

Rutherford's Farm

20th July, 1864

By Tom Ballou

"I've been told that right where we were, was the hottest five minutes of the war."

- Brady Steece, Company H, 91st Ohio

BACKGROUND

Lt. Gen. Jubal Early's drive on Washington had been turned back at the very gates of Washington; the Army of the Valley District retired in good order back to the Shenandoah Valley with a long supply train of looted goods. The mission had been to force Lt. Gen. Grant to divert troops from the siege of Richmond, to defend Washington. Though Early had caused a great deal of consternation, Grant knew this was just a move of a piece in the end game of the Confederacy, and refused to be drawn in.

The Union Army, however, was full of recriminations as terrified politicians felt the threat of Confederate guns. The scapegoat was Gen. David Hunter, who was removed as commander of the Army of West Virginia. His failed Lynchburg campaign at the southern end of the valley had not kept Early's army on the defensive and away from Washington. Brig. Gen. George Crook was given command of the majority of the Army of West Virginia as it was transferred by train from West Virginia to a defensive position between Washington and Early's Army.

Hunter remained in Harper's Ferry as nominal commander of the Army of West Virginia, but in reality, he only commanded remnants left behind to defend the line of the Potomac River and the Baltimore and Ohio railroad.

Once in command, Crook began a leisurely pursuit of Early's army with the assistance of Maj. Gen. Horatio Wright's 6th Corps and 19th Corps. Crook's force followed Early slowly and allowed him to slip back into the Shenandoah Valley and across the Shenandoah River. In doing so, he broke contact with Crook's pursuit, leaving Crook ignorant of his actual location in the valley.

Crook blindly tried to force crossings of the defended Shenandoah, triggering the battles of Castleman's Ferry, Berry's Ferry, and Snicker's Ferry. These were all repulsed but they forced Early to spread his troops along the length of the Shenandoah.

As the battles raged along the length of the Shenandoah, Hunter released some of his forces to push up the Shenandoah Valley along the Confederates' flanks.

Col. Rutherford B. Hayes slowly pushed his infantry brigade south along the western bank of the Shenandoah River from Harper's Ferry. His forces were within the sound of the guns as the Union attempted to cross Castleman's Ferry, but he did not rush to turn the flank of the Confederate position. He can hardly be blamed, as he did not have direct contact with Crook, did not know where Crook was trying to force the crossing, and had no idea where Early's army was located. With bad luck, his brigade could have stumbled into the combined forces of the Army of the Valley District.

Meanwhile, further west, Brig. Gen. William Averell's cavalry division consisting of two brigades of cavalry, departed Martinsburg, West Virginia, spreading out and probing south to try to determine where Early's forces were. He was joined by Col. Isaac Hardin Duval's brigade of infantry.

Early, feeling the pressure of Union forces to his East, North and West, decided to slip away south further up the Valley. However, Winchester, Virginia was a critical supply and rally point for his army, and Averell's force was sweeping slowly towards it. All Early needed was to buy some time to allow his forces to withdraw in order from the town. Early did not feel badly pressed; any slowing of Averell's force would suffice.

He assigned Maj. Gen. Stephen Ramseur's division to hold the works on the northern side of Winchester to keep the Union forces at bay. Ramseur's division had seen little action during the drive on Washington, and had not been involved in the Shenandoah defensive battles. With orders in hand, Ramseur's division marched south and west, moving towards Winchester during the evening and night, stopping just north of the town in the early morning hours, as the bulk of the Army of the Valley District slipped away south in the night.

Ramseur himself was a bit of a wildcard: he was aggressive and there were concerns about his wisdom in combat. Only a few months before, he had recklessly charged the Union artillery at the Battle of Totopotomoy Creek, burning out Lilly's brigade. Lilly's troops were still bitter and referred to the action as a "murder for ambition's sake".

