COMITATUS
Warfare in the Dark Ages
AD 250 - 1100

Scenario 5
Milvian Bridge
AD 312

Historical Background

Maxentius and Constantine had been shadow boxing in the opening years of the 4th century as they vied for power in the West. After the death of the eastern emperor Galerius in 311, their struggle broke out into open conflict. Maxentius (who controlled Italy and Africa) prepared for war, but Constantine (whose power base was Britain and Gaul) moved first.

"Having raised an army amongst the barbarians, Germans, and Celts, whom he had conquered, and likewise drawn a force out of Britain, amounting in the whole to 90,000 foot and 8,000 horse, Constantine marched from the Alps into Italy" Zosimus

In fact Constantine had to leave many of his troops behind to guard the Rhine frontier. His army probably numbered around 20,000 men and included units of newly raised elite auxiliaries (later known as Auxilia Palatina). After crossing the Alps, Constantine defeated a Maxentian army near Turin, assaulted and captured several towns that held out against him and then moved to defeat yet another army at Verona. The Maxentian army at Turin included a substantial number of fully armoured cataphracts and Constantine dealt with them by skirmishing, indicating that he had none in his army.

When Constantine marched on Rome, Maxentius, supported by the Praetorians, marched out to meet him. Maxentius was apparently reluctant to offer battle but he was loosing support and needed to act. He built a pontoon bridge over the Tiber (apparently having destroyed the permanent bridges previously) and formed up in an extended line with his back to the river. Constantine famously had a vision in which Christ came to him and promised him victory if he carried his sign into battle (*in hoc signo vinces*).

Praetorians in scale armour are depicted on the Arch of Constantine fleeing across the pontoon bridge and falling into the water as they are pursued by Constantine's cavalry. This was their last battle. After his victory Constantine disbanded the guard.

"Constantine sent his cavalry against that of the enemy, whom they charged with such impetuosity that they threw them into disorder. The signal being given to the infantry, they likewise marched in good order towards the enemy...As long as the cavalry kept their ground, Maxentius retained some hopes, but when they gave way, he fled with the rest over the bridge into the city. The beams not being strong enough to bear so great a weight, they broke; and Maxentius, with the others, was carried with the stream down the river." Zosimus

The Game

Each army is divided into 3 commands, one of which is commanded in person by the General. Players may choose their troops from the options below and organise them into any number of units

Scale

1 Infantry stand = 500-600 men
1 Cavalry stand = 250-300 men

Maxentian Order of Battle

1 General - Maxentius, 2 CPs

3 Subordinates - 3 CPs each

Choose 12 cavalry (representing 3,000 men) from the following options:

Leaders' Comitati: 3-4 stands heavy javelin cavalry, A Grade, High Morale

Horse Archers: up to 2 stands light horse archers, B Grade, Average Morale

Heavy Cavalry: 2-6 stands heavy javelin cavalry, A Grade, Average Morale

Moorish Cavalry: 2-4 stands light javelin cavalry, B Grade, Average Morale

Clibanarii: up to 4 stands cataphracts, A Grade, Average Morale

Choose 26 infantry stands (representing 13,000 men) from the following options:

Praetorians: 4-9 stands Roman infantry, Armoured, A Grade, High Morale.
option for one Praetorian stand to be a Leader's Comitatus instead of heavy cavalry

Legionaries: up to 6 stands Roman infantry, A Grade, Average Morale.

Auxiliaries: 4-8 stands Roman infantry, B Grade, Average Morale
option to class auxiliaries as javelinmen instead

Auxiliary Archers: 2-8 stands foot archers, B Grade, Average Morale

Notes

The Praetorians are classed as 'armoured' as they are depicted on the Arch of Constantine wearing fairly complete scale armour while others appear unarmoured. If both players agree they may choose to ignore this and drop the 'armoured' classification.

Apart from the Clibanarii, all other troops are assumed not to have significantly higher levels of armour than the norm.

