

War is Hell*

Recreating Sherman’s March to the Sea Through GMT’s Rebel Raiders on The High Seas Game

Introduction: This narrative is intended for reading with the latest Rebel Raiders on the High Seas (Rebel Raiders) Play Test map.

Hopefully, experienced gamers will be able to follow the game’s exciting action and appreciate how Rebel Raiders’ depicts American Civil War land actions with a relatively simple system capturing the period’s essence. This text will be updated when card and playing piece images, with decent artwork, are available.

For descriptions of how the game’s naval aspects play, see GMT’s P-500 site’s other two “game as history” pieces: “The Battle of New Orleans” and “Raphael Semmes – Confederate Raider (The Story of the Alabama)”.

Should there be any question, kindly post it within ConSimWorld’s Rebel Raiders site (under “Gunpowder” – “American Civil War”). It is Mark and Fred’s intent to post Rebel Raiders rules within GMT’s website.

Please note this narrative does not contain a complete description of how the game works... only what’s sufficient to support this particular description of game flow. We hope you enjoy this “game as history” description and are encouraged to place a P-500 Rebel Raiders on the High Seas order. Apologies for the blatant “shilling”. Thanks!

Rebel Raiders is unique in American Civil War strategy games as it focuses primarily on the naval aspects of the war – but just as land-focused games have waterborne elements, so does this sea-centric contest have a ground-pounding element. After all, the Union navies could choke and strangle the South; but it took Yankee armies to finish the job and end the rebellion (or dash the heady dreams of Southern independence, depending on your point of view).

Arguably no Yankee army did this more effectively, more decisively, and more brutally than that led by William Tecumseh Sherman. That his name is still reviled by many throughout Georgia and the Carolinas nearly a century and a half after the fact testifies to the impact and horror of the campaign to which the general’s name is forever linked: Sherman’s March.

Rebel Raiders allows the Union player the opportunity to recreate that epic martial sweep which gutted the Confederacy and brought the South to its knees. What follows is a reconstruction (with a small “r”) of the progress of Sherman and his armies in game terms. Rather than replay the entirety of the turns during which these events took place, including associated naval movement and battles, this offering telescopes the view to those parts of game turns 10, 11 and 12 that correspond to Sherman’s campaign.

The Stage is Set: Union Turn 10 (April-July 1864): Battle of Kennesaw Mountain

The Union has advanced as deep into the South as Chattanooga. As the Confederates go first each turn, it has just repulsed a Rebel counterattack (the Battle of Cassville, May 1864) and is ready to march. To reach its immediate goal of taking the key victory and production center of Atlanta, the North must first take the intervening fort space marked “Kennesaw Mountain.”

At the top half of turn 10, during the game’s Production Phase, the Confederacy fortified Kennesaw Mountain by placing a battery counter there. That will give the South a third die (instead of the usual two defensive dice). It will need it, as starting with this turn the North rolls FOUR dice when attacking. A battle is won by the side with the highest single die roll (after possible modification).

The Union player, however, wants even better odds. He plays Card 50 (Aptly named “Sherman”). What better way to kick off this march than by using the general who gave it his name? This gives the Union a fifth die for use in ONE land assault each turn. (The card is retained, face up, and is reusable each turn).

The Confederates are not without resources of their own, however, and respond with Card 85 (“Nathan Bedford Forrest”). Play of this card makes the North give up a battle die (it reflects the disruption of supplies and the need to divert troops to fend off and hunt down the famed Rebel cavalryman – as occurred in April and June 1864 during which Forrest fought the battles of Fort Pillow and Brice’s Crossroads).

The South also plays Card 91 (“J.E. Johnston”). This gives the Rebs an additional die – now both sides have FOUR dice: an even contest, with the South winning ties.

The Battle of Kennesaw Mountain (June 1864) was a brutal and bloody affair – literally an uphill fight for the North. Reduced back down to four dice, the Union player rolls his attack: his highest dice is a “4;” he does not roll any doubles or triples (which if he had, would increase his high die result by one or two, respectively).

The Southern player rolls 4 dice: he gets a “1”, a “2” and a pair of “3s.” His high die is a “3,” but is increased by one for the rolling of a pair: to a total of “4” for high die.