In addition to his division, Ramseur also had two brigades of cavalry to assist him in the delaying action. But neither of these brigades had shown any great effectiveness, and Brig. Gen. John C. Vaughn's men had been evaluated as little better than a "band of marauders". The majority of Vaughn's troops were, in fact, merely mounted infantry and were not trained to scout or to screen.

The battle of Rutherford's Farm may have occurred due to the failure of Vaughn's scouting to fully assess the size of the force Ramseur was facing. Ramseur claimed that he had received reports from Vaughn stating the Union troops were in small force. This was later denied by Vaughn, saying his troops reported a Union division.

In spite of being scapegoated for Hunter's failures in the Lynchburg campaign, Averell had a reputation as an effective commander with an excellent record in independent commands.

Col. Isaac Hardin Duval was recognized as a solid leader. One of his West Virginian troops wrote of him, "The cool courage and soldierly bearing of this officer ... are the theme of universal commendation".

The battle of Rutherford's Farm was a battle that could have been avoided if both sides had done what was expected of them.

Ramseur had been ordered to hold the works north of Winchester, but he choose to be aggressive (with visions of crushing the small Union force that Vaughn had reported) and had mustered his troops (after little sleep) to advance that morning north along the Valley Turnpike to make contact with Averell's forces. Had he held his assigned position, Averell would have contacted him and stopped as Early had expected.

Averell was ready and expecting a fight, he wrote Hunter, "Indications are that [the] enemy must attack me in the morning.... The probabilities are that I shall attack him".

Moving south, Averell had broken up his second brigade of cavalry into scouting elements to try to make contact with Early's and Crooks forces. The 14th Pennsylvania was broken into two scouting detachments, riding east and west to keep Averell from being surprised and gobbled up by Early's much larger force.

With the 1st and 3rd West Virginia cavalry acting as a screen, they pushed the Confederate cavalry screens

back. Averell's force was a small compact mass, moving across open undulating terrain.

Vaughn's cavalry finally made a stand at a wood lot just south of Rutherford's farm, bringing up Milledge's Georgia Artillery and stalling the Union cavalry on the hill at Rutherford's Farm. With the Rebels finally making a stand, Averell brought up his guns to shake them loose.

Averell's main body was located at Carter's farm, and Ramseur's force was marching up the Valley Turnpike from Winchester. The battle that both sides were looking for was on.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

Both sides want to drive the other from the field. A victory would be to exit off the opponent's edge and destroy his force.

TERRAIN DESCRIPTION

The contours are very small, only really high enough to break line of sight, so troops behind the contours can not be seen unless a force is on a higher contour.

The streams are mostly dry and represent 1" of broken terrain, provide partial cover.

The woods are light woods, and there are a couple of orchards scattered around, the most famous one being inside the wooden fence of Rutherford's Farm.

The ponds are not crossable.

Feel free to add additional fences as you see fit, I have no information on any fences outside of the one around Rutherford's farm.

DEPLOYMENT

The Union 1st and 3rd WV Cavalry are dismounted and deployed in and around Rutherford's Farm. The Union artillery is 12" north of Rutherford's Farm on the Valley Turnpike.

The remaining Union troops (excluding the 14th PA) are deployed within 12" of Carter's Farm. All Union units not in LOS of the Vaughn's troops may have dummy markers.

Vaughn's Brigade starts dismounted on the wood line on either side of the Valley Turnpike (12th, 16th & 1st [Carter's]). Tennessee Cavalry may remain mounted

and off the line if the Confederate player chooses, but must be within 12" of the rest of the brigade.

Milledge's Georgia Artillery starts deployed behind the pond on the west side of the Turnpike.

TIME SCHEDULE

Start turn is 11:00 AM.

Ramseur's division starts in march column coming up the Valley Turnpike from Winchester. They start arriving on the 11:15 AM turn. They enter in the following order:

Lewis' Brigade
Johnston's Brigade
Lilly's Brigade
Amherst (Virginia) Artillery
Jackson's Brigade

All Confederate Units (excluding Vaughn's Cavalry on the edge of the wood line, and Milledge's Georgia Artillery) start hidden and may have dummy units.