Constantine's men have higher morale as a result of their recent victories

We know Constantine's army contained horse archers from a frieze commemorating the battle on the Arch of Constantine

Constantinian Order of Battle

1 General - Constantine, 4 CPs

3 Subordinates - 3 CPs each

Choose 16 Cavalry (representing 4,000 men) from the following options:

Leaders' Comitati: 4-5 stands heavy javelin cavalry, A Grade, Exceptional Morale

Horse Archers: 2-4 stands light horse archers, B Grade, Average Morale = 500

Heavy Cavalry: 4-8 stands heavy javelin cavalry, A Grade, High Morale = 1000

Light Cavalry: up to 4 stands light javelin cavalry, A Grade, Average Morale = 500

Choose 22 infantry (representing 11,000 men) from the following options:

Legionaries: 6-10 stands Roman Infantry, A Grade, High Morale.

Auxilia Palatina: 2-6 stands Roman Infantry, A Grade, High Morale.

Other Auxiliaries: 4-8 stands Roman Infantry, B Grade, High Morale
option to class 'other auxiliaries' as Javelinmen instead

Auxiliary Archers: 2-8 stands foot archers, B Grade, Average Morale

Terrain

The battlefield should be relatively open and flat with the River Tiber at the rear of Maxentius's side (south side). There is a single pontoon bridge over the river which is otherwise impassable. The Tiber could be represented by the table edge.

If the Tiber and the pontoon bridge are not represented on table, the bridge's location should be marked at the centre rear of Maxentius' table edge.
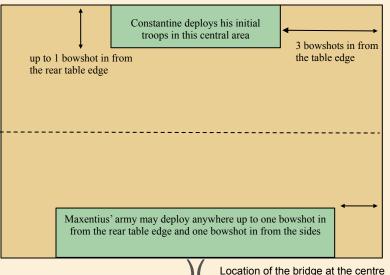
As the battlefield was very close to Rome, the table should represent farmland, perhaps with a few copses, buildings olive groves and vineyards. It could be cut with a few drainage ditches of small streams running North-South and draining into the Tiber. There appear to be no hills in the area of any note.

Most of the terrain features should be decorative rather than having a significant impact on the game.

Deployment

Constantine partially sets up first, deploying one of his commands up to one bow shot in from his rear table edge and three bowshots from the table side edges.

Then Maxentius deploys one of his commands. It may be up to one bow shot in from the north bank of the Tiber (or table edge if the river is not on table) and up to one bow shot in from the table side edges.

Constantine deploys his initial troops in this central area

3 bowshots in from the table edge

up to 1 bowshot in from the rear table edge

Maxentius' army may deploy anywhere up to one bowshot in from the rear table edge and one bowshot in from the sides

Location of the bridge at the centre rear of Maxentius' position

This continues alternately by command with Constantine's second and third commands being able to set up one bow shot in from the table sides.

Maxentius may hold back up to 2 units in reserve off table to his rear. He may either specify their arrival turn in advance (this could be noted paper to keep it secret from the opposing player) or he may wait and send a messenger to call them up. They arrive in march column from the pontoon bridge.

The deployment sequence represents the fact that Constantine was camped north of the river and when he saw Maxentius deploying he then deployed his troops accordingly. The first of Constantine's commands being fixed in the centre of the table represents those close to his camp.

Constantine has initiative on the first turn. Thereafter dice for initiative.

Objectives.

Maxentius needs to stop Constantine from crossing the Tiber while keeping his own army in tact. Constantine on the other hand needs to seize the bridgehead and break through.

Constantine wins if by the end of the 7th turn:

- he has one unshaken unit on the bridge, or within 1 JT of it, or has crossed over to the other side; and
- at least 1/3 of Maxentius' units are shaken, broken or destroyed

Maxentius wins if by the end of the 7th turn if:

- no unshaken Constantinian units have crossed the bridge or are within 1 JT of it; and
- he has the same or fewer units shaken, broken or destroyed than Constantine.

Any other result is a draw.

Special Rules

Units may leave the table voluntarily by exiting over the pontoon bridge. Once they have done so they may not return.

Routing or retiring troops whose path is blocked by the Tiber, will attempt to reach the bridge and cross it.

Roll a D6 for each unit routing or retiring over the bridge. If the result is '1' the bridge collapses and becomes impassable. All troops crossing it that turn are destroyed.

After disbanding the Praetorians, Constantine replaces them with new guards units called the Scholae. These particular troopers are from the Scola Scutariorum Secunda