

The Battle of the Longanus River: Hiero of Syracuse vs. The Mamertines circa 265 BC

Historical Background of the Mamertines:

The Mamertines were a group of mercenary soldiers mainly from Campania in Italy who had originally been hired by the Greek tyrant of Syracuse Agathocles to fight in his many wars and plundering raids. By treachery this gang of freebooters seized the city of Messana in Sicily and killed or expelled some of its citizens and took prisoner the wives and families of their victims. They also divided among themselves the ownership of the land and any remaining property within the city. The mercenaries then assumed the name Mamertines naming themselves after the Oscan war god Mamers.

Naturally these newly empowered and enriched cut-throats did not turn into the best of neighbors simply because they had gotten control of a wealthy city. The Mamertines plundered well into Carthaginian and Syracusan territory and dominated many of the towns and cities close by Messana, They were known for their fierceness in battle and even defeated the main Syracusan army on one occasion when Hiero, at the time Syracuse's foremost general, put some unreliable mercenaries that he wished to part company with in the foremost Syracusan ranks. The Mamertines slaughtered Hiero's disposable mercenaries, but the rearward Syracusan citizen troops managed to march safely away from the fight.

In about 265BC (some sources state that the battle was up to a few years earlier) Hiero had managed to train up his forces to a level where he felt confident that he could face the Mamertines and their head general Kion in a decisive campaign.

Historical Background of the Battle of the Longanus River:

“Hiero bided his time and with unceasing patience drilled his burghers from a militia into a regular force... The opportunity was favorable. The pick of the Mamertine troops happened to be in the interior of the island and Hiero, no doubt, hoped to surprise Messana in their absence. His plans were frustrated by the vigilance of the Mamertines. The garrison of Messana were able to repel Hiero until the main army returned by forced marches. Hiero retreated as if towards Syracuse; then changing his march he suddenly threw himself against Mylae, a city held by the Mamertines to the southwest of Messana. This he took by storm and drafted its garrison... into his own army. The speed of his movements seems to have paralyzed the Mamertines, for they made no effort to attack Hiero in the rear and let him storm unmolested Ameselon the most southerly of their strongholds. It lay between Cantoripa and Agyrion and was intended to overawe both towns. Hiero razed the fortress to the ground and divided the lands round it between the two cities that it had oppressed. He drafted the garrison into his own army and then made himself master of Alesa an important town on the western frontier of Mamertine territory. ... The fall of Alesa was followed by that of Abakainon and Tyndaris, two towns between Alesa and Mylae and in a few weeks the Mamertines found themselves reduced to Messana and the lands round it. Even here they were not safe, for Hiero's force swollen by the garrisons of the conquered cities to ten thousand foot and fifteen hundred horse was now marched straight at Messana. The Mamertines could put into the field but eight thousand infantry and a small body of horse.”

“Kion, who was in command of the Mamertine forces consulted his soothsayers as to the outcome of the battle. They replied that he would pass the night in the enemy’s camp. Kion believed the answer to mean that he would capture the enemy’s camp and equipment. He ordered his army to cross the Longanus and attack the Syracusan position. Hiero, had, however, in his ranks two hundred Messana refugees, who had escaped from the town...Hiero sent them with four hundred picked men to seize a hill called Thorax with orders to fall on the enemy’s rear, when an opportunity presented itself. He himself made a frontal attack on the Mamertines as they crossed the river. The latter fought with their accustomed courage and might have repulsed the Greek army, but for the sudden attack of the refugees. The Mamertines, taken entirely by surprise, were seized with a wild panic. Some indeed stood their ground; but worn out by some hours of fighting, they could not withstand the onslaught of a fresh force animated by a furious hatred. They were all cut down. The six hundred then placed themselves across the Mamertine line of retreat and a massacre ensued....Kion the leader was taken wounded but alive into Hiero’s presence, The latter ordered his doctors to attend to Kion’s wounds and had a bed prepared for him in one of his own tents, thus fulfilling the soothsayer’s prophecy...With careful treatment Kion might have recovered. But as he lay in Hiero’s tent, some of the general’s servants brought in a number of horses that they collected on the battlefield. Among the horses was the charger of Kion’s son. Judging from this that his son had perished, Kion in an agony of grief, tore off his bandages and died of a hemorrhage.”

