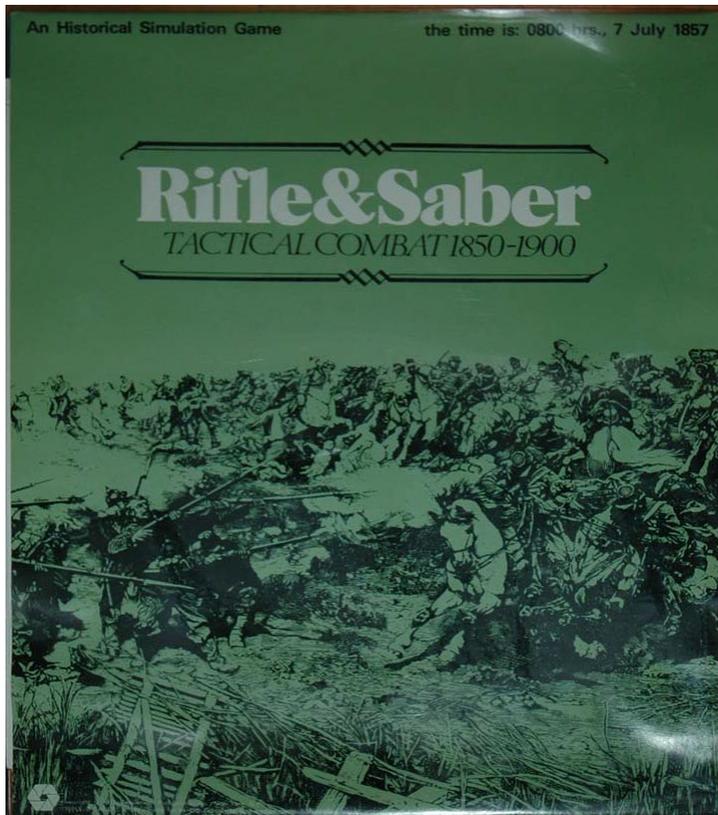

Rifle & Saber, SPI 1973

The Relief of Cawnpore, Fatehpur, July 1857

Replay by Mike Dyer

Rifle & Saber: Tactical Combat 1850-1900 – SPI Publications



Rifle & Saber simulates small actions around famous and almost unknown battles in the last half of the 19th Century – from the American Civil War to the Boer War. As another John Young tactical battle design, the game uses established mechanics. However, because of the lethal nature of the rapidly improving firearms of this period, the games feel different.

Using 17 scenarios, Young traces the increasingly deadly nature of warfare as guns move from muzzle-loading muskets to rifles, repeaters, and machine guns. The effect is not lost on the player.

This game offers fast play and excitement, with a map using terrain in a different configuration from the tactical games that preceded it. The mix of Cavalry and Infantry units range from 100 to 150 men, and the artillery or machine guns usually represents batteries of 4 to 6 guns. The scale is 50 meters per hex. – RHG

The Battle at Hand

The following session report replays the battle of Fatehpur, which saw General Havelock's relief column of East India Company forces tested in their first meeting engagement with Nana Sahib's sepoys. Fatehpur is the first scenario (of 17) presented in SPI's *Rifle & Saber*. The game covers a wide range of conflicts fought over the 1850-1900 period, but this is as a good a place to start learning the game as any.

Rules Overview:

[Ed. Note: As an older game, there are some differences in the rules from John's later work. I will try to highlight need-to-know info:.

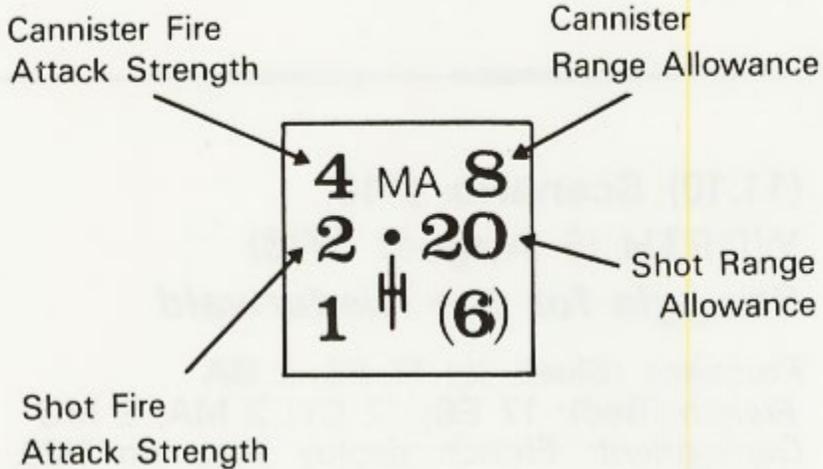
SEQ: First Player: Fire Phase – Movement – Shock Combat. – Second Player: Fire Phase – Movement – Shock Combat. Adv the turn marker.

Movement: Costs 3 PM to Limber/Unlimber Arty. Units on the road pay ½ point, but cannot use road rate to enter hex with other unit.

Cannot move from a ZOC to a ZOC. Units can LEAVE an enemy ZOC – but they are **Disrupted** (at the end of their move) if they do so.

Cavalry Charges: Double movement factors if they are moving through clear terrain and will Shock Combat a unit. Will be Disrupted afterward.

SAMPLE ARTILLERY UNIT



Combat: Units *ONLY* Fire in Fire Phase (meaning, no Defensive Fire.) All Fire on a hex is combined into 1 attack. No unit must attack. A unit *CONNOT* split fire. Stacked units in a hex *MUST* fire on different targets.

Fire Attacks:

- Fire Strength decided by Range (see Chart) and compared to top unit's Fire Defense Strength, which may be modified by the Terrain (see chart).
- Only the top unit is affected by the Fire result. (EXC: Shot Fire)
- Arty/MGs are *NEVER* retreated due to Fire Combat RD, but they are disrupted.

