

The Second Battle of Fiddler's Bottom

Adapting a scenario by Charles Grant for use with 'Pike & Shotte'

By Chris Hahn

The original battle of Fiddler's Bottom is documented and diagrammed in Chapter 13 of *Wargame Tactics*, the excellent and must-have book for any historical miniature wargamer's library. The action, as reported by the much admired Charles Grant, is a typical, straight-forward, if also fictional affair taking place during the English Civil War. The terrain is rather simple but appropriate; the Parliamentary and Royalist forces are evenly matched, and the ensuing miniature contest is fairly representative of battle during this period of English history.

For this solo wargaming project, the general idea and terrain was borrowed from the venerable Mr. Grant and then modified. The general composition of the opposing sides was also adopted and adapted from the engaging narrative of Chapter 13. Specifics for the various foot regiments, horse regiments, and artillery batteries, were determined using the army lists found in Mr. Steve Morgan's *Pike & Shotte*, a set of rules born of *Black Powder*, and dedicated to wargaming actions set in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries.

Terrain

Map 1 shows how I set up my 6-by-4 tabletop for the Second Battle of Fiddler's Bottom.

The high ground present along each long table edge in the first engagement has been replaced by a number of gentle hills. The farm known as Fiddler's Bottom sits in a kind of valley then, on the eastern side of the battlefield. This collection of half a dozen buildings (only one being made out of stone) is surrounded by about the same number of fields. At various intervals, short and tall hedges, as well as occasional stone walls, mark the borders of these crops. An improved track runs the length of the valley, splitting into a Y-intersection in the wooded area on the western end of the field. In contrast to the first contest, this revised landscape contains several more woods.

Troops

In the original engagement, 17 Royalist units (10 infantry and 7 cavalry) confronted 19 Parliamentary formations (11 infantry and 8 cavalry). Interested in maintaining this balance for my adaptation, I drew up orders of battle that provided each side with 5 battalions (the terms used in *Pike & Shotte* for larger formations or commands) of foot, 4 battalions of horse, and 1 battalion of artillery. Interested in pushing the historical envelope with this project, I changed the name of the opposing forces to Union and Confederate. Accepting the diverse color of uniforms during the early years of the ECW, I thought it would be more convenient as well as less confusing, if one side was predominantly blue in its appearance and the other side was gray. In terms of regiments and cannon, the Union force (based on Royalist list) would field 17 regiments of infantry, 13 of cavalry, and 9 pieces of ordnance. Three of the foot regiments were commanded shotte, and one battalion, or brigade, contained 3 regiments of foreign troops. These Imperial units consisted of two small sleeves of musketeers, a large body of pikemen, and an additional unit of swordsmen. The Confederate army (based on the Early Parliament list) also contained 17 regiments of infantry. Four of these were large formations of Highlanders (borrowed from the Covenanter list). The foot component was supported by 12 regiments of horse and 8 cannon.

In his narrative, Mr. Grant explained that the cavalry units he used numbered 10 figures each. My cavalry formations mustered 6, 12, or 16 figures. Infantry regiments in Mr. Grant's battle report contained 24 figures, two-thirds of which were musketeers. Having a preference for larger formations, and having a history of taking some liberties with the established historical record, the smallest foot regiment on my field consisted of 48 figures, split evenly between pikemen and musketeers. With regard to specific arrangement, I mounted the musketeers in three ranks and the pikemen in four ranks. The previously mentioned Highlanders were arranged in an 8-figures across by 6-figures deep warband formation. The number of musketeers in each foot regiment varied between 24, 30, or 36 figures. The number of pikemen in each foot regiment varied between 24, 36, or 48 figures.

To add some personality to my admittedly unusual approach, I conducted a Google search for the orders of battle for Marston Moor and Edgehill. The names of commanders for my fictional battalions and regiments were borrowed from these informative lists. I also made use of the phone book. To add a splash of color to my admittedly flat and not at all up-to-muster with regard to the accepted (and acceptable) approach to miniature wargaming, I designed standards for each of the 34 infantry and 25 cavalry regiments that would be present on the field.

