



COMITATUS

Warfare in the Dark Ages

AD 250-1100

Game Scenario

Adrianople

9 August AD 378

Historical Background

On 9 August 378 the East Roman Emperor Valens attacked a Gothic encampment 15 miles from Adrianople (modern Erdine in Turkey). He was unaware that a large number of other Goths had not yet arrived on the field of battle. As the Roman infantry assaulted the Goths a large force of mounted warriors swept in on the Roman left wing. After driving off the Roman cavalry they crashed into the flank of the Roman infantry who were already engaged frontally. The result was a crushing Roman defeat that left a powerful Gothic presence inside the Empire which endured for several centuries.

For a fuller description of the battle, including my conclusions about numbers and units involved, see my Osprey book *Adrianople*.

The Game

Wargaming Adrianople presents a number of challenges.

Valens believed that there were only 10,000 Gothic warriors while he more men — the elite of the East Roman army. Valens did not know that more Goths would be in a position to hit his flank once he launched his attack.

Fritigern, knew that reinforcements were on the way but did not know how many, nor when they would arrive.

Wargamers with knowledge of the battle will know this and will no doubt take precautions unless the scenario is somehow rigged to prevent it.

One way of doing this is to disguise the scenario. Tell the Roman players that they will be fighting the Battle of Strasbourg so that they do not suspect a cavalry attack on the flank. Let the Gothic players know that the game is Adrianople and that they can expect mounted reinforcements on their right flank but leave it up to the dice to decide when.

Alternatively introduce a card deck of chance events which will determine when and how many Gothic reinforcements will arrive with other historically plausible possibilities such as Roman reinforcements and a pause for negotiations (the latter did occur in the historical battle (see last page).



Orders of Battle

These are the orders of battle I used for the 2022 Society of Ancients Battle Day. The numbers listed below are Comitatus stands, or bases. Each infantry stand represents approximately 500 men, a cavalry stand 250 men. The orders of battle may be altered according to the troops available to players but the ratios of Romans to Goths and infantry to cavalry should be kept more or less the same.

The exact orders of battle are not known but we can deduce a fair amount from the sources. It is probable that both sides numbered around 15,000 men although the Romans may have had more. My orders of battle assume roughly 15,000 on each side, not counting those defending the Gothic wagon laager.



The Romans

Reserve

Valens, General, dice for Command Points (CPs)

Valens' Comitatus 2 Heavy Javelin Cavalry, A Grade, High Morale

Left Wing Cavalry

Victor, Subordinate Commander, 3 CPs

Victor's Comitatus: 1 Heavy Javelin Cavalry, A Grade, High Morale

Equites Promoti: 2 Heavy Javelin Cavalry, A Grade, Average Morale

Comites Sagittarii: 2 Light Horse Archers, A Grade, Average Morale

Equites Dalmatae: 2 Light Javelin Cavalry, B Grade, Average Morale

Infantry

Trajan, Subordinate Commander, 2 CPs

Trajan's Comitatus: 1 unit of 1 Roman Infantry, A Grade, Average Morale

Auxilia Palatina: 5 units each of 2 Roman Infantry, A Grade, Average Morale

Legiones Palatina: 2 units each of 2 Roman Infantry, Armoured, A Grade, Average Morale

Leg. Comitatuses: 3 units each of 2 Roman Infantry, Armoured, B Grade, Average Morale

Archers: 6 Foot Archers in 2-3 units, B Grade, Average Morale.

Right Wing Cavalry

Sebastian, Subordinate Commander, 3 CPs

Sebastian's Comitatus: 2 Heavy Javelin Cavalry, A Grade, High Morale

Equites Comitatuses: 2 units of 2 Heavy Javelin Cavalry, B Grade, Average Morale

Notes:

One of the Sebastian's Equites units may be replaced by Cataphracts (Armoured Shock Cavalry) same grade and morale. Elite Palatine units are A Grade, Comitatuses drawn from the regional armies are B Grade. Morale is lower than the Goths to reflect fighting after a long march from blistering heat. Trajan was "a man of high ambition but a poor general" according to contemporary sources.

The Goths

Tervingi

Fritigern, General, 4 CPs

Fritigern's Comitatus: 2 Shieldwall Infantry, B Grade, Armoured, Exceptional Morale

Tervingi Warriors: 12 Shieldwall Infantry in 2-3 units, B Grade, High Morale

Inexperienced Men: 6 Shieldwall Infantry, C Grade, Average Morale

Archers: 4 Foot Archers, in 1-2 units, C Grade, Average Morale.

Roman Deserters: 4 Roman Infantry in 1-2 units, B Grade, Poor Morale

Carpi: 3 Javelinmen, B Grade, Average Morale.

Greuthungi

Alatheus, Contingent Commander, dice for CPs

Alatheus' Comitatus: 2 Heavy Javelin Cavalry, B Grade, Exceptional Morale

Greuthungi Warriors: 10 Heavy Javelin Cavalry in 3-5 units, B Grade, High Morale

Alans and Huns

Saphrax, Subordinate Commander, 3 CPs

Saphrax's Comitatus: 2 Lance & Bow Cavalry, B Grade, High Morale

Alans: 4 Light Horse Archers, B Grade, Average Morale.

Huns: 2 Light Horse Archers, B Grade, High Morale.

Notes:

The Carpi, who gave their name to the Carpathian mountains are non-Gothic inhabitants of the former Roman province of Dacia. They could be replaced by Gothic light infantry javelinmen or archers.

