enter the battle hex from different hexsides, the owning player must select one hexside as the main attack. Attacking units entering from other hexsides are “battle reserves” which are not revealed and cannot fire or take hits until round 2 (if there is one). They must retreat if combat ends in round 1, and can retreat normally in later rounds.

6.3 If the defender moves blocks to reinforce a hex which the attacker has entered for battle, defender’s blocks are “battle reserves” in the first round and cannot fire or take hits until round 2 (if there is one). They must retreat if combat ends in round 1, and can retreat normally in later rounds.

6.4 The victor can Regroup at the instant of victory which is a group move from the battle hex into any friendly hexes free of enemy blocks.

*Battle Turns rule 7.0 is **replaced** by these sections only:*

7.1 Units are rated A, B, or C for combat. All A units “fire” (roll their dice) first, then B units, and lastly C units. Roll as many dice as the unit’s current strength. One hit is scored for each die equal to or lower than the unit’s combat rating. Example: a 3 step unit with B2 combat rating rolls 3 dice that hit on a 1 or 2 rolled. Defending A units go before attacking A units, and so forth. Combat lasts for 3 rounds after which the attacker must retreat if defenders still remain. In each round, a unit can fire or retreat. When all units have fired or retreated, that round is over.

7.2 Combat ratings for units (called Firepower in the unified rules) are listed here because they are not printed on the labels in these older games. You can write them on the labels with a fine point marker if you choose, or refer to this list. It is simplified from the Firepower ratings under unit data on page 6 of the unified rules with no variables for year or for tactics because the battle board is not used.

A2: artillery

A3: heavy artillery

B2: infantry and brigade

C1: garrison and HQ

C2: cavalry

7.3 Every hit reduces a unit's strength by 1 step and the block must be rotated so the current strength faces the enemy. Losses are not simultaneous but must be applied immediately. Losses must be taken off of the strongest unit first, owner's choice if more than one unit to choose from.

7.4 Retreats must be into friendly or neutral hexes free of enemy blocks, and not an existing battle hex. The attacker can retreat only into hexes from which the attack began. Defenders can retreat into any non-attacker route hex. All retreats are subject to hexside limits per round of combat.

7.5 Units of Player 2 defending in a Fortress benefit from double defense. They lose 1 step of combat value only after two hits scored by enemy die rolls. Single hits carry over from one unit's fire to another in the same round, but are forfeited at the end of any round.

Supply rule 11.0 is altered as follows:

11.33 is altered because there are no more Replacement Points. Capture of enemy Supply Sources still prevents enemy units from tracing a Supply Line to it during a Supply Phase, as long as control is maintained.

11.7 for HQ supply is deleted because there are no more Field HQ units.

11.8 is altered by changing the reference from the end of each "month" to "Game Turn".

Replacements rule 12.0 is **replaced** with this section only.

12.1 USA control of the Mississippi River affects CSA usage of Supply cards and the Build Action. Such control is accomplished for each turn that St. Louis, Memphis, and Vicksburg are all under USA control. Such control has these effects: A CSA Build of a new unit east of the Mississippi River from the unused or eliminated blocks is at one step less than full strength but is at full strength west of the Mississippi River or in Georgia. A CSA Supply Card is reduced by one point (3 to 2 or 2 to 1) but is at full strength west of the Mississippi River or in Georgia. (Georgia had its own industrial base and had good connections with the Carolinas.)

Two Theater War rule 13.0 is altered as follows:

13.2 RPs and 13.7 Emancipation are both deleted consistent with changes in the preceding rules.

The game board charts are altered as follows:

Ignore the black and white battle-day chart superimposed over Louisiana. Combat is now generalized per rule 7.0.

The turn record chart on the board is ignored because there is only one Winter turn, and regular game turns can be counted by the Action Cards remaining in the players' hands.

The Victory Point chart remains unaffected.

Comments:

I was first going to call these “design notes” but the “designs” are the property of Columbia’s talented game designers and dedicated playtesters. My role is the selection and application of specific rules from new card-driven games to the two Civil War titles.

1. *The central distinction between old and new rules are between a simulation and a game, which are not necessarily synonymous.* These rules changes allow the older games to play like the popular new card-driven games. They are more like speed chess, where each block moved is important, but resources and time are limited. Decisions each turn about which card to play and where on the board become crucial. Players can still move, fight, reinforce, or build but cannot do them all in every turn.