If this was a traditional wargame, I would require 17 cannon along with crew and perhaps a few wagons, 312 cavalry, and 2,073 infantry in order to fill out my orders of battle. A quick check of the Baccus site and some even quicker math informs that this battle or collection could be realized for approximately 200 English pounds. A rough exchange calculation makes that approximately 320 American dollars. Adding the cost of paint, brushes, basing material, and storage containers would probably push the total cost toward the \$500 mark. Spreading the payments out over a year (or better, two years), the collection *could* be realized. Perhaps it's some kind of character flaw, but I'm interested in setting up and playing this particular ECW-based solo wargame sooner rather than later. Besides, I don't require (and in truth, have never required) painted miniatures to be present in order to enjoy my wargaming efforts/pursuits.

Solo Mechanics

In Mr. Grant's narrative, the opposing generals sketched out plans on paper, conducted map moves, and then set down their respective forces when they were informed by the umpire that "the morning mist had lifted and that the combatants were in full view of each other" (108). Interested in avoiding the process of advancing to contact, I decided that the forward lines of the Union and Confederate forces would be set on the table 32 centimeters apart. This distance was selected because the range of medium cannon in the "Pike & Shotte" rules is 36 inches. In order to maximize my playing surface, inches were converted to centimeters. Instead of "stressing" over how to deploy each army, I decided to let a six-sided die determine how Generals Prisby and Lincoln would arrange their respective commands.

1d6	Left Flank	Center	Right Flank
1	2 ðBattaliaö Horse	2 ðBattaliaö Foot & Artillery 3 ðBattaliaö Foot	2 ðBattaliaö Horse
2	2 ðBattaliaö Horse	3 ðBattalia Foot & Artillery 2 ðBattaliaö Foot	2 ðBattaliaö Horse
3	3 ðBattaliaö Horse	2 ðBattaliaö Foot & Artillery 3 ðBattaliaö Foot	1 ðBattaliaö Horse
4	3 ðBattaliaö Horse	3 ðBattaliaö Foot & Artillery 2 ðBattaliaö Foot	1 ðBattaliaö Horse
5	1 ðBattaliaö Horse	2 ðBattaliaö Foot & Artillery 3 ðBattaliaö Foot	3 ðBattaliaö Horse
6	1 ðBattaliaö Horse	3 ðBattaliaö Foot & Artillery 2 ðBattaliaö Foot	3 ðBattaliaö Horse

A Summary of the Engagement

Map 2 shows how each side deployed before the first cannon was fired. The far right of the Union position was composed of three ðbattaliaö of horse. Sir Gibson's three units of commanded shotte were to the left of these numerous squadrons. Lord Dutton's ðbattaliaö formed the first line on the Union right. These foot regiments were supported by Lord Paisley's ðbattalia.ö The artillery of the army (all medium pieces) was deployed north of the central woods. The left of the Union line was guarded by Lord White's cavalry. Lord Pomeroy's foot were stationed on the hill to their right. The sizable contingent of foreign troops formed the reserve or second line on this flank. Each wing of the Confederate army contained two ðbattaliaö of horse. Lord McMann's Scottish lancers were stationed on the left of the battle line. To their right, Barnaby's foot and the four Highlander clans arranged themselves. (The Highlanders were in front, of course.) The natural gap in the center of the Confederate deployment was guarded by two light cannon. The medium guns were stationed to their right, on the second tier of the western hill. Lord Morgan's large ðbattaliaö of five regiments was in reserve, ready to come to the aid of the two light cannon and their crew. On the far right of the deployment, the Confederates had a two-to-one advantage in horseflesh. Lord Lewiston's cavalry were in the first line. These squadrons were supported by the regiments of Lord Smith's ðbattalia.ö

The first turns of the general engagement were marked by abysmal command dice and rather uncoordinated advances. Sir William's regiment of foot (Pomeroy's command) had the distinction of being the first unit to suffer casualties. Effective fire from the Confederate cannon on the hill north of their starting position tore a number of holes in the packed ranks of pikemen.