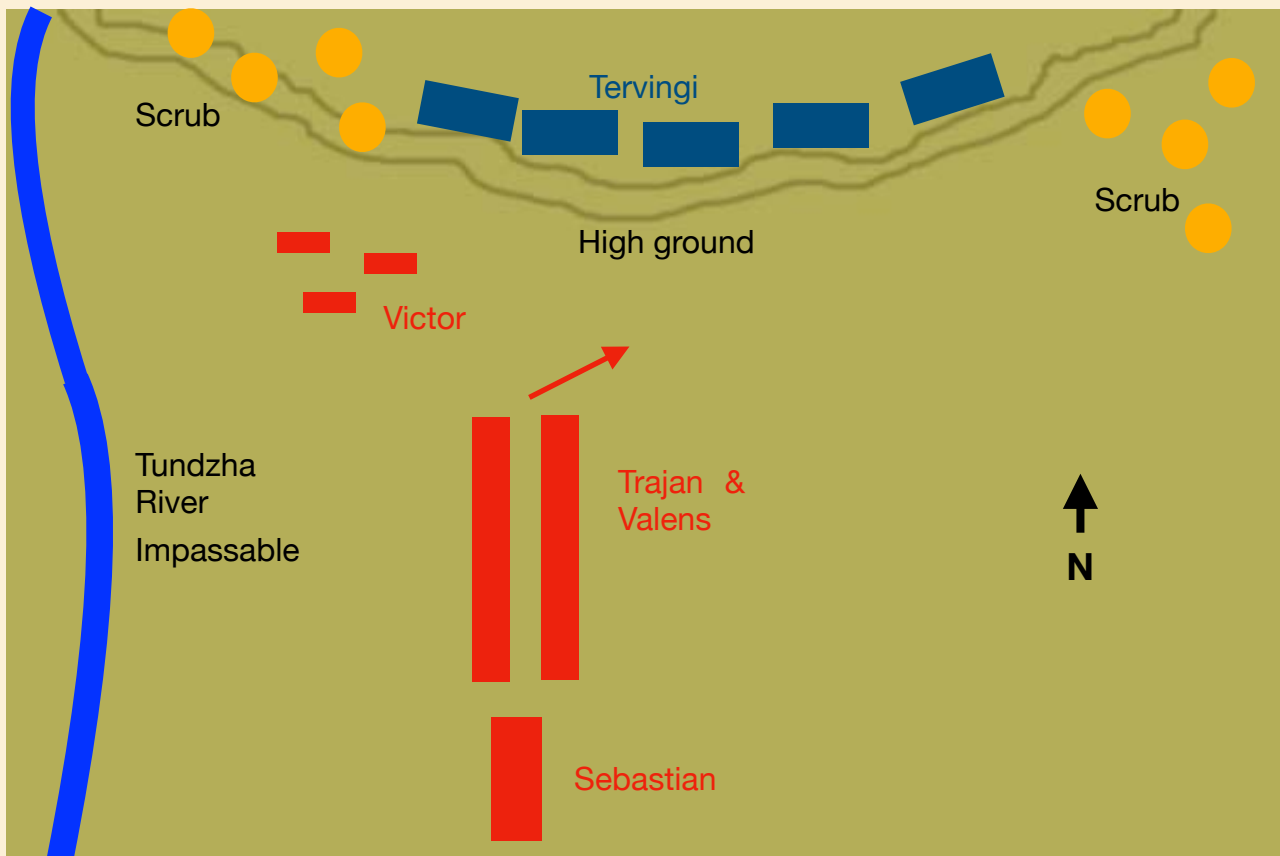
The Goths should have 'advantage of ground' if defending the high ground.



A large number of troops on the Gothic side were deserters from the Roman Army.

After a number of successful actions against the Romans prior to Adrianople, many of the Tervingi had equipped themselves with Roman weapons and armour.

Deployment



The Tervingi are deployed on the high ground, their flanks protected by scrub. The Greuthungi, Alans and Huns are off table. Their arrival determined by chance cards (see below). The Roman infantry are advancing in two columns with the intention of veering off to the left to form two lines facing the Tervingi just beyond bow range. Victor's cavalry are providing a screen to the front left, Sebastian's cavalry coming up behind.

The Card Deck

Prepare 7 cards to introduce variations to the game. Draw a card at the start of each turn, then discard until all the cards have been used or the game ends.

Negotiations x1. All units must remain beyond bow range of enemy for a complete game turn as envoys are sent to discuss peace terms. Any units within bow range must either remain where they are or retire. No shooting or combat allowed this turn. If hand to hand combat has already taken place, discard and draw again.

Unauthorised attack x1. The Roman unit closest to the Goths must advance into hand to hand combat. If several units are equidistant dice to decide which one attacks. The Roman player may choose to have other units of the same command join in the attack.

Roman reinforcements x1. One unit of light cavalry arrives on the Roman table edge. On a D6 roll of 5-6 one heavy cavalry unit accompanies them.

Gothic reinforcements x2. First draw roll a D6. 1-2 the Huns arrive alone; 3-5 all Saphrax's contingent arrives; 6 all reinforcements arrive. +1 to die roll if the 'negotiations' card has been previously drawn. On subsequent draw discard if all Gothic reinforcements are on table. Otherwise: 1-3 Alatheus' contingent arrives; 4-6 all remaining troops of Saphrax and Alatheus' contingents arrive. Gothic reinforcements arrive on the western table edge; or dice to decide if they arrive on the west (1-4) or east (5-6).

Grass fires x1. Fires ignited by the Goths spread to reduce visibility and reduce Roman morale.

Nothing happens x 1.