The South wins ties – but the North is not about to accept this defeat. The Union player throws down Card 46 (“One More Effort Boys”) to relaunch the assault (as it did historically after an initial repulse in the real battle). This card also allows all cards played by both sides in the first assault to apply again. There is a risk involved, as the card notes, for if the North loses THIS attack it pays a hefty penalty in Victory Points.

Fully knowledgeable of this, the North decides to use Union Tactics. The Union rolls fewer dice, but for each die he gives up (up to a maximum of 3) he gains a pip on the highest of the dice he does throw. He elects to roll two less dice, and rolls two dice,

adding two to the total, rather than FOUR. Both sides roll their dice – and this time, the Union wins, its highest die is a 5, adding two for tactics becomes a 7; the South’s best roll is only a 5. The South loses the difference between the dice in Victory Points. A Union control marker is placed on the space.

Having lost the battle at Kennesaw Mountain, there is a danger that the South may also forfeit the “J.E. Johnston” card. The dice are not kind to the South, and as happened in the real campaign, the wily Johnston is removed from command by President Jefferson Davis – and the card, as directed, is reshuffled into the deck.

The attack on Kennesaw Mountain cost the Union one of its Cannon Pawns (attack tokens indicating the ability to assault). It still has another. Atlanta beckons.

The Battles of Atlanta: The Union player commits his second Cannon and attacks Atlanta. As with Kennesaw, Atlanta has three batteries in place to add its defense (a prudent build up of strength). The Union announces his intention to attack; the Confederate player throws down Card 80 (“Rally Men. For God’s Sake Rally.”) As indicated on the card, this must be played before any dice are rolled – it gives the Confederates the option to re-roll any or all of their combat dice.

Atlanta was not one battle but three: Peachtree Creek, Ezra Church and the Battle of Atlanta. So here do the players furiously hurl dice and cards at one another in a see-saw contest. The North rolls well, but Card 80 gives the South re-rolls to beat that – but the North counters with a re-roll card of its own (Card 7 – “A Lack of Brains”) which forces the South to re-roll a die of the North’s choosing – but still, the South is higher! Not willing to accept defeat, the North throws down yet another card from its seemingly inexhaustible hand – (Card 5 – “Willing to Fight”). This lets the North re-roll dice, and this time, the North is triumphant!

..But only for a moment! The Union captures Atlanta, gains the difference in dice plus bonus rolls for taking a city and Atlanta in particular (a once per game two dice roll loss of victory points), but the Confederates have one last trick up their sleeve – Card 107 (“The South Shall Rise”). This allows the Rebs an immediate counterattack and yet one more fight is rolled – but this desperate effort is repulsed, and Atlanta remains in Union hands.

Its fall hurts the South greatly. It loses a city (as noted on the city track, potentially reducing the Confederate build level). As one of only two cities on the map that generate battery markers for the South (the other being Richmond), the Confederacy’s ability to place defenses and build ironclads, which can require the expenditure of a battery, is diminished.

The “Atlanta Arsenal Destroyed” marker is placed on the map. Atlanta is also one of the game’s key Union victory cities, the loss of which darkens the Confederacy’s future. The situation looks grim and it is about to get grimmer.

Turn 11 (August–December 1864): The March to the Sea

The Union player ended turn 10 in possession of Atlanta (which the Confederacy evacuated, historically, in the first days of September). Turn 11 begins with the South desperate for defenses. To replace batteries destroyed by preceding Union naval actions, it plays during its Production Phase Card 88 (“P.G.T. Beauregard”) to fortify (place a battery) in Charleston.

Then, during the turn’s Confederate Movement Phase, a blockade runner luckily sneaks in past the Union outer and inner blockade from Europe with cargo which allows the play of Card 99 (“The Queen’s Artillery”) so another battery is added to Savannah.

With “Sherman” (Card 50) again available, the Union plays a Cannon (attack pawn) and assaults Augusta, the fort space immediately east of Atlanta. It falls, is marked with a Union control marker and the Victory Point track is appropriately adjusted in the Union favor. The turn’s remaining Union Cannon Pawns are used for battles elsewhere on the map.