This one-sided contest continued throughout the afternoon and into the evening, resulting in the eventual rout of Sir William's pike-armed foot. The majority of Pomeroy's command was occupied by fending off the advance of Lord Thatcher's men. This chess match involved more musketry than push of pike as first one side and then the other gained a local and very temporary advantage. Lord Thatcher's infantry pressed the Union foot hard but could not create a rupture in the defensive line. During the third or fourth attempt to push the Union infantry off of their hill, Lord Thatcher was lost when the unit he was attached to broke in melee. His replacement did what he could to keep the pressure on Lord Pomeroy. Having lost so many men, however, it was all he could do to hold the small pieces of hard-won ground. The battered foot regiments of Lord Pomeroy's command withdrew. They were replaced by two of the large tercios under direct command of Lord Wilkemeyer. A similar stalemate transpired on the Confederate left-center between Lord MacPherson's Highlanders, Lord Barnaby's foot, and Lord Dutton's regiments.

After staring at the Union formations for an hour or so, the four clans under Lord MacPherson jogged forward. They took up a rough line along the road and short hedge west of Fiddler's Bottom. Attention was paid to these kilt-wearing irregulars by the guns of Cantrell's artillery and the foot regiments of Lord Dutton's *battalia*. The Highlanders gave almost as good as they got, but were eventually forced to withdraw when half of their original number was either sprawled on the ground or trying to find some way to escape to the rear. It was here that the Confederates suffered the loss of a general officer. General Cumberland was in the process of rallying the shaken men of Clan MacIntosh when a completely effective volley from the Union guns decimated the already disordered *warband*. The men broke under the galling fire. General Cumberland and his mount were smashed by a Union cannon ball. Lord Barnaby's men advanced to take their place, and were themselves soon engaged in a protracted fight for possession of a small portion of the larger battlefield.

Lord Morgan's five regiments of foot spent the entire battle in reserve. They were positioned across from (and out of range) the Union *grand battery* on the hill. During the late stages of the battle, Lord Morgan did begin to move two of his units over to the left in order to support Lord Barnaby and the Highlanders. These foot soldiers never saw any action, however. The same could be said of Lord Ashton's men, as well as Lord Paisley's regiments (Union). Neither of these commands suffered any combat losses nor even had their men discharge their weapons.

On the Confederate right, Lord Lewiston's cavalry made quick work of Lord White's regiments. The advantage was short-lived, however. Lord Wilkemeyer detached one of his large tercios to block any possible flanking movement by victorious enemy squadrons. Supported by a few light cannon, this formation of pikes, muskets, and sword and buckler *specialists*, frustrated any attempt by Lords Lewiston and Smith to turn the Union left. Poor command rolls, frequent disorder markers (the result of effective shooting), and the presence of a large number of mercenary pikemen, prevented the Confederate horsemen from establishing any credible threat on this side of the battlefield. The wing commander of the Union army, one Lt. Gen. Wilmore, took direct command of the tercio and moved it forward -- albeit slowly -- against the several regiments of enemy cavalry. Facing a bristling hedge of pike points, and having to endure volleys of musketry as well as light cannon, the Confederate troopers yielded.

On the Union right, the nature of the ground around Fiddler's Bottom did more to discourage any kind of concerted advance than any action or reaction by the outnumbered enemy. Eventually, Lord Esparza's

regiments were able to charge into contact with McMann's Scottish lancers and one regiment from Lord Dubrovay's command. After paying a steep price, the squadrons of Lord Esparza broke the three units sent against them. In subsequent turns, Lord Esparza's weakened formations were pushed back and then broken by effective pistol fire from Dubrovay's heavy cavalry. These troopers were lined up behind a chest-high stone wall in one of the plowed fields surrounding Fiddler's Bottom. Unfortunately, the supreme efforts of Lord Esparza were isolated; he and his men received absolutely no help from Lord Balderston or Lord Enright. In point of fact, only a single regiment of Lord Balderston's command got involved very late in the day. This unit inadvertently exposed its flank to Dubrovay's cavalry. After being disordered by close-range pistol fire, it was charged and broken in a sharp melee. Lord Balderston was unable to order his two remaining regiments forward. The four regiments under Lord Enright seemed completely content to sit on their horses and sit out the battle.

