

War of 1812 review and replay

War of 1812 is second oldest block game, published originally by Gamma 2 in 1973 and published today by their successor company Columbia Games. Modest revisions, the addition of dragoons and artillery to the counter mix, have done little to change the game, which is good.

It is the bare-bones basic block game. Units worth from 1-4 combat value points (CVs), roll dice equal to CV, roll a 6 to hit, defenders fire first, combat continues until one side retreats or dies, pursuit fire on retreating units is one die per pursuing unit which hits on 4-6. Naval combat is simultaneous, each player throws two dice per ship, hits are scored on a six, the first hit damages a fleet (and renders it powerless) and the second sinks it.

Command control is very restrictive; you have one land and one naval move per turn. The land move allows all land units in one town to move to an adjacent town (stacks may split and move in different directions if desired). Naval moves involve building fleets, repairing fleets or moving fleets. You can combine land and naval activation to transport a unit, even to make an amphibious invasion.

Fleets control Lakes Erie, Ontario and Champlain. Land units control towns.

Each game year (1812-1814) is composed of 10 turns, punctuated by a Wintering turn and a Victory check. Every city has a supply capacity that governs winter attrition. If you exceed a friendly town's capacity you lose one CV per excess unit, if it is an enemy town you lose excess units. Victory points are counted at the conclusion of year after attrition: one victory point per land unit, two VPs per lake under your control, and VPs equal to the supply capacity of enemy cities you occupy. If either player has a 10 VP margin over the other the game ends. American victory is hard to achieve after 1813 due to 1814's massive British reinforcements.

Two little bits of chrome: the British get an Indian unit if they take Detroit, the Indians are a 4 CV unit but will desert permanently if they ever face Americans alone; American units, being for the most part militia, will refuse to invade Canada on foot on a die roll of a "6". Militia will invade without a die roll if they are on ships ("Here we are boys! Sandusky! Just hop out!"). This should not affect the game much other than making the Americans slightly more cautious when invading... barring extreme luck that is.

The American player selects 12 units at random and places them on the map. The British then selects 10 at random and places them on the map. Both sides have considerable freedom to make strategic decisions in their set-up except that the loss of Quebec (and Montreal on the way) would be fatal for the British player so there must always be enough to stop a direct attack.

Excess to the needs of Russia Besieged, Elwyn Darden, Nathan Meadows and Bob Oliver found time to play two games of War of 1812. The House of Germond provided an early Columbia Games copy with neither Dragoons or Artillery. The first game started with a

failed American (Nathan Meadows) invasion into Canada from Ogdensburg to Prescott. Why they wanted to do that is a mystery for the ages. The British (Elwyn Darden) responded by driving the Americans from Sackett's Harbor. Sackett's Harbor is the American naval base for Lake Erie, so the Brits gained the opportunity to gain uncontested control of Lake Ontario. The British then fell on the militia at Ogdensburg that were still quivering on the banks of the St Lawrence. Thus the British had their Lake Erie force in northern New York, positioned to join with the Montreal force and threaten the Lake Champlain and ultimately Albany. The Americans responded by concentrating all eastern forces at Plattsburg.

Relying on Plattsburg as a defensive position, the Americans pressed their advantage in the West by concentrating at Fort Niagara and attacking Fort George. Once again, one American unit refused to cross, but the British were dislodged and retreated to Dundas. The Brits then used their Lake Erie fleet to transport the Dundas unit to Oswego. The following turn the Brits in Ogdensburg moved back to Sackett's Harbor, to threaten Western New York.

With one of the threatening forces gone, the Plattsburg horde hit the British (the Montreal covering force) at LaColle. True to the newest tradition of its new Army, one American unit fails to cross and the British handily repulse the invasion. The British pursue the shattered force into Plattsburg which then runs to Ticonderoga. British ships gain control of Lake Champlain.

The Americans seeing irretrievable disaster in the East begin to search for VPs in the West. The Fort George force moves to Dundas and then splits to take York and retake Ft. George. A landing at Fort Dover gave the Americans their last victory point. The British meanwhile respond by crushing the remaining Americans at Ticonderoga, taking Albany, and even taking Utica. The Americans scored a kill when the British tried to a contested landing at York and lost, but the British won at the end of 1812, 25-13.

The second game was between Nathan Meadows (American) and Bob Oliver (British). In an effort to establish a uniform American doctrine, Nathan again attempted to invade Canada, this time from Sackett's Harbor to Kingston, and again left militia behind (in deep reserve, no doubt). British troops from Prescott drove the lone American out of Kingston. The British pursued through Sackett's Harbor.

The Americans tried to retrieve the situation by beating up on the British in the quadrilateral of Ft Erie, Ft George, Ft Niagara, and Buffalo. Once the Americans became established on the Canadian side of Lake Erie, the British saw their Amherstburg garrison as isolated and vulnerable and pulled back to London.

