

"In all warfare, the first casualty is the truth"

Caesar (Gallic Wars Book 4), describing the first of his two raids on the shores of Britain, tells of the following incident (somewhat abridged, from Rex Warner's translation).

"One legion had been sent out as usual to bring in grain. The guards on duty at the camp gates reported to me that an unusually large cloud of dust could be seen in the direction in which the legion had gone. I guessed what had happened and ordered the cohorts on guard duty to set out with me. When we had gone forward some way from the camp I could see that our men were up against severe enemy pressure and were only just managing to hold out; the legion was crowded close together and under fire from every side.

"What had happened was this. Since the grain in this area had all been cut except for one place, the enemy had hidden in the woods during the night. Then when our men were scattered and busy reaping, they suddenly burst out on them, killed a few, and threw the rest into confusion before they could form up in proper order, swarming around them with cavalry and chariots.

The tactics employed by these charioteers are as follows. First they drive in every direction, hurling their javelins. Very often this alone throws their opponents into a state of confusion. Then they make their way through the squadrons of their own cavalry, leap down from the chariots, and fight on foot. So in their battles they combine the mobility of cavalry with the stamina of infantry. Daily training and practice have brought them to a remarkable state of efficiency. They are able, for example, to control their horses at full gallop on the steepest slopes, to run along the pole, stand on the yoke, and dart back again into the chariot.

Our men were quite unnerved by this kind of fighting, which was so unfamiliar to them, and I came to their rescue just in time. For the enemy halted when they saw us coming and our men recovered from their terror. However, once this result had been achieved, I decided that this was not the time for provoking battle and joining in a general engagement. I therefore stayed where I was and, after a short interval, led the legions back to camp.

A significant little tale. The first point that strikes one about it is the way in which Caesar needs to tell his readers what chariot fighting and tactics are about; so effectively had this weapon, a battle-winner in the days of the Pharaohs, been eclipsed by Philip of Macedon's brilliant expedient of training professional armies to march in step (vide Arrian's account of the Persian chariot charge at Arbela). But it can occasionally happen, when a weapon vanishes without trace, that the knowledge of the correct counter to it atrophies also, so that its



# The first casualty

sudden reappearance, as on this occasion, produces an altogether disproportionate effect. Another case in point would be the rediscovery by the mediaeval Swiss, of the Macedonian pike Phalanx, which promptly became the dominant infantry arm in European warfare until the coming of age of gunpowder.

The second point to note about Caesar's yarn is the closing paragraph. Why did he decide that this was not the time for provoking battle? This question can be answered by noting the third point about the story; that it makes an excellent subject for a wargame.

The game system used was SPI's PRESTAGS system, in particular the game 'Legion'.

Details of the scenario are as follows:

**Romans** 25SD, 8SK, 1 "1", 2 "2". Deploy: H4 and C4. Stacking: 4. VP77, PL39.

**Britons** 20BI, 2 SK, 12 LC, 6 CH, 2 "2". Deploy: J2 and the adjacent woods.

Stacking: 2. Leadership: Mt. Ex. British deploy second, move first. VP80, PL32.

**Game Length:** 15 game turns.

**Special Rules:** Romans. 8SD and one leader deploy H4, no two SD's allowed stacked with or adjacent to each other. Remainder of the Romans deploy C4; no unit of this force may move until at least one Roman unit has been attacked by at least one British unit. The British use the Chariot rules from the game "Chariot" which are:

#### **General Rule:**

Chariots are vehicle units that can be used by BW, IB, SK and Leader units to increase their Movement Allowance. Chariots move

during the Chariot Phase, which precedes the Fire Combat Phase of each Player Turn and during the Movement Phase.

#### **Procedure:**

To embark on a chariot unit, units must begin their Friendly Chariot or Movement Phase adjacent to a Chariot unit. They are first placed in the same hex as the Chariot unit, without expending any Movement Points and before any movement occurs. The units are then moved up to the Chariot's Movement Allowance. The carried unit forfeits independent movement during the Movement Phase.