2. Hammer of the Scots and Liberty have 5 turns per year, Crusader Rex has 6. They all have one Winter Turn which ends the year. I went with 6 game turns each year as in Crusader Rex, primarily because 1862 (where most players will start) has units spread out on both sides, especially on the Kentucky-Tennessee border. As in history, both sides will need time to get organized and although there will be offensive moves each way by year’s end, deep decisive occupations are not likely. One result is that players might continue to play longer even if intending only one scenario because play is streamlined.

3. Using Group Moves rather than a HQ block surrounded by units in adjacent hexes prevents the “chain of blocks” look which can render the game too static. Groups represent forces based around an invisible headquarters but in one hex. Groups are often separated by several hexes making the board more open for movement.

4. The Trans-Mississippi should offer risk and gain for both sides, especially early in the war as it did historically. Having some play on the western side of the board will add unpredictability and will require additional resource and time decisions. Operations will not get too large due to the forage limits and the restricted reach of railroads and river supply. But, we should either have some play on those hexes, or just end the game board at the Big River but the latter would deprive players of extra action. West of the river saw its share of action in real life which had a ripple effect on major campaigns along the River.

A. In January 1862 it was the South’s Trans-Mississippi District of General A.S. Johnston’s Department No. 2 which stretched across the entire game board. Van Dorn was District commander for his Army of the West. It fought Curtis’ army from southwest Missouri in the March 1862 decisive battle of Pea Ridge, Ark. which settled the fate of Missouri and northern Arkansas for most of the war other than raids. (*Van Dorn’s “corps” now starts on the board and does not just drop into Memphis automatically in March.*) In May 1862 after Johnston’s death at Shiloh and breakup of his Department, the Trans-Mississippi Department was created and included all board hexes west of the river plus the rest of those states, Indian Territory, and Texas.

B. In January 1862 the Union Department of the Missouri under Gen. Halleck included that state plus Arkansas and part of Kentucky west of the Cumberland River. (*These*

include the units which begin the game at St. Louis and Rolla, with the latter being Curtis' Army of the Southwest which won at Pea Ridge.) The Army of the Mississippi led by Gen. Pope existed from February to October 1862 initially for the New Madrid/Island No. 10 offensive. *(These are the units which begin the game in Irontown.)* In March the Department of the Mississippi replaced the previous departments of Missouri and Ohio under Halleck with HQ at St. Louis. By January 1864 it was reduced to only Missouri when the Military Division of the Mississippi was created first for U.S. Grant, then William Sherman. It included Arkansas and everything east to the Appalachians across the game board.

C. Major actions west of the big river after Pea Ridge included Fort Hindman and Helena in the 1863 Vicksburg campaign, the Red River and Arkansas campaigns in early 1864, and Price's Raid into Missouri that October.

(Source for data above: Civil War Dictionary by Lt.Col. Mark Boatner III)

D. Deployment changes in Trans-Mississippi for scenarios starting in 1863 or 1864 are beyond the scope of these proposed rules but interested players can research or devise their own.

5. The conscription draft and emancipation rules are removed because in the fast-moving new card-driven games, political, social, and diplomatic matters are generated mainly by Event cards which are not used here, or by reaching specific VP totals. Players now represent strictly senior military commanders, not the civilian governments too. It is consistent with the theme of being a fast game, not a full simulation.

6. Winter in the new card-driven games is frequently one special Game Turn at the end of the requisite number of regular Game Turns. In Hammer of the Scots, Winter is only disbanding and replacements. In Crusader Rex, Winter is movement at (-1) but no battles unless a special Move card called Winter Campaign is played. Then there is attrition followed by replacements, both based on the supply value number of towns. In Liberty, Winter starts with checking for victory based on victory points, then voluntary disbanding. After that is attrition based on supply limit of towns, followed by voluntary prisoner exchange.

These proposed rules have Winter as the 6th and final Game turn each year. There were several important winter campaigns and battles in the Western theater including Mill Springs, KY; Forts Henry and Donelson, TN; Stones River, TN; and Nashville, TN. In the Eastern theater Fredericksburg, VA is best known. It seemed that some limited movement and combat should be allowed in these new streamlined rules for the Grant/Lee games.

In our Civil War, there was no wholesale disbanding such as in earlier wars, so that concept is omitted. There are no replacements as part of Winter in these new rules because Supply Cards allow for them during regular play. But supply was important to the mass armies of volunteers, so the attrition rules based on supply value of cities

remains. There were regular prisoner exchanges until mid-1864, so that rule is borrowed from Liberty.

Feel free to try this rules system on any other older Columbia games and tinker with them to suit yourself. After all, *the point is always to play these games and have fun!*