

The Defeat of Varus: Teutoburger Wald 9 AD-The Main Ambush/Battle

“...And when the mighty Emperor Augustus learned of the disaster that had befallen Varus he ‘rent his garments and mourned greatly’, Roman historians tell us, and left his beard and hair uncut and uncombed for several months, and would thump his head against the doorposts of his palace crying out in dismay, ‘Varus, Varus, give me back my legions!’...”

Semi-Historical Background:

“After several hours of marching, during which renewed rain was their main harassment, the Romans approached a ridge of high wooded ground, located between what are now the villages of Driburg and Bielefeld. They made steady progress, the German (hit and run) attacks were less frequent than on the previous day, and hopes began to rise that before night they would be out of the forest and close to safety.”

“Moving up a narrow valley, the head of the (Roman) column came to a dead halt. The way was barred by a high barricade of tumbled tree trunks, some of them bound together with leather thongs. Thorn and other bushes were interspersed with rocks and made an inextricable mass, yards deep. On either side the hills were steep. Even if engineers could hew a passage through it or if foot soldiers could scramble up the cliffs and around it the advance was doomed to a dangerous delay.”

“News of the development leapt like wildfire down the line and with it came greater dismay. Orders were issued to abandon the wagons and ballistas and set them afire. When some of the soldiers witnessed this action they broke rank and rushed to the wagons to retrieve some of their personal valuables, gold and silver ornaments, money, and the like.”

“Arminius (the German Supreme Chief) saw that his great moment was at hand and ordered a general attack. Ear-splitting war cries burst on the ears of the weary Romans, and tribesmen in undreamed of nightmarish numbers came upon them from all sides. But even in such terrible hours Roman legions did not perish easily. Ranks were tightened, walls of shields faced the enemies, and the Roman javelins whistled in the air. Up to the shields swarmed the tribesmen, and bitter hand to hand fighting occurred everywhere. Desperate, the Roman commanders ordered various units to break rank and counterattack the Germans from the flanks. It was in vain. They were wiped out, and more and more tribal warriors, sure that the joys of Valhalla awaited those who would die, stormed like waves of the sea against the embattled Romans.”

“Commanding mounted squadrons, Arminius, fighting with a ferocity equaling that of his followers, time and again charged the Romans, killing many of them with his own hand. Numonius Vala and his thousand Roman cavalry fled pell-mell down the ravine, hoping to reach (the Roman post at) Aliso by some roundabout way. Arminius had foreseen some such possibility. Numbers of his own cavalymen and tribal marksmen were ready, held in reserve in the forest. Vala and his riders, unable to keep together, bewildered by woods and swamps, were slaughtered to the man.”

“Then orders for a retreat down the ravine were issued in the Roman ranks. Whether these came from Varus is not known, but the withdrawal started. It was the beginning of the end. Cheering Germans hacked their way right through the ranks, splitting the legions into encircled units. The disciplined strength of the massed Romans was hammered into the mud. Most of the Romans fought to the last, but others threw away their shields, and shouting in panic, sought to flee where escape was impossible.”

“A javelin whirred through the air and hit Varus in the throat. He fell to the ground. He must have remembered the screams of the tortured, for he flung himself on his own sword point. Many of his officers chose death the same way. By nightfall eighteen thousand Romans had been killed or wounded.....”

“Two thousand Roman legionaries, possibly those in the front ranks near the barricade, succeeded somehow in fighting their way out of the trap. They reached the western fringe of the forest...and established camp on a small hill, some eight or ten miles from Aliso. No help came from Aliso where some Roman forces were stationed. These were pinned up for a time by tribal contingents obeying orders from Arminius.”

“Massed on their small hill, the Romans faced the end bravely. It came a dawn in one overwhelming attack. No Roman survived, but dead tribesmen lay thick around their position. (The Three Roman Legions) Phollux, Claudia, Victrix were no more. The plot so carefully developed by the towering Cherusci prince (Arminius) had resulted in one of the most shattering victories ever achieved over Roman troops. That night great bonfires blazed in the forest.” (The above is a semi-historical, but obviously somewhat fictionalized account of the end of Varus’ Legions. It appeared in the book Battles and Bloodshed by Albert Orbaan in 1960 and was published by Scholastic Book Services)

Terrain Setup: (see Special Terrain Rules)

X19 Hills: I2, H1, H2, H5, H8, G1, G2, G5, F1, E2, D2, C3, C4, C6, C8, B3, B4, B6, B9

X4 Broken ground: C2, B2, A6, I5

X3 Hills/Barricade: **F2** (face G3/F3) **E3** (face F3/E4) **D3** (face D4/E4)—Use Ramparts

