

MODELING THE PHALANX

by Brady Severns

In the first expansion for *Command & Colors: Ancients*, we are introduced to a small variety of new unit types: Bow-equipped Light Horse Cavalry; a form of Camelry; and Light Balistas. It was with some irony, I thought, that the one formation that we associate with Classical Greek warfare, and of Alexander the Great and his successors in particular, does not appear as a unit type per se—the Phalanx.

The Phalanx does distinguish itself in several Greek vs. Roman scenarios through the use of some Special Rules. Basically, if Greek Heavy Infantry unit is conducting a Battle Back against a Roman Heavy or Medium Infantry unit unsupported, the Greek unit rolls 3 dice instead of 5.

Personally, I find this simple abstraction somewhat disappointing and lacking an illustrative quality. That is, the difference between the units is *reflected*—accounted for—but is not *illustrated*. The scenario Special Rules for the Phalanx fall under the title Roman Tactical Flexibility. And the sum of Roman Tactical Flexibility over the Greek Phalanx is, in game terms, just two fewer dice on an unsupported Battle Back. That reflects a difference.

But, in the game, we have Elephants that behave differently depending upon the units they battle against. We have rules for Auxilia, which exhibits remarkable tactical flexibility: it can throw javelins at opponents and deliver a punch in Close Combat. They can't evade battle as well as their lighter comrades, but they can advance across the board quickly. Warriors have special rules covering relative fearlessness and their ability to move quickly into combat.

In short, the rules for Elephants, Auxilia, and Warriors illustrate in detail how they are all different from other types of mounted and foot units in a similar class. The Special Rules covering Roman superiority over the Phalanx may accurately reflect the difference, but it isn't very illustrative.

What I would like to see and hope here to present are rules for a Phalanx unit which *illustrate* the difference between the Roman Legion and the Greek Phalanx. When you and an opponent battle with your opposing legions and phalanxes, you should discern a difference in how they fight and handle results—even if the outcome could be reflected as easily with just two fewer dice in an unsupported Battle Back.

What is a Phalanx? A phalanx is a dense bloc of Greek Hoplites, a kind of armored warrior wielding a long spear (in the range of 18 feet), and protected personally by a small shield (to accommodate handling of the spear), a helmet and greaves for the legs. He is protected tactically by the dense formation he shares with other hoplites and the discipline and coordination they have in using their spears and shields to form an impenetrable and immovable wall when defending and an unstoppable, bristling force when attacking.

The phalanx was noted for its ability to remain steadfast in the face of an onslaught. Its spears kept enemy troops at bay while on defense and dislodged them and broke them when they attacked. It is difficult for a man to fight an opponent who is a dozen or more feet away while he can still stab and thrust at you with his own weapon.

What made the pike most fearsome was its ability to fix an enemy unit in place while cavalry forces swept behind the enemy to attack them from the rear. Caught between such a hammer and anvil, the enemy would typically lose the will to resist and would be crushed between the coordinating phalanx and cavalry.

When not engaged but in the line, the Phalanx would use its forest of spears to break up incoming flights of arrows and javelins. As well, their armor would stand a good chance of protecting the hoplites from any missiles that were not deflected.

While a phalanx had some autonomy as a unit, it worked best in coordination with other phalanx and mounted units. The phalanxes together would form a wide front across the battlefield which light missile-armed troops could filter through to screen the front or the flanks of the advance as needed. When left or caught alone, it could be surrounded and destroyed piecemeal as the ring of spears were dispersed in a defensive circle rather than concentrated on a narrow front.

These three traits—the ability to resist attacks; the ability to dislodge and pin enemy forces, and the ability resist aerial harassment—are the hallmarks of a disciplined phalanx. In the rules that follow, these traits are illustrated by the ability of the phalanx to strike simultaneously against an attacking enemy as well as never retreating; the ability to strike hard while attacking by throwing more dice in Close Combat than all other units but other phalanxes and Roman Legions; the ability to resist missile attacks by ignoring a forced retreat from Light units.

But they also reflect the weakness of the phalanx if caught alone. While unsupported, their ability to Battle Back simultaneously with an attacking force is lost. And, ironically, a phalanx will take hits for each retreat result it cannot negate through support, leaders, and combat against hard-hitting medium and heavy enemy troops. This is especially true if the phalanx finds itself in inhospitable terrain: any space on the ground that is not level and clear.