Each dummy unit must take a full regiment of road distance, and they cause the delay of actual units as they enter the table.

Roll 1d6 + 3 – the 14th PA Cavalry arrives on the road entering the western edge of the table on that turn.

HISTORICAL ACCOUNT

Vaughn's troops beat back the Union Cavalry with the aid of Milledge's Artillery. They in turn were beaten back as the Union guns came on line, and fell back into the woods, and a single regiment moved west to cover the western flank of the Confederate deployment.

Ramseur's force marched up the road, sending Lewis' brigade western side of the pike and Johnston's brigade to the eastern side.

Lilly's brigade was deployed in reserve with the majority of Vaughn's force.

Jackson deployed further east of Johnston's brigade to cover his flank.

The Amherst Artillery joined Milledge's guns.

Averell had Duval deploy his brigade in line and they advanced towards Rutherford's farm. The 1st and 2nd

WV cavalry remounted and withdrew out of sight behind the hill.

Out of sight of the Rebels, the 2nd West Virginia cavalry, joined by the 3rd West Virginia cavalry, moved west and entered the woods to the west of Rutherford's Farm.

Though the Confederates' position looked strong, the angle of the woods caused Lewis' brigade to deploy in echelon towards the Union line.

As the Union infantry closed on the Rebels, the contact was uneven with the 14th West Virginia, making contact first with the 57th North Carolina of Lewis' brigade at the extreme western end of the Confederate line. At the same time, the two West Virginia cavalry squadrons were pressing the regiment of Vaughn's Tennessee mounted infantry regiment screening the western flank.

The 1st West Virginia Cavalry was deployed to cover the eastern flank of Duval's brigade. They attempted to pressure Johnston's eastern flank, were driven back by Jackson's brigade, and retired to a defence position, covering Duval.

Averell recognized that it was critical to break the Confederate flank, and pressured the 2nd and 3rd West Virginia to keep attacking. Finally, Vaughn's Tennesseans cracked and fell back, exposing the flank of the 57th North Carolina. The 14th West Virginia, seeing the 57th North Carolina waver, changed and broke them.

A cascade rout started as Johnston's brigade crumbled. Lilly attempted to stop the Union breakthrough, but was shot down as he tried to rally the troops.

At this point, Ramseur tried to stabilize the front by relocating his guns, just as the 91st Ohio on the eastern end of the line charged and overran the limbering artillery.

With the guns gone and their flank exposed, Lewis's brigade began to crumble as well and fell back. Soon the entire front collapsed, screened by Jackson's troops.

Averell's troops were too badly beat up to pursue aggressively, and allowed the Rebels to retire to the works of Winchester, harassed by the sudden appearance in their rear of the detachment of the 14th PA Cavalry riding to the sound of the guns.

Though history records Averell as the commander of this victory, he gave full credit to Duval: “Colonel, this is your fight; I have never seen such heroism and bravery displayed”.

Ramseur is remembered with somewhat less distinction. The battle has many official names: “Carter’s Farm”, “Rutherford’s Farm” and “Stephenson’s Depot”. The Rebel soldiers’ had their own name for it: “Ramseur’s Butt”.

UNION FORCES

Elements of the Army of West Virginia (Kanawha)

2nd Cavalry Division:

Brig. Gen. William Woods Averell *Able*

2nd Cavalry Brigade:

Col. William H. Powell *Able*

1st West Virginia Cavalry Vet 9/8/7 BC

2nd West Virginia Cavalry Vet 8/7/6 BC

3rd West Virginia Cavalry Vet 9/8/7 BC

Element of 1st Cavalry Brigade:

Scouting detachment 14th PA Cav

Vet 5/4/3 BC

2nd Brig. (attached from Crook’s 2nd Div.):

Col. Isaac Hardin Duval *Gallant*

14th West Virginia Regt.: Vet 8/5/3 RM

9th West Virginia Regt.: Vet 8/6/4 RM

91st Ohio Regiment: Crk 11/8/5 RM

34th Ohio Regiment: Vet 8/6/4 RM

Artillery:

