



COMITATUS

Warfare in the Dark Ages

3rd - 11th C AD

Game Scenario

Strasbourg

AD 357

Historical Background

In AD 357 the future Roman Emperor Julian, with 13,000 men, defeated the Alamanni who had crossed the Rhine near modern Strasbourg.

The battle was not of huge historical significance, other than temporarily stabilising the lower Rhine frontier and increasing Julian's reputation which led to his troops proclaiming him as emperor 3 years later. It does, however, make for a good wargame as the numbers of troops are quite manageable and we have very detailed accounts of the troops involved as well as the action itself.



Troops Involved

Many of Julian's actual units are known. These include the Cornuti, Bracchiati, Regii and Batavi (Auxiliaries); Catafractarii (heavily armoured cavalry); Equites Sagittarii (light horse archers), Scutarii and Gentiles (guards cavalry of the Schola) and the Primani Legion. A reasonable reconstruction of the full 13,000 men could be: 4000 Legionaries, 1000 Archers, 1000 light infantry javelinmen, 4000 other Auxilia Palatina, 500 cataphracts, 500 light horse archers, 1000 heavy cavalry of the Scholae and 1000 other cavalry. Severus commanded the Roman left wing and apart from Julian the other senior commanders are not known. Among the dead, however were Bainobaudes tribune of the Cornuti, Lapsio and Innocentius who commanded the cataphracts.

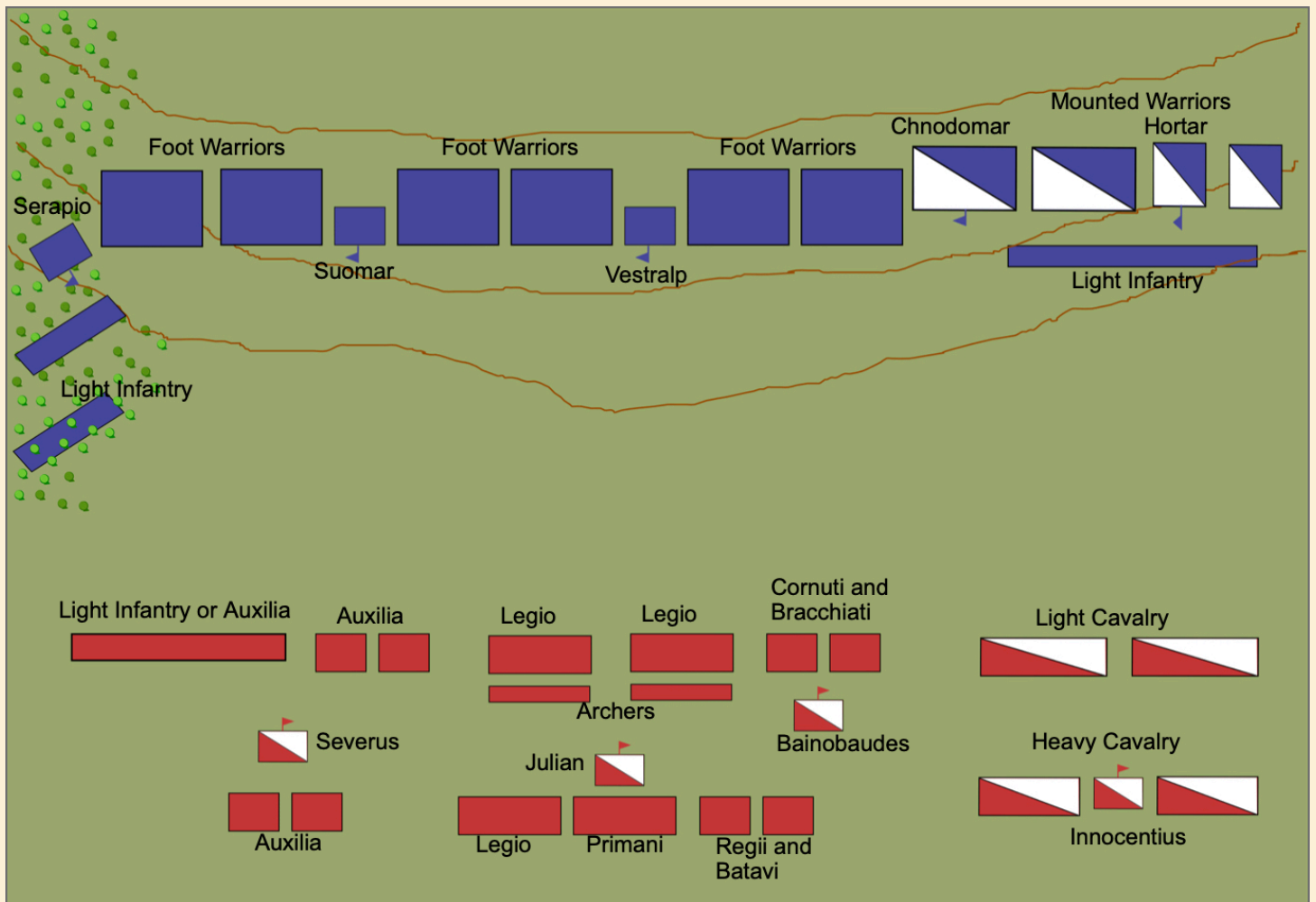
The Alamanni are said to have numbered 35,000 men '*drawn from various peoples, some whom served as mercenaries and the rest in accordance with pacts of mutual assistance.*' The Romans were notorious for exaggerating the numbers of their enemies so it is quite likely there were fewer of them, perhaps closer to 20,000. The Alamanni were commanded by King Chnodomar with the left wing led by Serapio. A number of other notable chieftains are mentioned: Vestralp - a king, along with Urius, Ursicinus, Suomar and Hortar.