Shock Attacks:

Multiple units may move into shock combat together. Most have a value of 1 (MG/Arty are 0.) Compare the combined strengths. The unit with the lesser points is Disrupted and retreats – but the winner must Disrupt an equal number of units!! Arty Eliminated by Shock Combat is Eliminated, and an RD on an Unlimbered Arty/MG is also eliminated for failure to retreat.

Combat Results:

Elim - On the Fire table, an Elim vs Arty/MG is treated as an RD unless SHOT fire is involved.

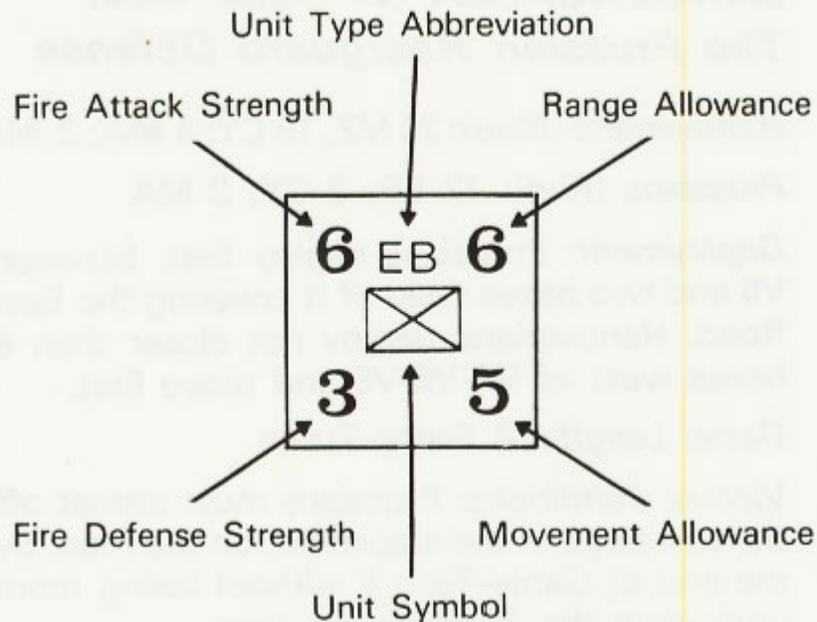
RD - Unit must retreat the maximum possible number of hexes in the path of least resistance – and d their retreat disrupted. If they enter a hex with other units along the path, that unit is disrupted.

Disrupted Notes:

- When Disrupted units are attacked, their Defense Strength is halved.
- If Disrupted units suffer another Disruption, they are eliminated.

Disruption Recovery:

- Disrupted in the Enemy Player turn, Inf and Cav units return to normal at the End of the NEXT Enemy Player Turn. If in Friendly Player turn (i.e., via Shock Attack) recovery at end of next Friendly Player Turn.



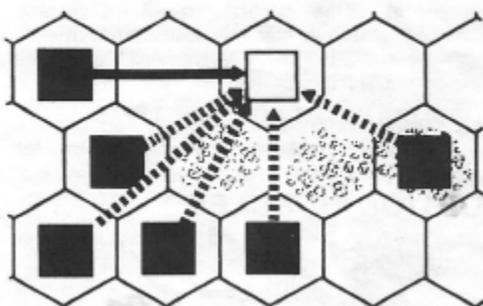
Stacking: 6 Stacking Points allowed in Hex. Arty/ MG = 3, all others 2. Stack order can change in Movement Phase (is considered movement) or due to adverse Combat Results. All units count in Shock Combat. Only top unit's Fire Defense Strength is used for Fire Combat Defense, but if Shot is used, *ONLY* the SHOT Attack value is compared to each lower unit's Defense Value /Terrain Modifier, and new die roll each.

Special Rules: Road Movement, Morale, Improved Positions – we will see those in the replay!

LOS:

In this game: LOS is blocked by other units, Woods, Villages, Hilltops, and Occupied units block if the LOS passes **through two hexside (i.e., through the hex) OR if the LOS along the hexside of a hex with Blocking Terrain. EXC: Units on Hilltops MAY see over units in lower terrain!**

EXAMPLES: blocked ■■■■ unblocked ■■■■



Fire Combat:

No unit may fire more than once per player turn, no unit may suffer Fire more than once per player turn.

Only the top unit's Defense Strength counts in a Fire

Die Roll	Fire Attack Strength-to-Fire Defense Strength							E
	1-3	1-2	1-1	2-1	3-1	4-1	5-1	
1	•	•	•	•	•	•	RD	E
2	•	•	•	•	RD	RD	RD	E
3	•	•	•	•	RD	RD	RD	E
4	•	•	•	RD	RD	RD	RD	E
5	•	•	RD	RD	RD	E	E	E
6	•	RD	RD	RD	E	E	E	E

attack. Fire attacks make a choice between shot and cannister. Cannister attacks only the top unit. Shot hits each unit in the

stack. Shot can Eliminate Arty/MGs in Fire Attacks. An E result with cannister fire Disrupts the unit instead, with no retreat required.

RANGE EFFECTS CHART			
RANGE:	1...3	4...7	8 or more
Unit Types			
MZ,EB,LB,CY,MR	Normal	Halved	Quartered
MACHINE GUN	Normal	Halved	Halved
ARTILLERY:			
Cannister	Doubled	Normal	Halved
Shot	Normal	Normal	Halved

[9.2] Terrain Effects Chart

Terrain or condition	Movement Point (MP) Cost to Enter	Effect on Defense Strength (Fire and Shock)
Clear	1 MP	Normal
Village	1 MP	Tripled
Slope and/or Woods	2 MP	Doubled
Ridge Hexside	+ 1 MP	Blocks Fire; No Effect on Shock
River	3 MP	Doubled
River Ford	2 MP	Halved
Bridge	½ MP*	Halved
Road	½ MP*	NA

The Relief of Cawnpore, Fatehpur, July 1857

FATEHPUR (7 July 1857)

Sepoys (Blue): 27 MZ; 3 CY; 2 MAh

British (Red): 15 MZ; 1 CY; 3 MA

Deployment: British deploy first, anywhere on or north of H26 and on or west of H32. Sepoys deploy on or adjacent to V4 and move first.