The British drove from LaColle to Plattsburg to Ticonderoga to Albany, driving the Americans before them, but abandoning VPs in their rear so the year ended with the British occupying Albany and Sackett's Harbor only and shattered in the west. British 17, Americans 18, war continues for a year.

In 1813 the British receive reinforcements in Quebec (five marches from Albany), while the Americans receive them in Pittsburgh and Albany. Since the Brits hold Albany those reinforcements are off-map. They can attack Albany from off-map, but it is risky as an attacker must retreat to the place he came from and one cannot retreat off-map.

The British continued to withdraw eastward from London, eventually garrisoning York as the westernmost defensible position. Because of the British retreat the Pittsburgh reinforcements were able to continue east once they reached Buffalo and went through Williamsburg to Oswego. The large force prompts the British to send reinforcements towards Sackett's Harbor. The Americans however drove through Utica to Albany, pushed the British out, and then took reinforcements there.

The British adopt a high risk strategy of uniting everything in the east to drive on Albany, destroy the Americans and use their 1814 reinforcements to win the game in the final year.

6 British units mostly fresh, attacked 7 Americans (5 with some damage) in Albany, but the key factor is that the attack was made in the tenth turn. Units would winter where they ended the turn, so while an American retreat to Ticonderoga was bad (one CV per unit in excess of the first), a British retreat to Utica would be a disaster (Every unit beyond the first).

It was Haig on crack against Grant with a bad hangover.

Revealed strength was 18 British CV (weaker than feared) against 17 American CV (must have been some good reinforcements) but with defenders firing first. The first round was sanguinary 4 British losses, and the 14 surviving British inflicted 3 losses on the Americans. 14 defenders firing first at 14 should be pretty safe, but both players hit a severe drought and went through several rounds of one or no hits. At battle's end 2 American units with 3 CV between them were left standing. British 5 VPs, Americans 16 VPs.

Haig's attack on Albany, or rather Bob's attack on Albany, could not have resulted in better than 13 VPs for the British with 14 VPs for the Americans, but it would have left the Americans crippled in the east for 1814 with 7 fresh British units driving on the fleshpots of Sackett's Harbor and Oswego. Scattering units instead of concentrating them, and thus not fighting at Albany at all, would have given him at least 16 VPs and the Americans 21 VPs with some additional attrition for overstacked units.

Nathan set a record for futility by having militia balk at almost every invasion. The British also had good luck in both games for beating an American attack and then winning initiative the turn following allowing murderous pursuit of defeated forces.

A third round of War of 1812 was played between Bob Oliver (British) and Elwyn Darden (American) during the third week of Russia Besieged. The Americans set up 12 units first with a extremely heavy Western bias (four units in Detroit, only one in the

vicinity of Lake Champlain). The British were forced to respond in kind by committing most of their 10 units to face the American threat (3 in Amherstburg facing Detroit and only 2 in Eastern Canada).

The Americans won the initiative on the first turn, and tried the predictable invasion of Canada from Detroit. Following the proud tradition established by Nathan's Americans the week before, two of the four units refused to cross the river into Canada. The resulting attack at Amherstburg lasted one round with the outgunned Americans retreating immediately back to Detroit.

The following turn the Americans tried to invade again, at Kingston, from Sackett's Harbor. Again one militia unit hung back, again the Americans fled back across the St. Lawrence. Encouraged by their success at defending, the British, all of them, pursued across the River into Sackett's Harbor. The Americans having the benefit of all their forces on native soil repulsed the British, but were far too weak to attempt Kingston again.

The Americans attempted Amherstburg again, this time with only one unit chickening out, and displaced the British. The British fought too long in a losing battle and were utterly shattered. The British withdrew forces from Fort George to Dundas where they could block the Americans in Amherstburg from marching to the Lake Ontario region. The Americans moved forward to London and concentrated other forces at Ft. Niagara.

The British used their control of Lake Ontario to transport one unit from York to Kingston, raising American fears for Sackett's Harbor, but apparently intended to comfort the single battered unit then in Kingston. The British were also able to move two other units from Dundas to York. The Americans pursued from London to Dundas and crossed from Fort Niagara to Fort George (once again a unit failed to invade). The Americans also enjoyed a naval success gaining control of Lake Ontario.

The British tried to launch a Lake Champlain offensive by attacking Plattsburg, hoping to score some points or at least distract the Americans from further activity in the West. Sadly for them, the American unit at Plattsburg was a four which rolled well enough to drive them back quickly.

The Fort George force split three ways, one to Ft Erie, one stayed in Fort George and one joined the main American force in Dundas. On the final turn the Americans sent three units from Dundas to York. This move was bound to cost the Americans a unit as York could only winter two units safely, but the Americans were hoping to lose that unit honorably in battle. British forces instead abandoned York for Smith's Creek and then used their move to winter an additional unit in Kingston. America won 21 vps to 5 vps.