Players should, under these rules, receive an understanding about how a phalanx fought and defended itself. They are meant to be no more complex to remember than the rules covering Auxilia or perhaps Elephants. The rules for the Phalanx allows opportunity for careful players to take advantage of the strength of the formation (it's ability to remain steadfast when necessary and take advantage of supporting formations) and clever players to take advantage of some inherent weakness (it's inability to retreat when desirable and weakness in rough terrain).

THE PHALANX:

An Unofficial Unit Variant for Commands & Colors Ancients: Expansion 1 by Brady Severns

Type: Heavy Foot Unit

Class: Represented by Greek, Macedonian, and Successor Heavy Infantry Foot units. Both sides must agree to their use before the start of a scenario. To help remind you of their differing effects from other Heavy Infantry units, note them with a Special Unit marker.

Move: One hex.

Range Fire: No **Fire Dice:** N/A

Close Combat: May engage in Close Combat.

Close Combat Dice: A Phalanx rolls 5 dice in Close Combat and scores/receives hits as Heavy Infantry.

May Ignore: One Flag result from all Light units. A Phalanx also ignores one Flag result if supported by two or more adjacent, friendly units. And it may also ignore a Flag result if a Leader is attached to the unit.

Close Combat Special: A *defending* Phalanx unit which is *also supported* modifies Close Combat in the following manner: First, the attacking unit and defending Phalanx roll their allotted dice for Close Combat (after adjustments for card bonuses, terrain penalties, etc.) *simultaneously* and set aside all hits and Flag results. Remove any Flag results that can be ignored by the opposing units (for Lights vs. Phalanx, Leaders, support, full-strength Warrior) as well as Sword hits that can be ignored by attacking Elephants. Second, the remaining hits and Flags from each side cancel each other out, one-for-for one, with Flag results cancelled last. (Hits and Flags may cancel each other so long as the sequence is followed.) Finally, apply any remaining hits and/or Flags against the opposing unit. (Note: unless all results cancel each other out, only one side will have any remaining hits and/or Flag results to apply after Close Combat.)

Evade Close Combat: No

Momentum: Advance (and Battle again with Leader)

Hexes Retreated for Each Flag: 0 (None.)

Special Rules: A Phalanx *never* retreats, whether supported or not. Instead, Flag results which the Phalanx cannot ignore (in excess of: support and Leaders; 1 Flag from Light units; cancellation from a simultaneous throw) count as *hits* against a Phalanx. Also, a Phalanx which enters any terrain hex other than Clear cannot receive support while it remains on the hex. It may still offer support, however.

COMBAT EXAMPLES:

Ranged Combat Examples:

- An activated Persian Bow unit that did not move fires at an unsupported Greek Phalanx. The bow unit throws 2 dice and rolls 1 Red and 1 Flag. Being a Heavy Foot Unit, the Phalanx takes one hit. The Flag is ignored due to the ability of the Phalanx to ignore one Flag result from all Light units.
- Same situation as above: activated Bow unit which did not move fires at the Phalanx, rolling 2 dice. The result is 2 Flags. The first Flag is ignored due to the Phalanx's ability to ignore 1 Flag result from Light units. The second flag, however, cannot be ignored and the Phalanx takes a hit since a Phalanx never retreats and takes hits for Flag results it cannot ignore. If the Phalanx were supported or had an attached leader, it would have ignored another retreat and taken no hits.

Close Combat Examples:

- A Persian full-strength Medium Warrior Unit attacks an unsupported Phalanx with an attached Leader. Because the defending Phalanx is unsupported, even though there is a Leader attached to the unit, the Phalanx does not receive the benefit of rolling simultaneously with the attacking unit in Close Combat. Combat takes place normally. The Warrior Infantry rolls 4 dice and scores: 1 Red, 1 Sword, and 2 Flags. The Phalanx ignores 1 Flag (for the attached Leader) and takes 3 hits. Since the Phalanx was not eliminated and cannot retreat, it may Battle Back with 5 dice.
- Same situation as above, but the defending Phalanx is supported. Now the Phalanx receives the benefit of rolling simultaneously with the attacking unit in Close Combat. The Warrior Infantry rolls: 1 Red, 1 Sword, and 2 Flags. The Phalanx rolls 5 dice and scores: 1 Blue, 1 Helmet, 1 Sword, 2 Flags. The Warrior ignores 1 Flag and the Phalanx ignores 2 (supported and attached Leader). The Warrior totals 2 hits (1 Red + 1 Sword) against the Phalanx's 3 hits and 1 Flag (1 Blue + 1 Helmet + 1 Sword + 1 Flag, which is applied last). Two of the 4 scores from the Phalanx cancel the Warrior's 2 hits. 1 Sword and 1 Flag result are applied to the Warrior unit which cannot be ignored.
- Next turn, the Phalanx advances and attacks the Warrior unit. The Phalanx is attacking, so Close Combat takes place normally with Phalanx attacking and applying its results first. (No simultaneous throws.)