Game Length: 20 Game-Turns

Victory Conditions: The Sepoys must hold V12 for any one turn before the end of the game.

Special Rule: Treat all woods hexes as clear terrain.

4	MA	8
2	•	20
1	♣	(6)

Muzzle-Loading Artillery

2	CY	2
☒		
1	34	8

Cavalry

3	MZ	3
☒		
2	144	3

Muzzle-Loading Infantry

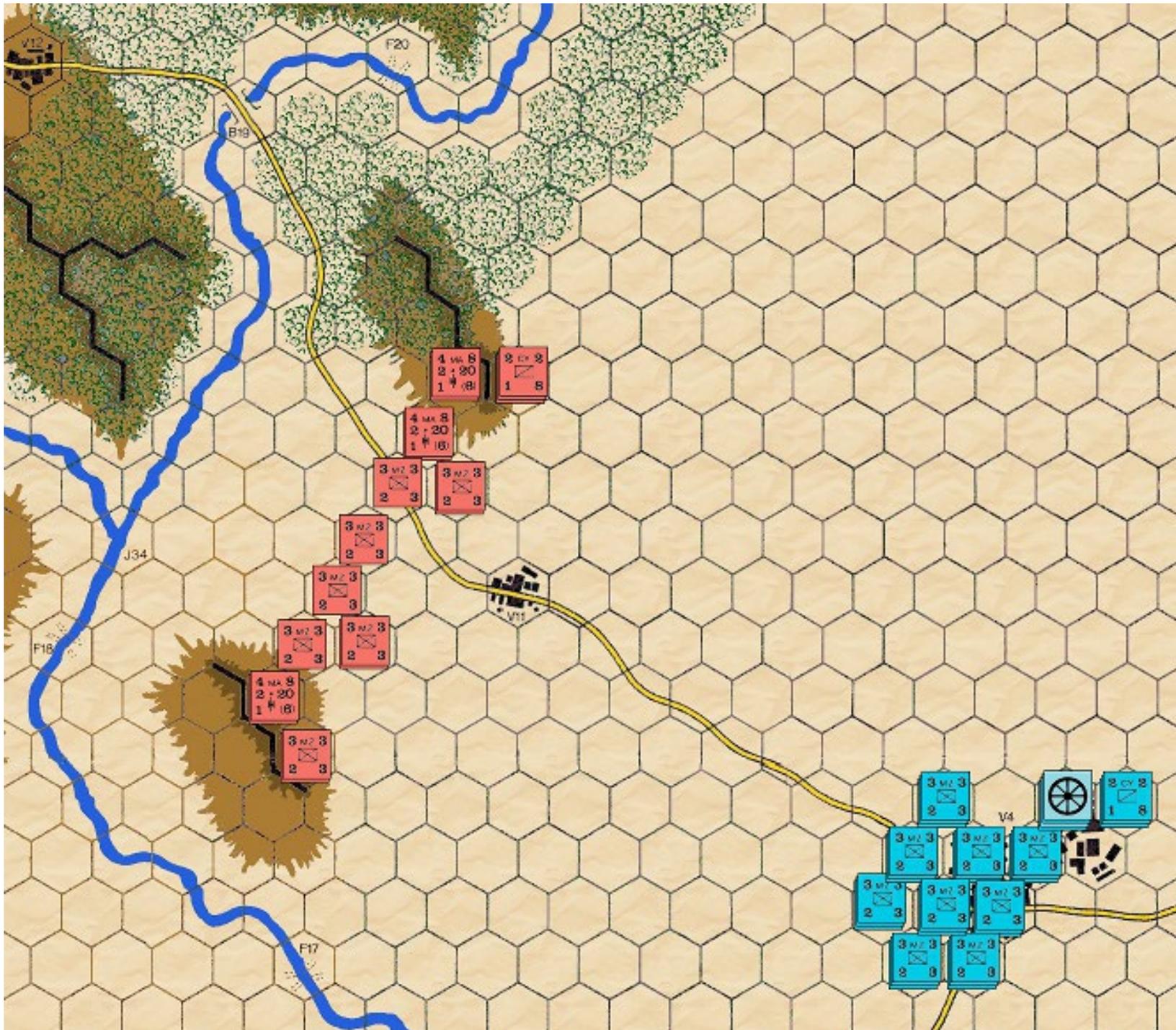
2	MAh	6
1	•	15
1	♣	(8)

Muzzle-Loading Horse Artillery

This scenario doesn't cover the relief of Cawnpore itself, just one step towards the re-capture of the city.