(The above selection is from C. A. Kincaid’s book “Successors of Alexander the Great”)

Aftermath: For Hiero the Longanus was a great boon to his career as the general and tyrant of Syracuse—he proclaimed himself a king after this great victory, he and his successors ruled Syracuse down to 214 BC. The Mamertines for their part, with the loss of their army, their general, and key fortresses were first driven into the arms of the Carthaginians and then into a close alliance with the Roman republic. In 264 BC a Roman consular army arrived at Messana and managed to defeat both Hiero’s Syracusan army and the Carthaginians in twin battles outside the city. The confrontation at Messana was the opening event in the 1st Punic War (264-241BC) between Rome and Carthage.

Terrain Setup: (see Special Terrain rules for the Fordable Longanus River below)

X13 Fordable River: F1, F2, F3, G4, G5, G6, G7, G8, F8, F9, F10, F11, F12

X5 Hills: I4, I5, H10, H11, G11

X2 Forest: I1, H1

X2 Syracusan Camp: A5, A6

Initial Setup:

:Syracusan Army: (Use Greek, Carthaginian, or Eastern Kingdom Blocks)

x1 Heavy Cavalry: C11

x1 Medium Cavalry: C2

x3 Auxillia (see Peltest Special Rule): C9, B8, B3

x2 Light Infantry: B2, C10

x1 Light Slinger (Elite see Special Rule): C4

x3 Medium Infantry (See Hoplite Rules): C5, C8, G12
x2 Heavy Infantry(See Hoplite Rules): C6, C7
x1 Picked Heavy Infantry (5 blocks See Hoplite Rules): H11
x1 Leader:C6 (Hiero)

Mamertine Army: (Use Roman or Carthaginian Blocks)

x1 Light Cavalry: F4
x2 Auxillia (see Peltest Special Rule): F8, G9
x2 Light Infantry: F3, E10
x2 Medium Infantry (See Hoplite Rules): F6, F9
x3 Heavy Infantry(See Hoplite Rules): G5, F5, F7
x1 Leader: F5 (Kion)

War Council:

:Syracusan Army:

Leader: Hiero

5 Command Cards (1 Double Time Card & 4 Random Picks)

Move First

Mamertine Army:

Leader: Kion

3 Command Cards (to 4 Cards end Turn 2 see special rules)

Victory: 6 Banners—The Mamertines receive one banner for each Syracusan Camp hex occupied by one of their units—if the unit moves off the camp hex—or is forced off they lose the Banner—all other Banners for enemy units/leaders are scored in the normal way.

Special Scenario Rules:

Command

A Leader attached (stacked with) a friendly unit may cancel one sword hit on the unit **in lieu** of canceling a retreat hit.

Hiero 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, however if Hiero is supporting the unit up to two helmet hits may be counted.

Special card Command Rules: The Mamertine Player starts with a 3-card hand—he draws an extra card at the end of his 2nd Player-turn bringing his hand to 4 cards for the remainder of the scenario. The Syracusan Player may not use a “Double Time” card for his very first Command card play. A maximum of five foot units can be ordered by play of a single Line Command Card in the scenario.

Special Troop Rules:

Hoplites: Both sides Heavy & Medium Infantry are assumed to be heavily armed and armored Greek warfare fighting style Hoplites—therefore such units always ignore the

first sword hit inflicted upon them, except if the unit is in an outflanked position in which case such hits are applied normally.

Peltests: **All** Auxillia are assumed to be Peltests—therefore they are allowed to evade per the normal rules if attacked by Heavy or Medium Infantry only in close combat. Treat as normal Auxillia otherwise.

Elite Slingers: The Syracusan Slinger unit is made up of elite mercenaries. This unit hits on swords when missile firing against enemy light foot. It also hits on swords in battle-back only.

Messana Exiles and Picked Syracusan Troops: The Syracusan units that start in hexes G12 & H11 represent Hiero's flanking force of elite troops and the highly motivated exiles from Messana. These units may always ignore the first Flag result inflicted upon them—but if they do retreat they retreat toward the Syracusan map-edge (row "A").

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 or impassable terrain 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. Outflanked hoplites regardless of whether they are attacking or defending do not ignore the first sword hit inflicted upon them.

Special Terrain rules:

Fordable Longanus River: Units in a Fordable River hex have a "normal" maximum of three dice in close-combat and battle-back. Syracusan Cavalry units attacking in close-combat (not battle-back) from a clear hex to a river hex do so at +1 normal dice. Note that units attacking, or battling back **into** a fordable river hex from a non-river hex in this scenario suffer NO penalty whatsoever, and in the case of the Syracusan cavalry do so at a bonus when attacking. Missile units firing from a fordable river hex do so at one dice only regardless of whether or not they have moved. Ordered units cease their move when entering a fordable river hex.