At the end of the Friendly Chariot Phase or Movement Phase, units may disembark from Chariot units by merely being placed in any non-enemy occupied hex adjacent to the Chariot unit. Units may embark and disembark in the same Chariot Phase or Movement Phase. Disembarked units are liable to normal Defensive Fire.

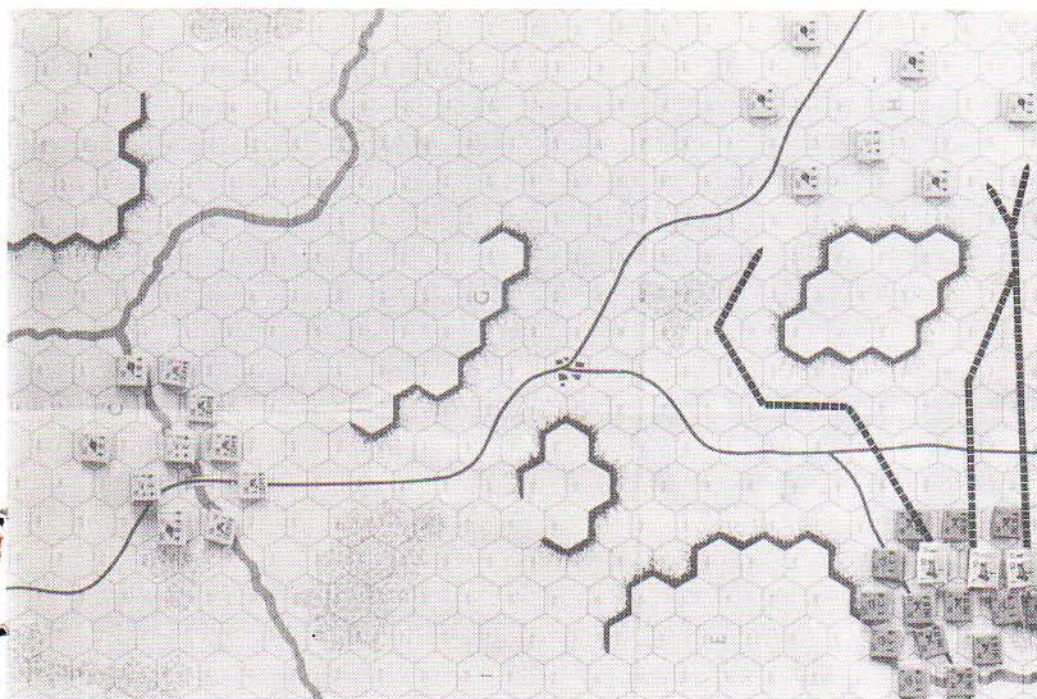
#### **Cases:**

**1.1** Chariots have no direct effect upon combat they are modes of transportation for BW, IB, SK and Leader units.

**1.2** The Chariot Phase in no way alters the Sequence of Play; it precedes the Fire Combat Movement/Melee Combat/ Disruption Recovery Sequence.

**1.3** Units on Chariots do not have to disembark to take part in Fire or Melee Combat. They must, however, await the appropriate segment of the Sequence of Play to take part in combat.

For instance, if a BW unit moves on a Chariot during the Chariot Phase it could



A possible opening move in the new scenario.

## ●●● A MODIFICATION TO SPI's LEGION BY J.HIND

take part in Fire Combat immediately after Chariot movement. An SK unit could move with a Chariot during the Chariot Phase, fire during the Fire Combat, and continue moving with the chariot during the Movement Phase. Or an SK unit could move during the Chariot Phase, move again during the Movement Phase, and then Melee Attack.

**1.4** The one Movement Allowance of a Chariot (nine movement points) is the total the chariot has available for both Movement Phases of each Player-Turn. Therefore, if a Player uses six Movement Points of the Chariot in the Chariot Phase he would have three Movement Points left for the Movement Phase. Or, a Player could use all of the Movement Points in one, or the other phase.