Deployment

The battle was fought on a gently sloping hill near the banks of the Rhine. The Alamanni held the high ground with their right flank covered by woods. They hid a number of troops in trenches in the woods, hoping to surprise the Roman left wing.

The Romans deployed first, forming up in two lines with all their cavalry on the right. The Cornuti and Bracchiati were in the front line of infantry in the centre while the Primani Legion along with the Batavi and Regii were in the rear line. It is likely that archers were deployed behind the front line of infantry in a position to shoot over their heads, as was the usual late Roman practise.

Seeing the Roman dispositions, the Alamanni placed all their mounted men opposite the Roman cavalry, interspersing them with light infantry. The bulk of the other infantry were arrayed on the high ground with presumably light infantry waiting in ambush in the woods. The kings and other commanders were mounted but they dismounted just prior to battle. It is not clear if the rest of the German cavalry also dismounted



With the numbers involved this battle makes for a very manageable game even in 28mm on a 6x4 table. For Comitatus I recommend a scale of 1 heavy infantry stand (8 figures) representing approximately 500 men; cavalry (2-3 figures) and light infantry stands (4 figures) representing approximately 250 men.

The map above shows the approximate historical deployment. Players are free to choose whether or not to follow this or to deploy freely. The Romans deploy their forces first followed by the Germans. As the Romans suspected the ambush I suggest that there is no point in trying to hide a possible deployment by the Alamanni in the woods. Troops deployed there, however, will not be visible to the Romans and they will count as 'surprised' if they are engaged from the woods.



Roman Order of Battle

The following is how I field the Roman Army using Comitatus rules. All troops are A Grade.

Julian, Leader in Chief, 4 Leadership Points (LPs)

Severus, Left Wing Leader, 3 LPs

Innocentius, Cavalry Leader, 2 LPs

Bainobaudes, Infantry Leader, 4 LPs

Scholae: 4 stands Equites, High Morale, each stand forming the Comitatus of one of the Leaders. Julian's Comitatus has Exceptional Morale.

Catafractarii: 2 stands Shock Cavalry, Average Morale.

Horse Archers: 2 stands Light Horse Archers, Average Morale

Dalmatae: 2 stands Light Javelin Cavalry, Average Morale

Other Cavalry: 2 stands Equites, Average Morale

Legions: 8 stands, Roman Infantry, Average Morale

Auxilia Palatina: 10 stands, Roman Infantry, Average Morale

Option to replace 2 stands of the Auxilia Palatina with 4 stands of Light Infantry. Up to 2 of these may be crossbowmen to represent the possibility that the Balistarii Julian had with him prior to the battle were crossbow armed.

Archers: 4 stands Foot Archers, Average Morale

I tend to use units of 2 stands for most of my Romans. Such a unit then represents a single Legio, or two Auxilia Palatina brigaded together, or a cavalry Vexillation.

Alamanni Order of Battle

All the Alamanni are B Grade except for the archers who are C Grade

Chnodomar, General, 3 LPs

Serapio, Left Wing Infantry Leader, 3 LPs

Suomar, Centre Infantry Leader, 3 LPs

Vestralp, Right Wing Infantry Leader, 3 LPs

Hortar, Cavalry Leader, 3 LPs

Chnodomar's Comitatus: 4 Equites, Exceptional Morale

Serapio, Suomar and Vestralp's Comitatus: each 2 Shock Infantry, High Morale

Hortar's Comitatus: 2 Equites, Exceptional Morale

Mounted Warriors: 6 Equites, High Morale

Foot Warriors: 24 Shock Infantry, Average Morale

Option to replace up to 8 Shock Infantry with Shieldwall Infantry to represent Burgundian allies

Archers: 4 Foot Archers, Average Morale

Light Infantry: 8 Skirmishers, Average Morale. One unit with Serapio, the other with Hortar

Chnodomar's Comitatus must dismount on the first turn to form 2 Shock Infantry. All of the cavalry have the option of dismounting either as Shock or Shieldwall Infantry replacing 2 cavalry stands with 1 infantry stand. Dismounted cavalry may later mount up again.

Instead of fielding the cavalry and light infantry as separate units they could be combined into units of cavalry with integral infantry.