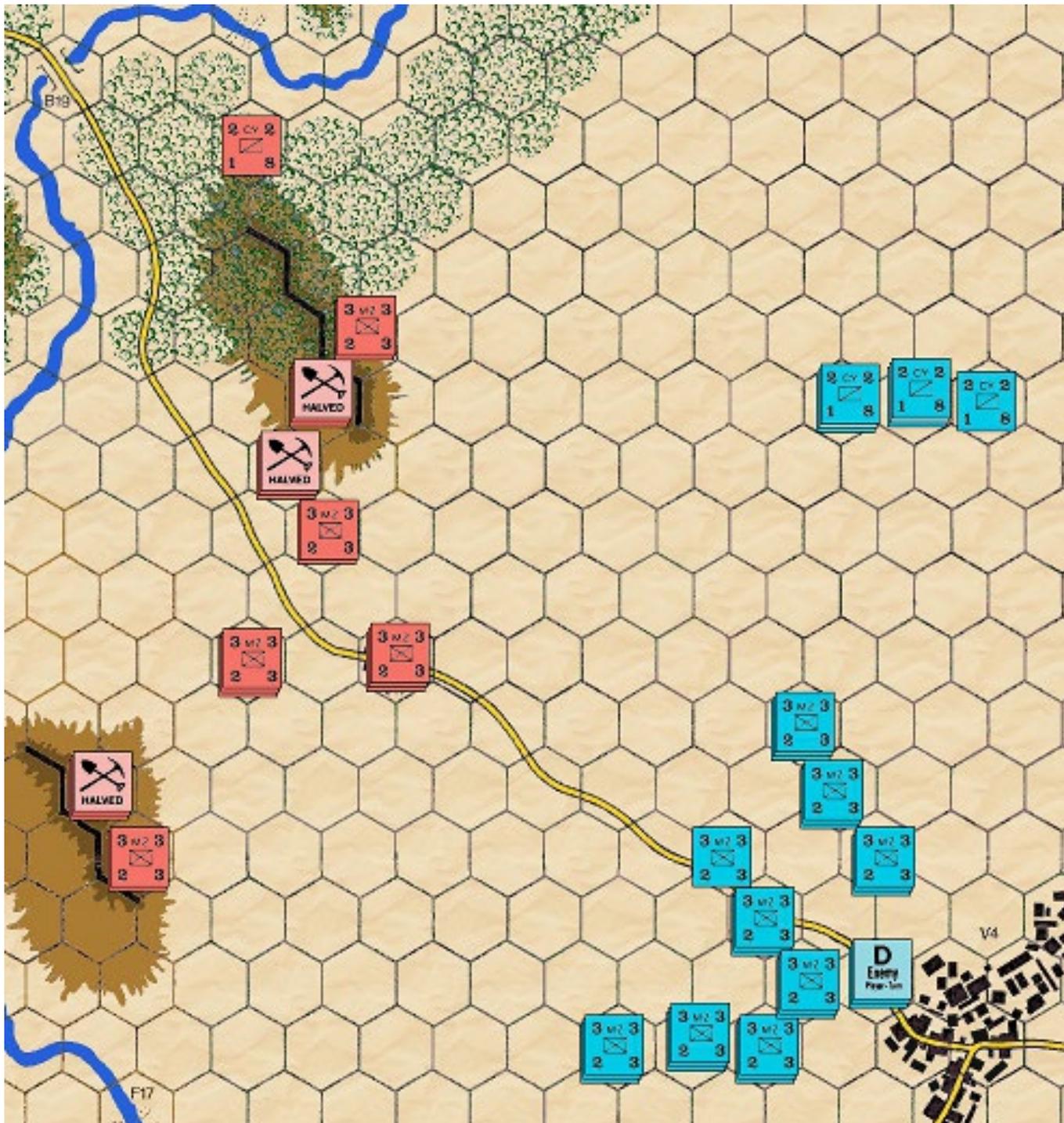
Cawnpore was taken by the mutineers during the Indian Mutiny in June of 1857, and almost all the British men and loyal sepoys were killed in the massacre at Satichaura Ghat. General Havelock set out with a relief column of the British East India Company on 7th July and defeated the sepoy mutineers in an engagement near Fatehpur on the 12th, then again at Aong on the 15th. The British re-took Cawnpore on 16th July, one day after the remaining hostages, mostly women and children, had been massacred at the Bibighar. The mass murders at Cawnpore make for some grim reading with the details of the British retribution being just as severe.

Fatehpur (7 July 1857). This was an action during the *Sepoy Mutiny* (1857-1858) in India, when the native Indian forces under British control rose in rebellion. A considerable British garrison was locked up in Cawnpore, and a column of about 1,500 British troops with artillery, but little cavalry, was sent out to attempt a relief of that garrison. At Fatehpur, some 3,500 mutineers attempted to destroy the column, or at least to destroy the supply train with it. The action was a one-sided British victory, with the Indians being badly crushed, while very few British casualties were incurred. Cawnpore, however, was not relieved.



Turn 1 - Setup

The British are setup in line as far forward as possible. Artillery batteries anchor the heights on both sides of the road and are well protected by companies of infantry. Hex V12, in the top left corner, is the victory hex (let's call it the baggage train) which the mutineers need to take to win. The mutineers are massed on the outskirts of the town of Fatehpur. The cavalry and horse artillery are all located on the right flank.



