



COMITATUS

Warfare in the Dark Ages

3rd - 11th C AD

Game Scenario

Name of Battle

Date of battle

This is a simple introductory scenario from the Late Roman period using a relatively small number of troops in a fairly classic infantry v infantry encounter.

Historical Background



In early 377 a band of hostile Goths was encamped by the mouth of the Danube near Marcianople. A hastily gathered Roman army moved out to dislodge them. The battle took place “ad salices” or “by the willows”

The Goths sent out messengers calling for help from other nearby bands and when these reinforcements arrived they left their fortified camp to attack the Romans rather than waiting for the Romans to strike first.

The numbers of troops are unknown but both armies were probably about 5-8000 strong with the Goths having a slight numerical advantage. Both sides were predominantly infantry.

The Romans were a mixed force of eastern legions from Armenia and under strength western units sent from the Rhine frontier. Morale was low since the Easterners were unused to this sort of fighting and the Westerners were not happy about being sent so far from home. They were probably augmented with regional troops (comitatenses) from Thrace and possibly also border troops (limitanei) drawn from the Scythian frontier zone.

Overall command fell to the Western General Richomeres. He was assisted by the able but ageing Frigeridus, also a westerner, and Profuturus and Trajan, both eastern commanders who were described as ‘men of high ambition but poor generals’. Nothing concrete is known about the Gothic forces or commanders, however they were desperately short of food and supplies.

The Goths seized some high ground from which to charge down on the Romans who were deploying defensively in two lines. The Goths moved forward in dense columns, advancing deliberately and cautiously. When close the two lines tried to intimidate each other by shouting war cries, banging on their shields, and insulting their opponents. This gave way to an engagement with missile weapons.

Finally the two line crashed together, each trying to force the other back in a massive shoving match. As so often happened, the first Roman line gave way under the weight of the denser Gothic formation, but the reserves moved up to restore the situation. In this case, the traditionally weak left wing gave way, while the rest of the line managed to hold. The cavalry, small in numbers, hovered on the flanks, seeking opportunities and pursuing fugitives.

The battle went on all day and as evening came on both sides withdrew exhausted and in disorder to their respective camps although the Romans suffered the greatest losses.

The Game



This is not a game of subtle manoeuvre.

The Gothic objective is to break the Roman line while the Romans need to hold their position and minimise their own casualties so that they can continue the campaign.

Scale

1 Infantry stand = 400 men

1 Cavalry stand = 150 men

This could be increased to 1 infantry stand = 300 men (leaving cavalry the same), if players want to use a few more troops.

Roman Order of Battle

Organised into three contingents, the Roman army must include: 4 Leaders, 6-8 Cavalry stands and 8-12 Infantry stands chosen from the list below. Increase infantry maximum to 16 if using 1:300 scale.

Richomeres commands the whole army and his Comitatus. Infantry are split between Trajan and Frigeridus with the Western Auxilia in Frigeridus' contingent. Profuturus' contingent is all the cavalry except other leaders' Comitatus units.

Commander in Chief	Richomeres, Dice for LPs
Cavalry Leader	Profuturus, Dice for LPs, re-roll 5 once only
Western Leader	Frigeridus, Dice for LPs
Eastern Leader	Trajan, Dice for LPs, re-roll 5 once only
Scholae <i>units for each of the leaders)</i>	4 Equites, A Grade, High Morale +2 (<i>forming one-stand Comitatus</i>)
Palatine Cavalry	up to 2 Equites, A Grade, Above Average Morale +1
Scythian Limitanei	up to 4 Light Javelin Cavalry, C Grade, Average Morale 0
Armenian Legions	2-4 Roman Infantry, B Grade, Average Morale, 0
Western Auxilia Palatina	2-4 Roman Infantry, A Grade, Poor Morale -2
Light Infantry	2-4 Archers, B Grade, Average Morale 0
Thracian Comitatuses	up to 4 Roman Infantry, A Grade, Poor Morale -2
Scythian Limitanei	up to 2 Shieldwall Infantry, C Grade, Average Morale 0

The Armenians are classed as B rather than A Grade to reflect their lack of experience in this sort of fighting. The Western Auxilia have poor morale due to a recorded lack of enthusiasm.

The Thracian Comitatuses had suffered several defeats at the hands of the Goths and so are also downgraded.

Both Profuturus and Trajan performed badly on the day — hence the re-roll go 5s when determining LPs. If they roll a 5 again then obviously they are having a good day.

Gothic Order of Battle

Once the Roman Player has chosen his forces the Gothic player chooses 4 stands more than the Roman. The Gothic Army must include 3 leaders, 4-8 cavalry, 12-16 infantry chosen from the following list. Increase infantry maximum to 20 if using 1:300 scale. The names of the Gothic leaders are unknown.

