

## **69 AD: The Year of the Four Emperors—The Battles of Albintimilium**

“The squadrons of the Treveri charged the enemy incautiously, and found themselves encountered in front by the veteran troops (the Othonian praetorians), while on the flanks they were also annoyed by showers of stones from the rustic band (the slingers from the fleet), who were skillful throwers, and who mixed up as they were among the regular soldiers, whether cowardly or brave, were all equally bold in the moment of victory. The general consternation of the Vitellians was increased by a new alarm as the fleet attacked the rear of the combatants. By this movement they were hemmed in on all sides, and the whole force would have perished, had not the shades of night checked the advance of the victorious army, and covered the retreat of the vanquished...” (From Tacitus Book II Chapter 14 of the Histories relating his account of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of Albintimilium)

*Scenario Note: An interesting and unusual pair of battles on the Riviera seacoast is presented here between the Othonian and Vitellian forces from the Roman Civil Wars of 69AD—an unstable year thrown up in the wake of the Emperor Nero’s suicide of mid-68 AD. The year 69AD featured the reigns of no less than four separate recognized Roman Emperors. The first three of these noble Romans: Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, served only short months in the imperial office before their demise by suicide or murder. The last, Vespasian, went on to found the Flavian dynasty which ruled the empire for the next 27-odd years.*

### **Historical Background to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battles of Albintimilium:**

*Situation Note: Otho had sent a naval expedition that included urban cohorts and praetorian detachments from Rome to harry the Ligurian and Narbonensis coastal towns that had declared for Vitellius. The Vitellian general Fabius Valens detached about 2600 men (all auxiliaries) from his column to meet and defend against the maritime threat.*

“Eight squadrons of (Vitellian) horse and probably three-quarters of the foot were sent to protect Forum Julii. The rest augmented by the (local militia) cohort of Ligurians and “500 Pannonians not yet under the standards” (raw recruits), were ordered to deal with the Othonians. The two sides made contact in a relatively small plain on the coast, probably near (modern-day) Menton (some six miles west of Albintimilium). The Othonian line faced west: on the foothills on the right-wing they positioned a mix of marines and local inhabitants (perhaps pressed, perhaps volunteers). The (Othonian) praetorians occupied the center, on the flat ground between the hills and the sea. And for their left wing they used their ships with their prows turned toward the shore (the opposite of normal practice). Since there is no mention of the urban cohorts, they may have been held in reserve, but they were more probably embarked on the ships. They would have made real the threat to the Vitellians’ (right) flank. For their part, the Vitellians positioned the cohort of Ligurians on the foothills, to make up their left wing, drew up the Tungrian (auxiliary infantry) cohorts they had with them in close order on the flat ground. But since their strength lay in cavalry, they made the Treveran horsemen their front line (the Treveri were considered among the best cavalry in the Roman army). Apparently overconfident the horsemen led the attack incautiously, and paid a heavily for their mistake. With trained soldiers at their front, a rain of missiles (slingbolts and lances)

coming in from their left-flank (from the hills), and the fleet making threatening moves on their right, the Treveri lost their nerve and turned tail. It sounds suspiciously like a formula, but since Tacitus asserts that the entire force could have been destroyed, had not darkness fallen, the cavalry's retreat may have thrown their own (Vitellian) infantry into disorder too."

"Refusing to admit defeat, the Vitellians sent for reinforcements from Forum Julii. Then they renewed the offensive some days later, and this time they caught the Othonians off guard. Victory had made the latter careless, and the Vitellians overran their outposts easily, penetrated their camp, and even caused a panic among the men on the ships. The praetorians managed to rally on a nearby hill, however, and eventually to go over to the attack. The prefects of the Tungrian cohorts made a valiant attempt to hold their ground but, like the Treveri in the first engagement, they were overwhelmed by a rain of missiles and forced to retreat. This time, however, their cavalry saved the day, encircling and wiping out the most enthusiastic of the Othonians who came up in pursuit. Tacitus gives the impression that the two sides counted this a stalemate and so withdrew, the Vitellians to Antipolis (modern-day Antibes on the French Riviera coast).....and the Othonians to Albintimilium (modern day Albenga) in Liguria (northwestern Italy).....And so the (Othonian) maritime expedition died aborning. Though the Othonians managed to delay Valens march (over the Alps and into Italy) briefly, they did nothing to alter the outcome of the war. As Tacitus goes on to say, the only effect of their (coastal fleet) raids on events elsewhere was to inspire the procurator of Corsica, Picarius Decumus, to make a pointless attempt to swing the island over to the Vitellians. He was murdered for his pains by the local inhabitants. They had no wish to be drilled for, let alone be caught up in, a civil war"... (The above selection is from "69AD: The Year of the Four Emperors" by Gwyn Morgan pages 105 & 106)