Evaluation

The wargame commenced on December 16, 2012. The "miniature" battle was called on December 29, after 14 turns were completed. Ideally, 18 turns should have been played, as this would have allowed a kind of symmetry (one map of field status every 6 turns), permitted an engagement of six hours (providing one accepts a time scale of one turn represents the passage of 20 minutes), and perhaps -- emphasis on perhaps -- determined a winner.

The terrain and troops looked pretty good, at least to my subjective and non-traditional standard. Even though it was a borrowed scenario, I thought the adapted idea and orders of battle provided for a fairly entertaining two weeks. And even though five "battalia" of cavalry were positioned on a flank where the ground was very unfavorable to mounted action, I maintain that the solo mechanics for random deployment worked fairly well. To be certain, I was disappointed (again) with the drawn result. I was also slightly disappointed by the fact that at no point during this wargame was a "hedghegog" formed (understanding that many object to that term), or that swordsmen were afforded a chance to participate in a melee. If the action would have been continued to 18, 20, or even 24 completed turns, perhaps these "disappointments" would have been addressed. Given the "exhausting" back-and-forth of the combat, however, it seems probable that no significant development would have taken place.

At the cessation of hostilities, both sides had essentially equal forces uncommitted to action. Given this accounting, perhaps the forces were too large to begin with or perhaps too evenly matched? My lack of experience with the rules is another point of consideration and or concern. I am sure that some mistakes were made, but I do not think any one of these (or all them together) had a major impact on the course of tabletop action. I do not deny the splendor filling the pages of "Pike & Shotte," but I wonder if the reader/wargamer might be better served if some of the color pages and battle reports were sacrificed for extended examples of play? Having cleaned up the field, I wonder if my experience would have been better had I tinkered with the rules instead of playing them as written? For example, I could have modified the game move sequence so that defensive fire -- not in the sense of closing fire -- would have been an option. This prevents the rather unrealistic occurrence of units moving to within two or three inches of an enemy formation and then blazing away without fear of incurring losses.

I could have adjusted the range of weapons and the to hit modifiers as well. Close range fire becomes different for the type of firearm or weight of gun, and to hit anything at long range becomes a bit more difficult as the standard 4, 5, or 6 is modified to 5 or 6. A similar approach could be taken with saving throws. In brief, there are a lot of opportunities for tinkering with "Pike & Shotte." Having cleaned up

the field, I also wonder if it would be to my benefit to refight the battle (this time, I would hope, to a clear conclusion) with a different set of rules. I confess that I am very tempted to break out my copy of "Advanced Armato" and have another try at Fiddler's Bottom. However, as I find my attention drawn to the Egyptian desert (circa 900 BCE), perhaps Fiddler's Bottom will have to become something like an annual tradition?

Oh to play at battle during the English Civil War, now that Christmas time is here.

((12 photos with captions are below.))



Photo 1

Looking at Fiddler's Bottom and surrounding fields from Confederate side of table. Some of the fields have partial borders of hedges (short and "easy" or tall and "difficult") or stone walls.