Commander in Chief (CinC), dice for LPs

Two Subordinate Leaders, dice for LPs

CinC's Comitatus: 1-2 Equites, B Grade, Exceptional Morale +3

Cavalry Leader's Comitatus: 1-2 Equites, B Grade, High Morale +2

Infantry Leader's Comitatus: 1-2 Shock Infantry, B Grade, High Morale +2

Mounted Warriors: up to 4 Equites, B Grade, Average Morale 0

Huns or Alans: up to 2 Light Horse Archers, B Grade, Average Morale 0

Foot Warriors: 6-12 Shock Infantry, B Grade, Average Morale 0

Foot Archers: 2-4 Archers, B Grade, Average Morale 0

Roman Deserters: 0-2 Roman Infantry, B Grade, Poor Morale -2

Roman Volunteers: 0-4 Armed Rabble, C Grade, Average Morale 0

Up to 2 units with Average Morale may instead have above average morale (+1)

Roman volunteers include escaped Roman slaves and locals who joined the Goths.

There is evidence of deserters from the Roman army joining the Goths alongside less organised 'volunteers'. The photograph opposite is one of my units of Roman deserters.

There is no evidence for Huns or Alans being present in the battle, however they were operating on the other side of the Danube and shortly afterwards joined in a formal alliance. I have included them, therefore, to offer plausible variety.

The Gothic army may be organised in two or three contingents. The cavalry in one and the infantry in one or two. If the army is organised in only two contingents, the Commander in Chief will directly command only his own Comitatus. The other two leaders will command either the cavalry or infantry contingents.

Any or all Gothic cavalry may dismount as Shieldwall Infantry.



Terrain

The battle can easily be played on a 6'x4' table even with 28mm figures. The Gothic player sets up the terrain choosing from:

- 2-3 gentle hills,
- 1-3 pieces of difficult terrain (woods and/or marsh but no towns)

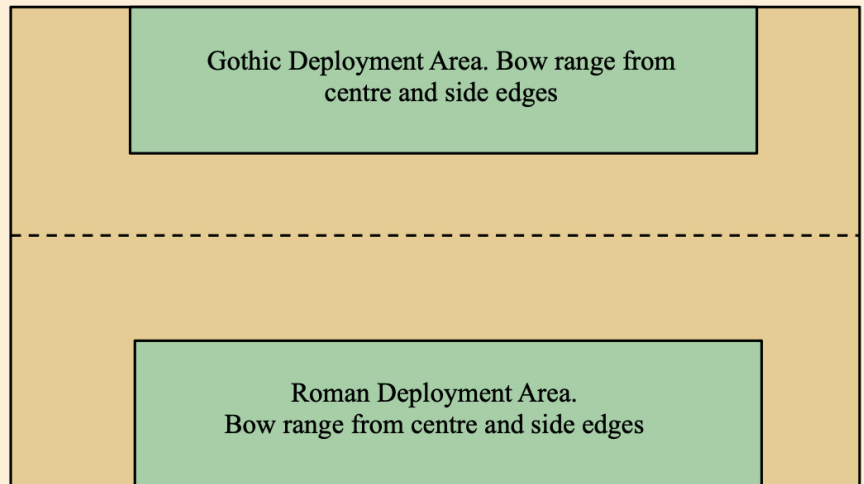
The Roman player then chooses which side of the table he wishes to deploy on, adding one additional terrain piece, from the above list, on his half of the table if he wishes.

One of the pieces of difficult terrain should ideally be a copse of willow trees since the battle took place "by the willows"

Deployment

The Roman player draws a sketch map of his intended deployment and then sets up units which would be visible from the Gothic table edge.

Troops behind hills, in woods or behind other troops, therefore, need not be deployed. Romans may be initially deployed up to bow range from the centre of the table and outside edges. Roman units may be deployed in any normally allowed formation for their troop type.



The Goth player then deploys anywhere up to 12" of the centre and table sides. Then the Roman deploys the rest of his troops, except for those in woods, which only need to be put on table if they move, or shoot, or if enemy come within one javelin throw of the wood edge. The Goths have initiative on the first game turn.

Special Rules

The Goths charged down from high ground giving extra impetus to their charge and they were apparently eager for battle. To simulate this, the Goths get +1 in combat if charging in the first 3 turns of the game. This only counts if charging, not if standing to receive a charge.



Victory Conditions

The Goths win the game if at least 1/3 the Roman stands are shaken or casualties by the end of the 6th turn.

Casualties amongst Limitanei, and Volunteers do not count, as they are 'expendable'.

The Romans win if they suffer fewer casualties than the Goths and not more than 1/4 of their troops are shaken or casualties at the end of the 7th turn.

Any other result is a draw.