#### **Terrain Set-up: See Terrain Special Rules:**

(Use virtually the same setup of terrain for BOTH BATTLES the only exception is that the two Othonian Camp tiles listed below **are not placed** on the map in the first battle):  
x35 Hill Tiles: I1, I2, I5, I6, I7, I9, H1, H2, H4, H5, H6, H8, G1, G2, G5, G6, F3, F5, F6, E3, E4, E5, E6, D3, D4, D5, C2, C3, C4, C5, B2, B3, B4, A2, A3  
x3 Broken Ground: F2, B1, I8  
x9 Sea Coast: See Terrain Special Rules: A12, B11, C11, D10, E11, F11, G11, H11, I12  
x13 Sea Hexes (see Special Rules): A13, B12, C12, C13, D11, D12, E12, E13, F12, G12, G13, H12, I13 (sea hexes are those beyond the sea coast line/impassable except for ships)  
x2 Othonian Camp Tiles (setup only for the second battle & see special rules): E9, E10

#### **Initial Setup for the First Battle of Albintimilium:**

Othonian Force: (Use Gray or Red Romans)

X1 Auxillia: E3

X3 Light Infantry: E4, E5, F9

X2 Light Slinger (Marines see special rules): E6, D5

X3 Heavy Infantry: (Praetorians see special rules): E7, E8, E9

X3 Ships each with one Medium Infantry Aboard (see special rules): D11, E12, F12

X1 Leader: E8 (Suedius Clemens)

Vitellian Force: (Use Gray Romans or Carthaginians)

X1 Warrior: B2

X2 Auxillia: B3, B4

X1 Light Infantry: B5

X2 Medium Infantry: A6, A7

X4 Heavy Cavalry: B7, B8, B9, B10

X2 Medium Cavalry: B6, A9

X1 Leader B8 (Julius Classicus)

### **War Council for First Battle:**

Othonian Force:

Leader: Suedius Clemens//4 Command Cards

Vitellian Force:

Leader: Julius Classicus//5 Command Cards// **Move First**

**Victory for First Battle:** 5 Banners for each side—scored in the normal fashion, however the Othonian Player receives and retains 1 banner if one of their ship units with a Medium Infantry unit still aboard occupies hex A13. Additionally the Vitellians score and retain 1 Banner if their units currently occupy **both** hexes I10 & I11.

### **Special Scenario Rules for 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Battles of Albintimilium:**

**Command Rules:** A Leader attached (stacked with) a friendly unit may cancel one sword hit on the unit **in lieu** of canceling a retreat hit. A unit involved in close combat with the support of a Leader may only count one helmet hit amongst those rolled to inflict a hit on an opposing unit.

**Outflanking---***This is an easy way of introducing facing and flanks to the game with little fuss—it can be retrofitted to other scenarios where appropriate:*

A unit is said to be “Outflanked” if it is surrounded **in all** six adjacent hexes by either enemy units, or hexes adjacent to an enemy unit. The presence of friendly units does not negate an “Outflanked” situation **in any way**. Units on the board edges (and not surrounded by six adjacent hexes) **cannot** be “Outflanked”.

**Effects of being Outflanked:** “Outflanked” units when battling back roll only half the normal number of dice they would be normally entitled to rounded up—to a maximum of only two dice—“Outflanked” units when battling back **never** hit on helmet rolls even if supported by a leader. A unit’s “Outflanked” situation is judged at the instant it battles back.

**Othonian Marine Light Slingers:** The Othonian Light Slingers are Marines put ashore from the Othonian controlled Roman Misenum fleet, when firing their missiles at Vitellian foot units at a range of two hexes or less they hit on swords—in battle back only they also hit on swords regardless of opponent. Othonian Marine Light Slingers located in a hill hex may fire over units of either side located in clear hexes. Ordered Marine

Light Slingers may even missile fire at adjacent enemy units in lieu of attacking them in close-combat. Othonian Marine Light Slingers may evade through a friendly unit, as long as the friendly unit is located in the first hex of their evasion path.

**Othonian Praetorians:** The Othonian Heavy Infantry represent detachments from the Elite Praetorian Guard: the so-called ‘flower of Italy’. Such units always ignore the first sword hit inflicted upon them in close-combat and battle-back.

**Othonian Ships each with one Medium Infantry Aboard (the Urban Cohorts)**

Ships of the Misenum fleet carrying the Othonian Urban Cohorts out on the Mediterranean Sea are represented by three Othonian ship units that initially start in hexes D11, E12, F12 in both battles. Each of these ships is assumed to have an Othonian Medium Infantry unit aboard at the start of each battle scenario.

These sea-based forces caused the Vitellians some trouble in the first battle when they tried to advance near the sea and probably were also used to threaten the retreat route of the Vitellian cavalry. Each of the ship units and troops aboard is represented in the game by **four** blocks of the appropriate Type (Medium Infantry) representing the Othonian Medium Infantry unit aboard as ‘cargo’ and a single ship model representing the ship and its remaining crew—“The Conquest of the Empire” game by MB/Eagle Games has some plastic models that could be used to represent the ships. Use the following rules for these ship units and the initially embarked medium infantry—in general, for game purposes, except where noted below, the ship units are treated as, and are ordered & move as Medium Infantry units, but with a missile capability.