Turn 12 (December 1864-March 1865): The March Goes On

From its hand the Confederacy plays Card 89 (“John Bell Hood”) to make a desperate counterattack: Hood’s brief, initially glorious but eventually ill-starred Franklin and Nashville campaign, which ended in a charge even larger and more disastrous than that famous foray of Pickett’s at Gettysburg. In Rebel Raider game terms, this would be depicted as an assault to recapture Atlanta from Montgomery.

The dice are rolled, the Southern counterattack defeated – and at double the Victory Point cost (the risk, as noted in the Card’s text, of using John Bell Hood for his “free” counterattack).

The Confederates are hard-pressed, especially as during its turn the Union played the “If it takes all Summer...” Card (Card 36). This gives the Union a chance to extend the game past the usual 12-turn limit. Both sides roll a die, with the Union adding to its die for the capture of Atlanta – and New Orleans, which fell earlier in the war. The Union wins the roll, and is assured a 13th turn – an extra chance to win the war.

The Union plays Card 34 (“Loose the Fateful Lightning”), which gives it an extra free attack every turn without need to expend a Cannon Pawn, attacks Savannah, and, as it did historically, the city falls in late December – Sherman’s “Christmas present” to Lincoln, as he wrote in announcing its capture to the Union president.

Appropriately, the Union then plays “War is Cruelty” (Card 6), allowing the North to immediately and without expending a precious Cannon Pawn attack a city or fort adjacent to that which it just captured – and with a handful of dice and cards on its side,

the Union marches into Charleston, and from there attacks again, using a Cannon Pawn, to take Wilmington.

Using yet another Cannon Pawn the North advances on Goldsboro – and there, once again, “Sherman” (Card 50) meets “J.E. Johnston” (Card 91), which the South has drawn again from the deck. Near there was the Battle of Bentonville, Johnston’s last stand in late March, 1865. The South, like Johnston, initially does well – but its brief hope of one last effort to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat are shattered as the Union plays Card 4 (“We Cross the Ford, Never to Retreat Again to This Side.”) to re-roll the dice and win the battle for the North.

Aptly enough, the quote on the card, allowing a re-roll of combat dice, is attributed to the general who started this campaign – William Tecumseh Sherman.

General Sherman



(SIDEBAR)

*** THE STORY BEHIND “WAR IS HELL” – “WAR IS CRUELTY”**

William Tecumseh Sherman and “war is hell” are as inseparably linked in lore and custom as fire and brimstone, ham and eggs, and Sears and Roebuck. Like many great pairings in the cultural lexicon, there is more to the story than just a catch phrase.

Sherman did indeed say “war is hell” – but he did not say it during the March to the Sea or at any other time during the Civil War. He said it in an address to a graduating class of military school cadets, and did so 16 years after the ashes of Atlanta had cooled.

“I’ve been where you are now and I know just how you feel. It’s entirely natural that there should beat in the breast of every one of you a hope and desire that some day you can use the skill you have acquired here. Suppress it! You don’t know the horrible aspects of war. I’ve been through two wars and I know. I’ve seen cities and homes in ashes. I’ve seen thousands of men lying on the ground, their dead faces looking up at the skies. I tell you, war is hell!”

What Sherman said in 1864 was not “war is hell” but “war is cruelty.” In September 1864 Sherman issued a warning to the citizens of Atlanta to evacuate as he intended to burn the city and destroying its commercial and war-making base. Numerous protests and petitions were presented to them, including a missive from the mayor and city council begging the Union general to stay his hand. Sherman was not swayed from his course, but he was moved enough by their pleadings to give a lengthy written explanation of his decision. Embedded within that response is the cautionary advice that:

“You cannot qualify war in harsher terms than I will. War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it; and those who brought war into our country deserve all the curses and maledictions a people can pour out. I know I had no hand in making this war, and I know I will make more sacrifices today than any of you to secure peace. But you cannot have peace and a division of our country...”

“...You might as well appeal against the thunder-storm as against these terrible hardships of war. They are inevitable, and the only way the people of Atlanta can hope once more to live in peace and quiet at home, is to stop the war, which can only be done by admitting that it began in error and is perpetuated in pride.”