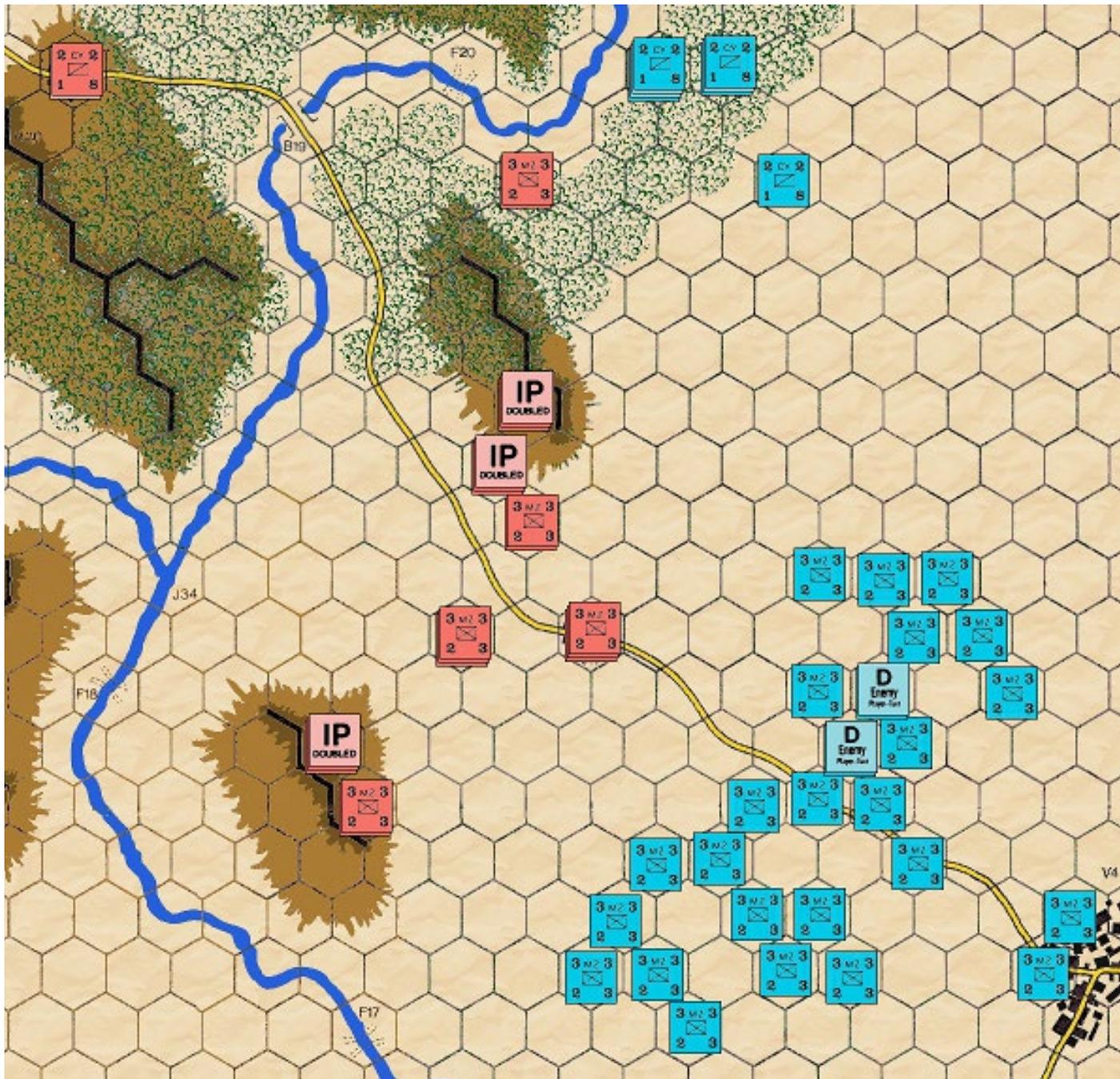
Turn 2

The mutineers approach slowly (optional rules for road movement are in play). The sepoy cavalry moves off far to the north in an effort to avoid the guns and flank the British position. British engineers begin entrenching the artillery batteries (optional rules for improved positions are in play), and move forward in strength to take the small village. Artillery potshots cause a little disruption but the main worry is the Indian cavalry movement. The British only have a single cavalry company to protect their flanks from a move like this.

[Ed. Note: Improved Positions take two turns to complete. Place labor marker as first action in a Friendly Player turn, and replace with an IP marker at the END of the NEXT friendly Player turn. An IP will double the defense of any units in the IP position! (Mounted units NA).

If the unit with the labor marker does any other action in those two turns, the Labor marker is removed, and the IP marker is NOT placed.

If all units in an improved position leave, the IP marker is removed from the board.]