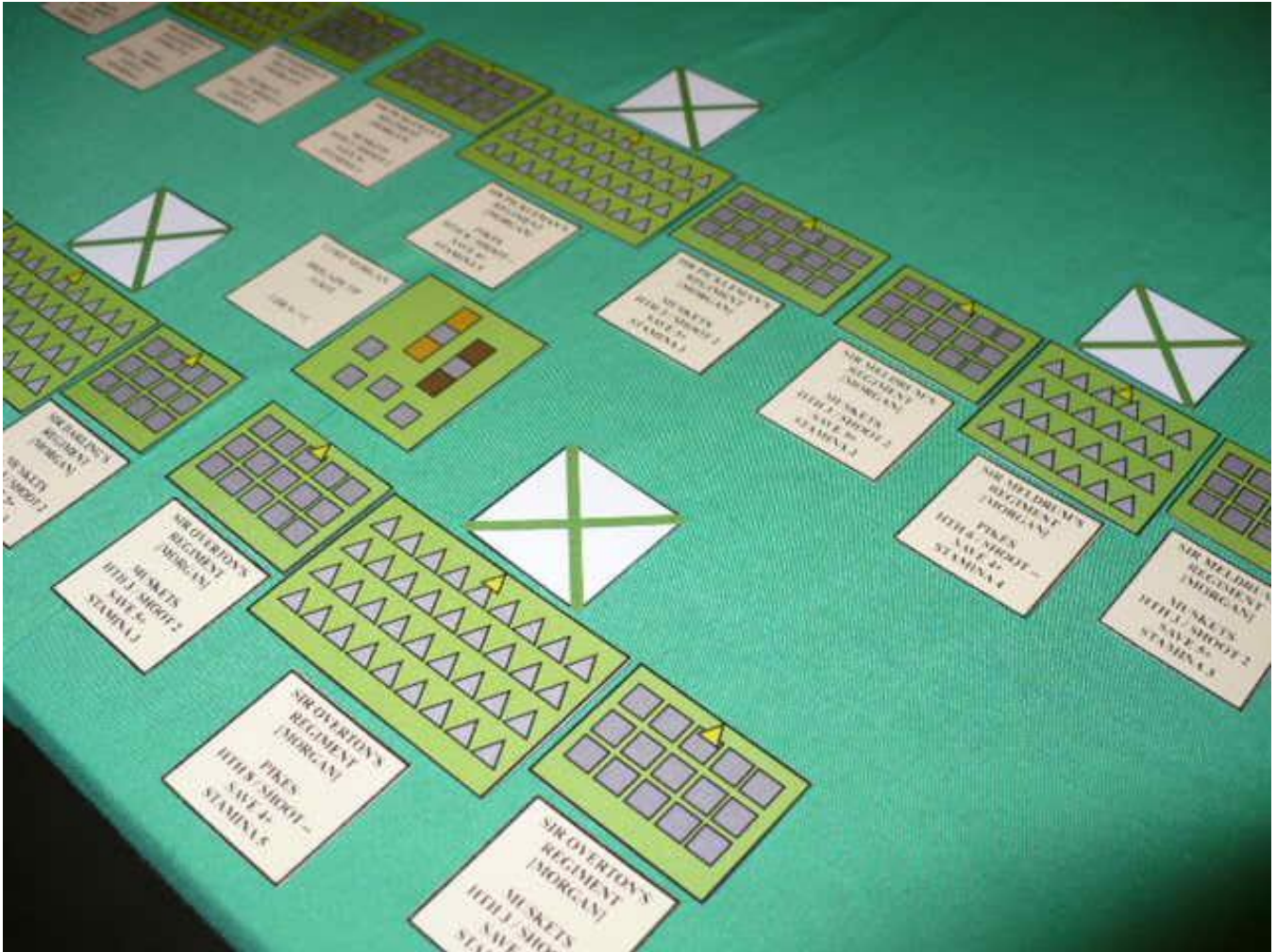


Photo 2

Lord Morgan's *obattalia* of five regiments of foot. These were arranged with three units in front and two to the rear. Not one of the five units saw action.



Photo 3

The cavalry of Lord Lewiston (first rank) and Lord Smith, on the Confederate right flank.



Photo 4

The battalion of Lord Dutton on the Union center-right. Some of the Union cannon can be seen to the left of this formation. Sir Gibson's commanded shotte units are in column at the top right of the picture.



Photo 5

An aerial view of the center of the table, viewed from the Confederate side. Lord Morgan and Lord Ashton's infantry are in the foreground. The five batteries of Confederate cannon are deployed to their front.



Photo 6

The four regiments of Lord Enright's command. These squadrons refused almost every order given to them during the 14-turn miniature battle.



Photo 7

Lord Barnaby's foot has moved up to relieve the Highlanders. They face Sir Gibson's commanded shotte (blue unit in foreground on left) and Lord Dutton's men.



Photo 8
Early in the engagement: The Highlanders (top) await the advance of Lord Dutton's troops.