1st West Virginia Light Artillery Battery F: Sec 1 Vet LR

Sec 2 Vet LR

Sec 3 Vet LR

(6x 3” Ordinance Rifles)

1st Ohio Independent Light Artillery:

Sec 1 Vet LR

Sec 2 Vet LR

Sec 3 Vet LR

(6x 10# Parrot Rifles)

CONFEDERATE FORCES

Elements of the Army of the Valley District

Ramseur’s Division:

Maj. Gen. Stephen D. Ramseur *Poor*

Lewis’ Brigade:

Brig. Gen. Robert D. Lewis *Able*

6th North Carolina Regt. Vet 5/-/3 RM

21st North Carolina Regt. Vet 5/-/3 RM

54th North Carolina Regt. Vet 5/-/3 RM

57th North Carolina Regt. Vet 5/4/3 RM

Johnston’s Brigade:

Brig. Gen. Robert D. Johnston *Able*

5th North Carolina Regt. Vet 5/-/3 RM

12th North Carolina Regt. Vet 5/-/3 RM 20th North

Carolina Regt. Vet 5/-/3 RM

23rd North Carolina Regt. Vet 5/-/3 RM

Lilly’s Brigade:

Brig. Gen. Robert Lilly *Able*

Remnants of 13th, 31st & 49th Virginia Regts: Vet 7/6/4 RM

Remnants of 52nd & 58th Virginia Regts: Vet 5/4/3 RM

Nelson’s Battalion (-):

Milledge’s Georgia Artillery:

Vet LR

(2x 3” Ord. Rifles, 1x 10# Parrot)

Amherst (Virginia) Artillery:

Sec 1 Vet HS

Sec 2 Vet LR

(2x 12# Nap, 1x 3” Ord. Rifle)

Vaughn’s Cavalry Brigade:

Brig. Gen. John C. Vaughn *Poor*

12th, 16th & 1st (Carter’s) Tennessee Cavalry: Vet 5/4/3 RC

39th, 43rd & 59th Tennessee Mounted Infantry: Grn 6/5/4 RM

3rd, 60th, 61st, & 62nd Tennessee Mounted Infantry: Grn 5/-/3 RM

Jackson’s Cavalry Brigade:

Col. William L. “Mudwall” Jackson *Able*

2nd Maryland, 19th & 20th Virginia Cavalry:

Vet 8/7/6 RC

46th & 47th Virginia Cavalry:

Vet 9/8/7 RC

SCENARIO SPECIAL RULES

Hidden movement each regiment/battery is given two 3x5 cards. One is marked real, one dummy. Brigade cards must be kept within command radius based on terrain. Leaders are assumed to be near the center of the formation.

Each card is moved as a standard regiment, if it is faced flat, the unit is in line formation/deployed (line

or extended line), if faced narrow side the unit is column/limbered (field or march column).

Once a card comes into LOS it must be revealed as a dummy or the unit must be placed on the table. Cards that come within LOS of each other must both be revealed (this represent scouts or skirmishers making contact).

Once placed on the table, the unit must deploy in the area covered by the card, and in a valid formation. The brigade's leader may deploy with the unit if the player wishes.