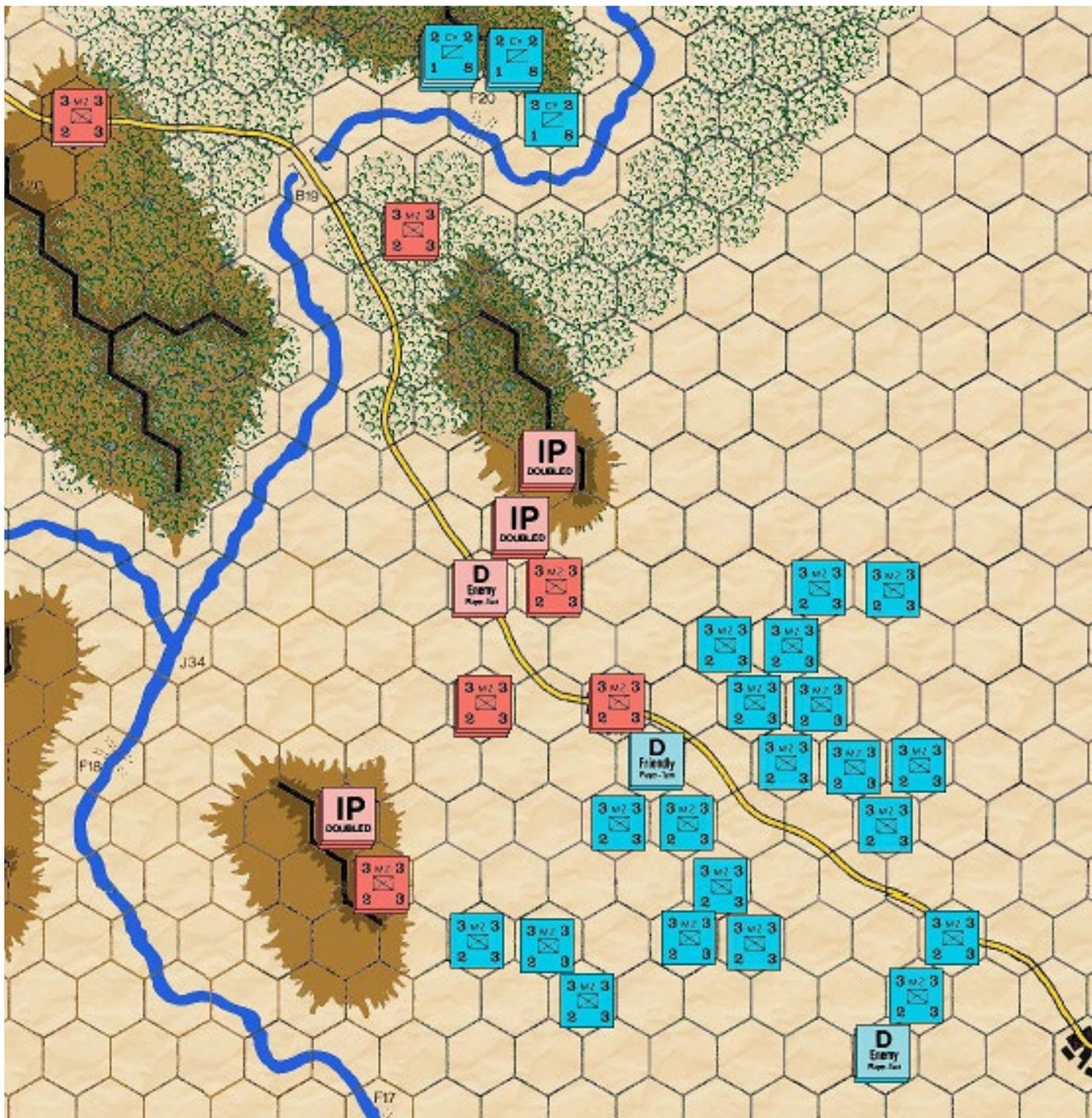
Turn 3

The massive force of sepoys spreads out and marches on the British lines. Leading elements begin to come under British musket and artillery fire and the first casualties are taken.

British morale is high (optional morale rules are in play) which will make their troops hard to shift in hand-to-hand combat. The Indian cavalry and horse artillery are moving fast down the flank and are presenting a serious threat to the baggage train. The British cavalry are quickly dispatched to protect the supplies but additional infantry must be taken off the flank and sent back as quickly as possible to reinforce.

[Ed. Note: Morale rules show the resolve or despair of each army. (High, Normal, Demoralized). If an Army is designated as normal then all combat remains the same. If HIGH, then each unit is counted as TWO in Shock Combat, AND units are not disrupted when friendly units retreat through them. We will cover Demoralized later.]

Morale changes based on combat losses of both sides. If you fall below 75% of your starting strength, your Army morale will slip one level. If you have a 3:1 ratio in your favor for Fire SP losses, it goes up 1 level. It can change mid-attack!]

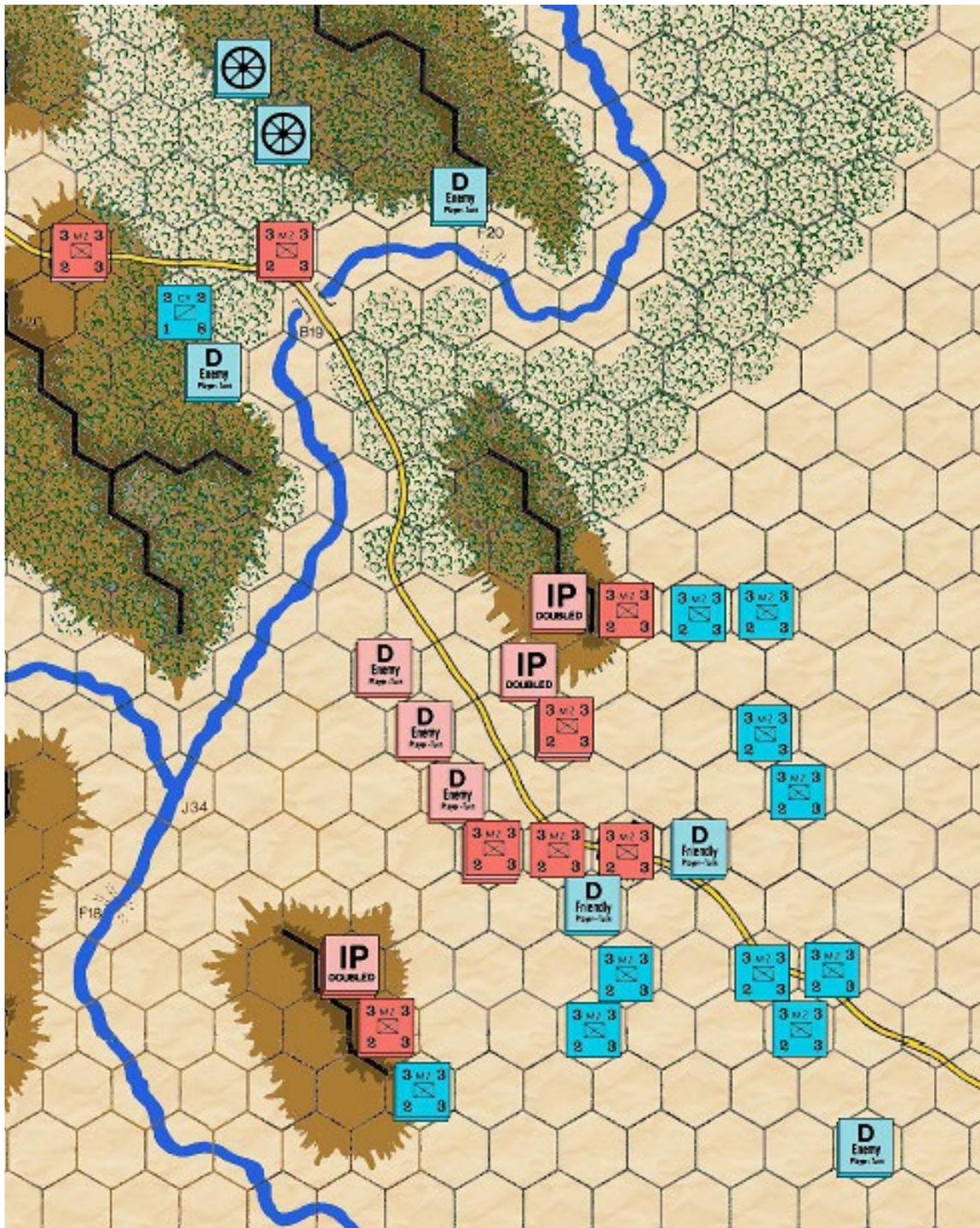


Turn 4

The sepoys launch a strong attack on the small village and are repulsed with many losses as the artillery and muskets clear wide swathes.