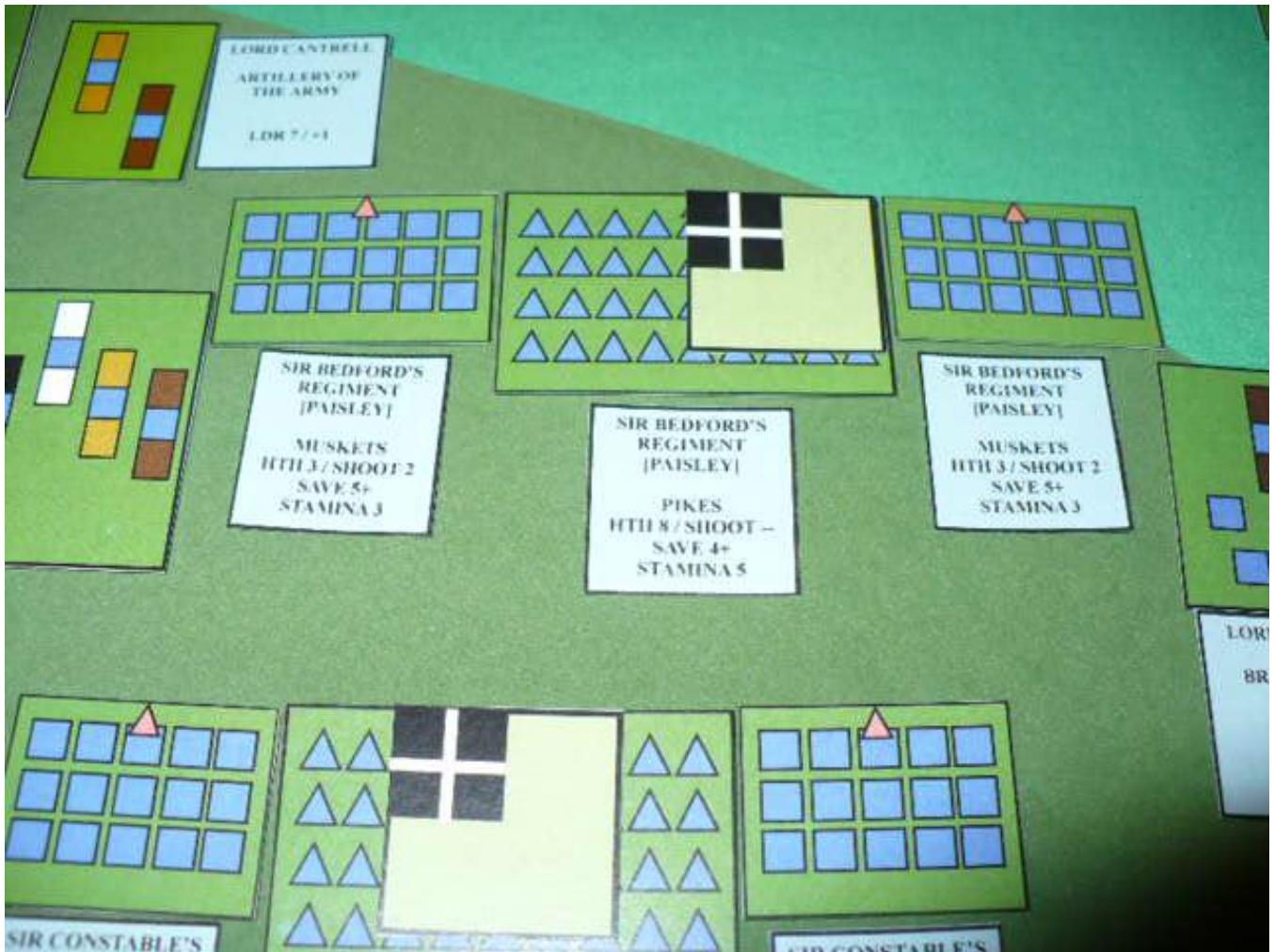


Photo 9

A close-up of Lord Paisley's battalions. These regiments played no part in the action.



Photo 10

An aerial view of the tabletop: Fiddlerø Bottom is at the bottom of the photo. The Union forces of General Lincoln are on the left. The Confederates occupy the right of the picture.



Photo 11
Another view of the Union center-right.



Photo 12

A close up of the action in and around the fields, walls, and hedges of Fiddler's Bottom. Lord Esparza's horse try to come to grips with the troopers of Lord Dubrovay. (The Confederate horse preferred to present pistols instead of slashing with swords.)