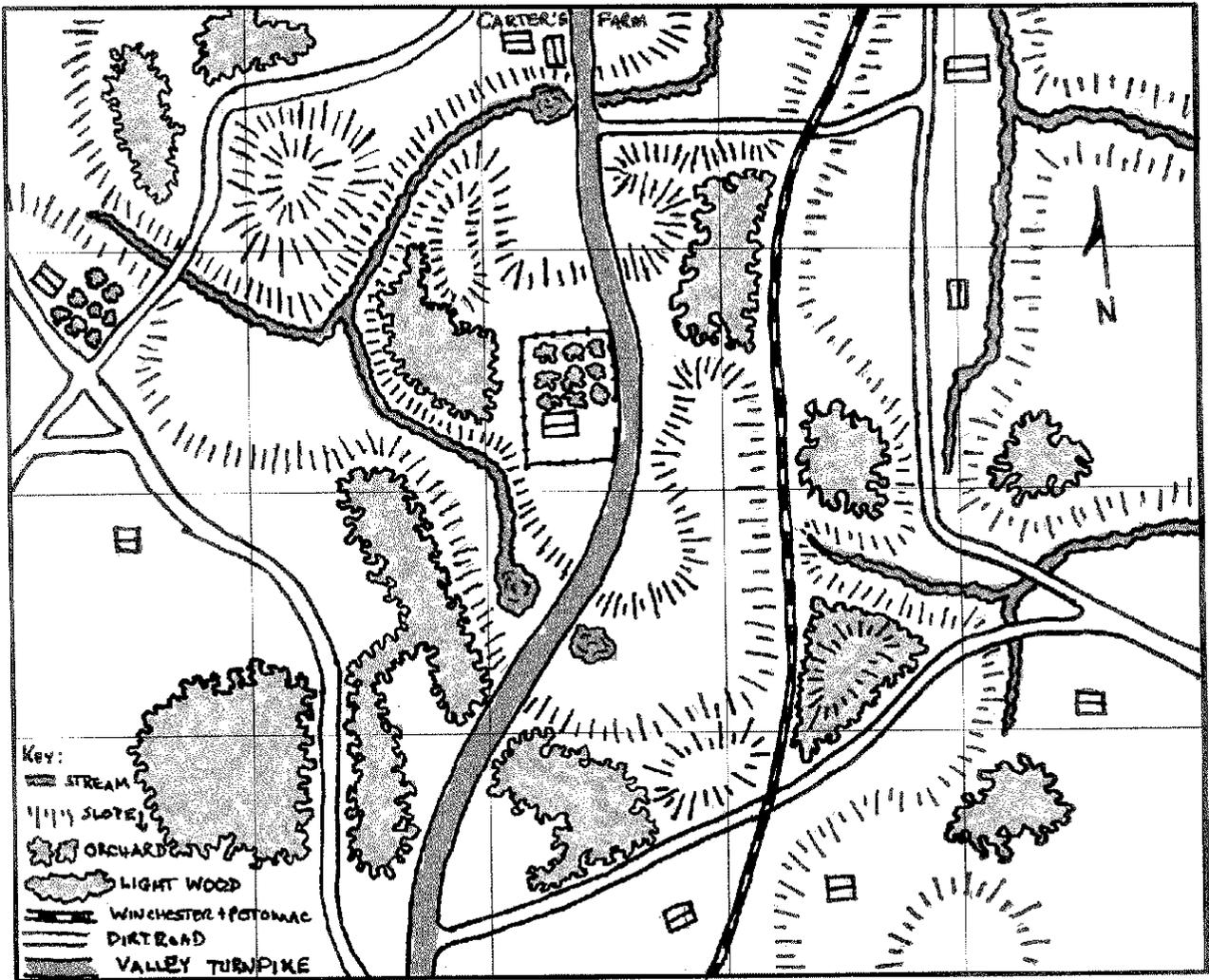
Woods blocks LOS for units outside of 6". Orchards blocks LOS for units outside of 8".

FURTHER NOTES

The Confederate Infantry's Unreliable effectiveness reflects back-to-back marches and tired infantry; they would be normally rated as Spirited or Reliable.

Special Union spotting, Carter's Barn. Due to the low height of the hills and the size of Carter's barn, Averell stood on the roof of the barn and directed the battle. So if the LOS does not cross the Rutherford's orchard or buildings, a figure on the barn may see the southern wood lot's edge, but may not see the low ground where the ponds are located.

Hidden movement is critical to this game; there are lots of ridges to hide troops and move hidden. I recommend if you have a GM, use map movements and allow unit that break LOS to return to hidden status and place the two unit cards.



Each line on the map is 18" (40yds/inch)