The British position is only slightly weakened by the assault with one company disrupted and in retreat.

In the rear, the Indian cavalry fords the river and moves through the hills. The British cavalry dismount to protect the supply train but there will be no time to entrench. Two infantry companies race back to support them, leaving the British left flank somewhat vulnerable.



Turn 5

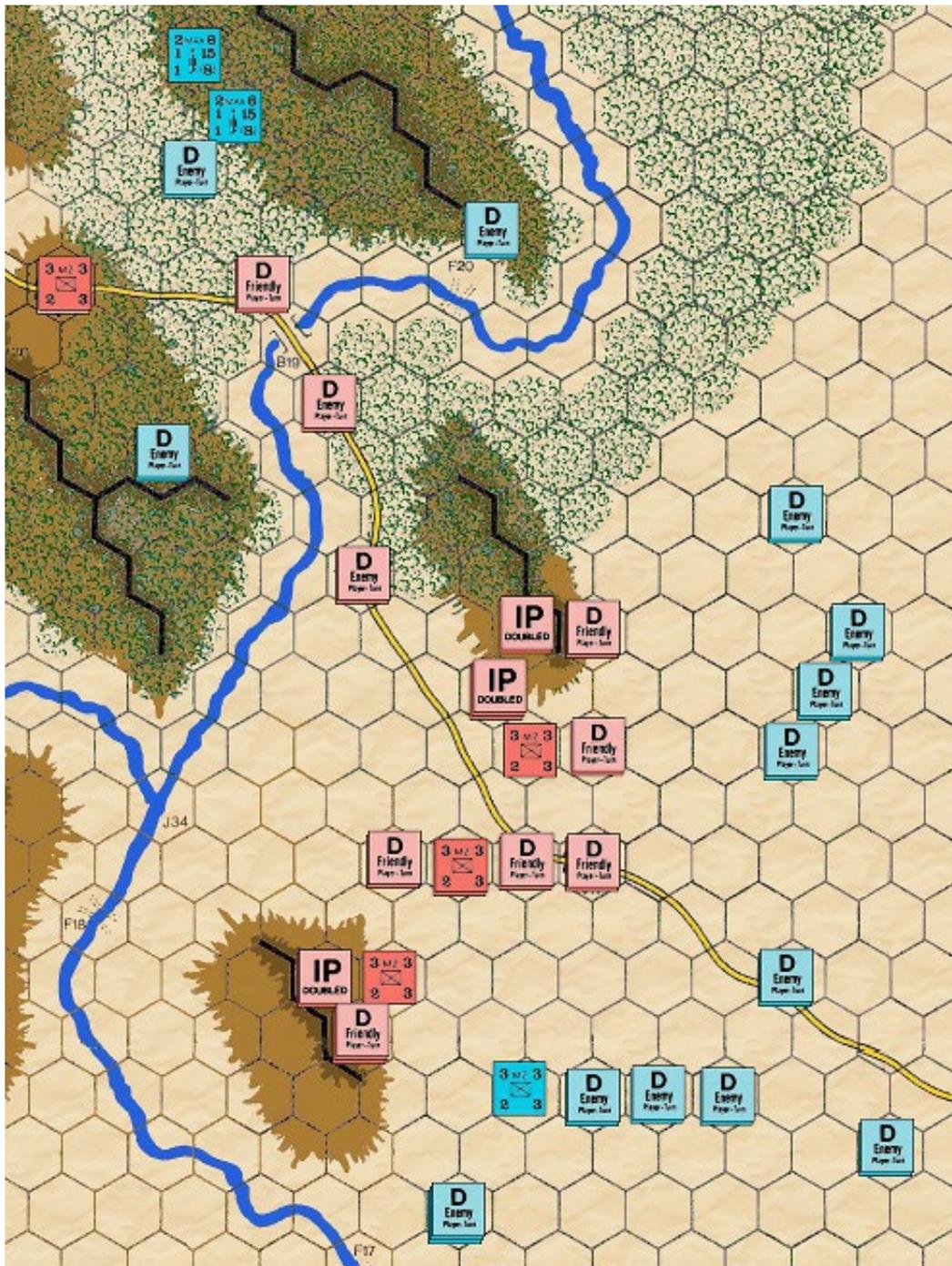
Another mass attack from Nana Sahib's sepoys disrupt more British but the counter-attacks come swift and strong and the British line remains firm.

The battle hits its turning point with the sepoys demoralized from losses.

[Ed Note: If you fall below 75% of your starting strength, your Army morale will slip one level. If you fall below 50% you fall two levels. If the Sepoys started at high, the first level would have taken them to Normal Morale. But if they started at Normal, the next lost took them to Demoralized.]

Once an army reaches Demoralized, it is difficult to return: No further shock attacks are possible and no recovery from disruption is possible).

In the rear, the Indian horse artillery moves into position to bombard the supply train but the British rear-guard has also been lucky with some good shooting against the Indian horsemen. The flanking cavalry are disrupted and their artillery is left with little support.



Turn 6 - End Game

The remnants of Nana Sahib's force take their final potshots at the British line and make a futile attempt to break through to the artillery positions. The British respond with a massed charge that sets the mutineers into full retreat. The horse artillery gets in one last shot at the baggage train but it's pointless to continue. The British are exhausted but will recover in moments, the demoralized sepoys will not. Half of the sepoy force has been lost for not a single British unit. A complete victory for Havelock. Forward to Cawnpore!