**1.5** Chariots are 'stopped' by undisrupted Enemy fire units Zones of Control only for that phase e.g. a Chariot that moves adjacent to an Enemy fire unit in the Chariot Phase could then move elsewhere in the Movement Phase unless, of course, it was disrupted by Defensive Fire during the Fire Combat Phase. Chariot units must also cease movement for that Player Turn upon entering a stream hex.

**1.6** Units may embark only on to Friendly Chariot units. There is no way to 'capture' Enemy Chariots.

**1.7** Chariots follow the rules for disruption recovery.

**1.8** Only one unit may be embarked on a single Chariot unit at any one time. For these purposes Leader units (CM) do not

count: i.e. Leader units may be carried by Chariots freely in addition to any other single unit. Chariots themselves do not count for stacking limitations.

**1.9** At the end of a given Friendly Chariot or Movement Phase, Chariot units may not be stacked with any other units, except units embarked on the Chariots, or Leader units.

### Victory Conditions

Britons must win a Substantive Victory. Romans must achieve Decisive Victory, with control of hex H.

The Chariot counters need to be borrowed from the game 'Chariot', or else home-made. So the scenario also gives a good opportunity to test the interchangeability of the games of the PRESTAGS series. (To be strictly accurate the author borrowed his chariots from the previous game 'Armageddon'. Chariots are allowed to carry one passenger unit each, plus any number of leaders; and the odds column on the CRT is shifted two places to the right whenever a chariot attacks after a straight charge of at least 4 hexes of clear terrain. To offset this advantage, chariots need a great deal of room, and are limited to one per hex, plus passengers).

The initial deployment of the pieces will be clear enough to anyone who tries it on the 'Legion' board. The Seventh Legion is out foraging; the British are about to spring their ambush; Caesar is marching up in the distance. Note his lack of cavalry. The Marian Legion never thought much of cavalry, and none had been brought across the channel.

Let any reader who owns 'Legion' try the above scenario (he can easily make his own chariots) and see if he comes to the same conclusions as I did. The British have a walk-over win. The trap having once been successfully laid, they can cut the VII Legion down before the latter have time to form testudo, and achieve a comfortable victory before the Roman reinforcements arrive. This victory will not be in any sense decisive; more on the lines of a successful guerilla ambush. But the British have no need of a strategic win. The small Roman army is on a hostile shore, separated from even the comparative safety of a restive Gaul, by the English Channel; this latter being subject to the weird and utterly (to any Mediterranean mind) incomprehensible phenomenon of tides. These, indeed have just served to wreck much of the Roman fleet at anchor, when a storm blew up. Winter is approaching; no grain has been brought from Gaul.

In the circumstances, all the British need do is sit tight on their grain, murder every forage party they can lay their hands on, and wait for Caesar to swim back to Gaul in disgrace.

Caesar, on the other hand, has an army already made jumpy by the shipwreck of the fleet, and which now imagines chariots galloping toward it from behind every bush. Small wonder that he decides that this is 'not the moment to provoke battle', to say nothing of his infantry's inability to catch the British cavalry and chariots, even if they did run after them. Small wonder also that hardly any British tribe was fool enough to send hostages to him after his return to Gaul the chiefs must have collapsed laughing.

In the circumstances, it is a striking tribute to Caesar's power at writing propaganda, that the Roman Senate should award this fiasco with a public thanksgiving of 20 days. Some people will believe anything. It is also an important matter for the later history of the Empire, that Caesar was too busy covering up for himself, and the Senate were too ignorant of military matters, for anyone to point out the significance of the lack of Roman Cavalry, and the use to which a few heavily-armed cohorts could have been put. All this would come home to roost at Adrianople. It is significant, though, that for the second raid of 54BC. Caesar took great care to bring some cavalry with him, building large numbers of special transport for the purpose. In terms of the game, only cavalry has the ability to pin the British chariots, and prevent them from employing the retreat before combat rule. In the absence of Roman cavalry, the British can spring their ambush, and then retreat indefinitely if they wish from Caesar and his reinforcements, allowing the latter to rescue whatever remains of the ambushed Seventh Legion, and then leaving him nothing practical to do beyond "lead the legions back to camp".

*Chariot rules in "Chariot" differ greatly from the original rules in "Armageddon".*