

ABOUT TERRAIN

When my oldest child was much younger, we played a computer, Civil War game. Probably crude by today's standards, the game showed some of the features of the given campaign or battle to include forests, roads, rivers and elevations. For example, Gettysburg would necessarily include Cemetery Ridge and other notable features.

In keeping with reality, travel was most effective on the roads; and it was least effective in a dense forest (such as prevalent in the battle called, "The Wilderness"). Even as speedy as the cavalry could be, attempts through the wooded area was a challenge. With this example in mind comes the broader discussion of terrain.



As with this game, life's journey has to consider the terrain albeit called "the environment", the territory" or by other such names. In other words, we must try to understand what's up ahead, what challenges could be (or will be) encountered, and similar planning and preparation.

Referring again to a past experience, the same child and I went on several hikes together with the scouts. Each year in Atlanta, we would hike the "Up, down and around" at Stone Mountain. I'm not sure which is tougher; hiking up the rock or coming down? Once the mountain was conquered, a brief rest was allowed before circumventing the point. At the least, the hiker had to watch his footing but ideally, the pack (or leader) would have done some planning **so as to understand the terrain or lay of the land.**

Whether playing the Civil War game or going for a hike, a tendency is to just *put one foot in front of the other*; no planning or anticipation, but just the basic decision of a single move of one unit of troops or one stride down the path. **As I have discovered however, such shortsightedness does not work for board games, hikes or any other activity of similarity.** It is just plain foolish to be so narrowly focused and, consequently, pay little attention to what's coming-up, what could happen, and how you might react.

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On the rare and amusing occasion to watch young kids play soccer, one aspect of skill seems to be **anticipation** (rather than reaction) to the ball. The better or more skilled players have speed and ball-handling skills, of course; but they also had developed the art of anticipating where the ball was going – and positioning themselves accordingly. Again, to draw from the past, this observation shows a first step toward planning and preparing – and thereby anticipating the figurative terrain or scenario that may or will develop.

Likewise, the Civil War game required the player (or pseudo-commander) to consider the terrain (and limitations) during the series of moves and positioning. I can remember getting bogged-down or hemmed-in because of my own oversight of a tree-line, a river too deep for fording, or some jagged elevations impassable by artillery. Yes, I know, it was only a game but, when you're in the *thick of it*, you're in the *thick of it*. I can say that having a constant aerial view of the battle's theater was, while unrealistic, a "force-multiplier" in conducting operations, etc.

In the book of Deuteronomy (chapter 8), God is describing the terrain of Israel (or the Promised Land) among other important matters of the final destination for the long-nomadic Hebrews. Such information was of unquestionable benefit since it generally confirmed a longstanding promise – as well as prepared them for this *last leg* of the journey. Somewhat like the pseudo-commander of the Civil War game, God had an aerial view of the entire theater; but what's more, he knew (and knows) the future, and thus, can speak (and lead) with "absolute" certainty or confidence. **He is our fixed star...and knows the plans for our journey.**