Earlier Attempts & Conclusions

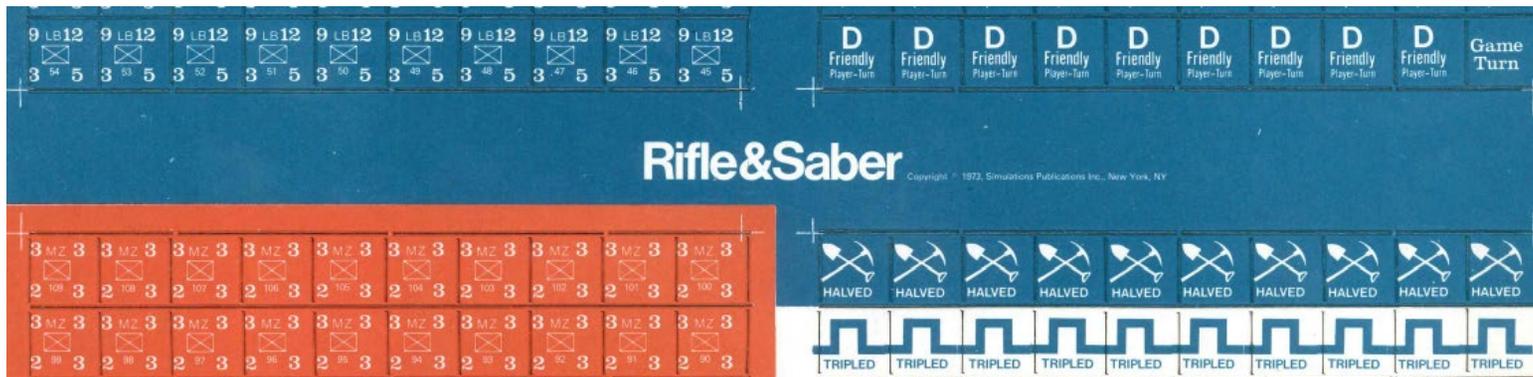
I'm still not sure how I feel about *Rifle & Saber*. When I first picked it up some years back I was hoping for something more focused on the British colonial wars. R&S attempts to cover a lot in just 5 pages of rules, and the broad scope didn't really grab me. It was in an email conversation with Kim Meints some time ago, where he pointed out sources for a variety of R&S colonial scenarios, that got the game back on my radar (thanks Kim!). I'm a buff for colonial history and my interest here is to see how accurately a historical result can be replicated under the rules provided (subject to my limited knowledge and bias, of course).

It actually took me three attempts to get Fatehpur to come out the way I was looking for. My first game I didn't use any of the optional rules and kept my artillery back on the slopes behind the stream. Without the optional rules for road movement the sepoys advanced too quickly and the British were overwhelmed in a matter of 3-4 turns by relentless shock combat. The artillery camp behind the river was too isolated to be able to fall back in any meaningful order before the horde of sepoys came pouring down the road.

Before my second game I read up on the optional rules. The rules on morale, improved positions and road movement looked good so I decided to use them all. This time I placed one gun battery forward on the left flank (Hill 32) and the other two far back in the rear (but still with long LOS down the valley). The British started out in a forward line, much as in my session here but with half a dozen companies entrenching improved positions on either side of the road at strategic points down the road to the rear.

That second session was much closer to the one presented above, with the British holding the small forward village in force and the mass of sepoy closing around them. The morale rules mean that the British quickly gain the upper hand in shock combat (first blood gives High morale, which doubles units in shock combat). The British downfall here was that the artillery was positioned too far back to get a crossfire on the sepoy around the village. It took about five turns for the British to lose their High morale and there were too many units held back in improved positions to regain the advantage. The sepoy slowly rolled up the improved positions in a long game which saw a stream of demoralized Brits floating back to the victory hex. I stuck it out to the bitter end and it was a hard slog for the Indian sepoy, with two batteries of artillery blasting at them all the way. Turn 20 they had the victory hex surrounded, but not taken, with both sides completely demoralized. Certainly not the battle of Fatehpur I wanted to write up.

Finally with the third session (illustrated above) I got the decisive British result I was looking for. A little contrived with the disorganized sepoy advance perhaps, but still a close run thing. If the British do lose their High morale advantage then there are deep thickets of Indian mutineers that can quickly change the tide of battle. The Indian cavalry showed that some defense to the rear is necessary to avoid a flanking move and that was a near slip that could also have changed the battle.



I'll really need to play some more scenarios of R&S to get a better feel for the game. The technology of 1857 doesn't fully showcase the "age of rifles" that this game is all about, and the artillery and cavalry still have their classical advantages.

I'm a little dubious about the ACW scenarios, but the battles from 1870's onwards look interesting. There are also some Zulu war scenarios for R&S that recently came to light and I'm looking forward to having a go at those. – Mike Dyer

[RHG's comments:] I liked this replay a lot, and Mike's comments about the optional rules are absolutely correct. Without them, there is little to differentiate the game from counters on a generic map. John Young designed and developed this game at the same time as **Musket & Pike**. He felt **Musket & Pike** was a successful game design – as did the public – but he had less love for **Rifle & Saber**.

The public also turned up their nose to this game. Young put that down to two important points: A game has to feel believable. **Musket & Pike** felt like it delivered the warfare it promised. But this time Young felt the scenarios had no special weapons or rules to 'sell' you that you were in a specific time period. I can echo that: When I played the American Civil War battles in this game in the 1970s, nothing

about the experience evoked what I saw as the American Civil War. Like Mike, I put it on the shelf for some time. Would color, or a less generic map have made a difference? Also, the lack of leadership may be the biggest missing link.

Young also placed the blame on timing. Prior to 1973, EVERYTHING SPI created sold BIG for them. But now their massive output of new games meant purchasers became more discerning in their choices. **Rifle & Saber** would not meet sales expectations. It also became an in-house example to the team: 'give the buyer what THEY want to BUY, not what YOU want to design.'

Still, looking back, we can see from this replay the game DOES deliver excitement. Kudos to Mike for melding in these optional rules on the fly and creating this EXCELLENT replay! It has prompted me to try the Shiloh scenario again! –RHG