X4 Marsh: D8, D10, H7, H7

X27 Forest: A1, A4, A8, A9, A12, B8, B10, B11, C10, D6, D11, D12, F5, F8, F10, F12, G4, G7, G9, H3, H4, H9, H12, I7, I9, I12, I13

Initial Set-up

Roman Army:

X9 Heavy Infantry (all 5 blocks): F4, F5, F6, E3, E10, E11, C5, D7, D9

X2 Medium Cavalry: E6, E7

X1 Light Archer: D5

X1 Auxillia: F9

X2 Light Infantry (Baggage & Camp-followers, see special rules): E8, E9

X1 Leader: F5 (Varus)

German Tribal Alliance:

X10 Warrior: E3, C3, H3, H5, H8, F12, B10, B8, B6, A7

X3 Elite Warrior (use Medium Infantry—see special rules): A4, H6, H9

X3 Medium Cavalry: B3, I5, H11

X3 Light Infantry: F2, B7, G11

X3 Auxillia: B9, D3, H7

X2 Leaders B3 (Arminius) H6 (German Tribal Chief)

War Council:

Roman Army:

Leader Varus

2 Command Cards rising to 4 Command Cards (see special rules)

German Tribal Alliance

Leader: Arminius

5 Command Cards

Move First

Victory: Germans: 8 Banners scored in the usual way...Romans: 10 Banners—scored in the usual way plus the Romans get Banners for exiting units/leaders from a mapedge (see special rules).

Special Scenario Rules:

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.

Arminius may cancel **both** a sword and a retreat hit if stacked with a friendly unit.

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. Units supported by Arminius may count up to two helmets however. Varus may only support a Roman unit he is stacked with in combat—he cannot support adjacent units.

Roman Command Cards: The Roman Player starts the game with two command cards—he draws an extra command card at the end of his 2nd Player-turn bringing his hand to three cards, and he draws another extra command card at the end of the 4th Player-turn bringing his hand to four cards for the remainder of the scenario.

Line Commands in the Scenario: No more than **six units** can be moved by play of a single Line Command Card in the scenario for both sides Roman and German.

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.

Retreat and Evasion & Player Orientation: (these rules were added due to the unique layout, ferocity, & character of this battle)

a) **Retreats:** Units in this game, if retreated due to a flag result, only retreat one hex if infantry, or one or two hexes (owner's choice) if cavalry units per flag result inflicted and not ignored or canceled. Retreats may be **in any** direction (if a two hex retreat, however it must end 2 hexes away) as long as the retreat route does not pass adjacent to an enemy unit—**units may never retreat through or into hexes adjacent to enemy units.**

b) **Evasion:** Roman units in the game **may never** attempt evasion if attacked in close combat. German units may evade **in any** direction if allowed to evade per the rules, but the hexes they evade into or through may not be adjacent to Roman units--German units may never evade through or into hexes adjacent to enemy units.

Leaders if they evade/retreat and survive, evade simply into the nearest hex occupied by a friendly unit (owner picks if two or more friendly units equidistant). They may evade through hexes adjacent to enemy units. (or even **through enemies** see standard rules).

c) **Orientation:** The Left and Right sections of each Player depend on where he is sitting. Its suggested that the Roman Player sit on the side closest to the "A" hexrow—the German Player close to the "I" hexrow.

German Elite Warriors: All German medium infantry units are treated as Warriors for **all purposes**, they are Elite Warriors—in addition they receive one extra dice **the very first time** in the scenario they battle back or engage in close combat as long as the unit still has three or more blocks.

Roman Baggage Train and Camp Followers: The two Roman Light Infantry units represent the Roman Baggage Train and Camp Followers. These units are treated as Light Infantry in close-combat, but may not missile fire and have a normal ordered move of only one hex (unless double-timed) rather than two hexes.

Special Terrain Rules:

Forest Hexes: Use Normal Rules, **however German units** entering such hexes via ordered moves **may attack** during the same player-turn.

Hills & Hill/Barricade Hexes: Use Normal Rules for Hills, however the Hill/Barricade Hexes are treated as BOTH Hills AND Ramparts for combat purpose—They reduce the dice for both sides as if they were hills and provide the normal rampart benefits to a defender located on the hextile who is attacked through the 'teeth' of the barricade. Cavalry units may not attack or conduct an ordered move through the 'teeth' in either direction. Ordered moves through the 'teeth' in either direction by foot units must start in an adjacent hex & end in the very next hex—a unit cannot battle after an ordered move through the 'teeth' in either direction.

Marsh and Broken Ground: Use normal rules

Exiting Roman Units/Leaders from the Map:

Roman units/leaders located on any mapedge hex numbered "1" (in other words A1, B1 , C1 through to H1 & I1 on that mapedge) may exit the map if ordered to move in lieu of taking a normal on-map move. Each Roman unit/Leader exited in this way scores the Roman Player 1 Banner.