- a) The Othonian Ship units may not enter seacoast hexes. Although they can unload their embarked Medium Infantry units into seacoast hexes (see below). The movements of the ship units are confined to the sea hexes listed above in the terrain set-up.
- b) The Othonian Ship units and any units they carry aboard as ‘cargo’ cannot be attacked at all—not even by Vitellian missile fire. Othonian Ship units, and their embarked Medium Infantry **may never** close-combat attack.
- c) Othonian Ship units that still have a Medium Infantry unit aboard may missile fire if ordered—their missile range is three hexes. Missile fire is conducted per the normal rules, but may be shot into adjacent seacoast hexes from the ships. Ships without the Medium Infantry aboard may still be ordered to move, but may not missile fire.
- d) The Othonian Medium Infantry units that start initially aboard the ships stay with the ship unit they are aboard as ‘cargo’ until unloaded. Ship units may unload the Medium Infantry into an adjacent vacant seacoast hex. This can only be done if the ship is ordered via a card and remains stationary without missile fire—Place the Medium unit in the adjacent seacoast hex—it may not battle on the player-turn of its landing. Once ashore the Othonian Medium Infantry units operate normally as regular Medium Infantry, they can now attack in close-combat and be attacked by the Vitellians and may not re-embark. Obviously the initially embarked Othonian Medium Infantry units (representing the Othonian Urban Cohorts) cannot be disembarked into sea hexes. Once ashore the Othonian Medium Infantry units have no missile capability.

- e) Othonian Ship units and any embarked units carried as ‘cargo’ may not be ordered by play of Line Command, Double Time, or any Leadership cards. Disembarked Othonian Medium Infantry units may be ordered by such cards once ashore.
- f) Othonian Ship units, with or without embarked Medium Infantry can offer support to Othonian units on adjacent seacoast hexes. (Exception: see surprise rules in the second battle).

**Special Terrain Rules for 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Battles of of Albintimilium:**

Seacoast Hexes: Othonian ship units may not enter seacoast hexes. All other units/leaders may conduct ordered moves into such hexes, but only if ordered from an immediately adjacent hex. Seacoast hexes do not otherwise affect line of sight, retreats, momentum combat, close-combat/battle-back, or evasions.

Sea Hexes: Sea Hexes as noted in the terrain setup are totally impassable for all units/leaders in the game save the Othonian ship units and any embarked units aboard them.

**Initial Setup for the Second Battle of Albintimilium:**

Othonian Force: (Use Gray or Red Romans)

X1 Auxillia: E4

X3 Light Infantry: D9, H6, E5

X2 Light Slinger (Marines see special rules): E6, F6

X3 Heavy Infantry: E9, F7, H8

X3 Ships each with one Medium Infantry Aboard (see special rules): D11, E12, F12

X1 Leader: F7 (Suedius Clemens)

Vitellian Force: (Use Gray Romans or Carthaginians)

X1 Warrior: B6

X2 Auxillia: B3, B4

X1 Light Infantry: C5

X4 Medium Infantry: B7, B8, B9, B10

X3 Heavy Cavalry: A8, A9, A10

X2 Medium Cavalry: A7, A11

X1 Leader: A9 (Julius Classicus)

**War Council for Second Battle:**

Othonian Force:

Leader: Suedius Clemens

2 Command Cards initially rising to 5 Command Cards by the end of Othonian Player-turn 5 (see special rules).

Vitellian Force: 5 Command Cards// **Move First**

Leader: Julius Classicus

**Victory for Second Battle:** 5 Banners for both sides —scored in the normal fashion — but also the Vitellians score and retain 1 Banner if their units were the last to enter both Othonian camp hexes. If they lose control by Othonian re-entry to either camp hex they lose the Banner until they possibly regain control. Additionally the Vitellians score and retain 1 Banner if their units currently occupy **both** hexes I10 & I11.

**Special Scenario Rules for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Albintimilium:**

**Vitellian Surprise Attack Effect:** The Othonian Player starts the game with only 2 Command Cards—At the end of his first, third and fifth player-turns he draws an additional card to eventually bring his hand to five cards for the rest of the scenario. Othonian units (including ship units) may not support each other to prevent retreats during the first three Vitellian and the first three Othonian player-turns.

**Othonian Fleet Panic:** Othonian ship units may not be ordered **at all** during the first four Othonian Player-turns of the scenario. The ship units must simply stay in their starting hexes: D11, E12, F12 with their Medium Infantry units aboard until the Othonian 5<sup>th</sup> Player- turn when they can be ordered normally.

**Special Terrain Rules for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Albintimilium:**

*Othonian Camp Hexiles:* The camp tiles have no special combat effects other than to a) block line of sight, and also b) Vitellian cavalry units attacking/battling-back into or out of the camp hexes do so at 1 dice less than normal. Note that the Othonian Camp tiles are not on the map in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle.

**Battle Strengths Note:** These two fights represent quite small-scale historical engagements when compared with the vast bulk of other C & C Ancients scenario situations. The opposing forces probably only had in the area of 2,000 to 4,000 effective combatants per side in each battle.