THE PHALANX FAQ:

Question: How does a Phalanx move? How does Terrain effect it?

The Phalanx moves just like any other Heavy Infantry Foot unit. It may enter and fight in the same terrain as Heavy Infantry and suffer Terrain Effects the same way. But it may not receive support in any Terrain hex it occupies except Clear. However, it may still offer support to other adjacent, friendly units, even if it isn't in Clear Terrain. *Unlike other Heavy Infantry, the Phalanx will never retreat.*

Question: How is Close Combat resolved against a defending, unsupported Phalanx?

Close Combat is resolved against the Phalanx as if the attacker were attacking a Heavy Infantry Foot unit. Except Flags that the Phalanx can't ignore are treated as hits.

Question: If a defending Phalanx is NOT supported; doesn't retreat; and it isn't eliminated, will it Battle Back?

Yes. It will Battle Back like any other Heavy Infantry unit.

Question: How is Close Combat resolved against a defending, supported Phalanx?

First, roll the Battle Back dice for the Phalanx simultaneously with the dice thrown by the attacking unit.

Next, discard any face from the throws that the opponents can ignore (for support, Leaders, etc.). Then, the remaining hits and Flags from the Battle Back throw cancel any hits (including Flags) from the attacker's throw. (Flags are cancelled last.)

Finally, the results will either be a) no result on either unit—all hits and Flags cancel one another; or b) the defending Phalanx will take hits (because it didn't secure enough hits and Flags to cancel the attacker's results and it never retreats; or c) the excess hits and Flag results from the Phalanx's Battle Back will be applied on the attacking unit.

Question: Can a Phalanx receive the Leader Bonus?

Yes, if the friendly Leader is attached or adjacent to the Phalanx, it will receive the Leader's bonus in Close Combat.

Question: What does a Phalanx ignore, again?

One Flag result from all Light units. (Important to remember in Ranged and Close Combat.) Additional Flags may be ignored for attached Leaders and support from two or more adjacent, friendly units.

Question: And what can hit a Phalanx?

Red faces, Swords, Helmets (if a Leader is attached or adjacent to the attacking unit) and any Flag result the Phalanx can't ignore.

Question: How does a Phalanx retreat?

A Phalanx *never* retreats. It takes hits for Flag (retreat) results it can't ignore instead. 1 hit for each Flag.

Question: May an attacking Phalanx take a Momentum Advance? And conduct a Bonus Battle with an attached Leader?

Yes to both.

Question: How are attacks by a Phalanx against a defending Phalanx handled?

If the defending Phalanx is supported, it will make a simultaneous Battle Back throw against the attacking Phalanx. If the defending Phalanx is not supported, it will be treated like any other Heavy Infantry vs. Heavy Infantry attack.

Question: How are Leader casualties handled with a Leader attached to a Phalanx?

If the Leader is attached to a defending Phalanx that is also supported, the Phalanx will benefit from the Leader's bonus during the simultaneous throw. If the Phalanx receives any hits after the simultaneous throw, the attacker rolls to see if the Leader was a casualty as normal.

If the Leader is attached to a defending Phalanx that is unsupported or the Leader is attached to an attacking Phalanx, Leader casualties are calculated normally if the Phalanx receives any hits.

Question: How is the First Strike card handled against an attacking Phalanx?

If the Phalanx is supported, the attacking Phalanx will benefit from a simultaneous Close Combat throw with the First Striking defender. If the attacking Phalanx is not supported, the defending unit will strike first with its Battle Back dice with no simultaneous throw from the attacking Phalanx.

Question: How do Elephants fight against a Phalanx?

Elephants will attack a Phalanx with 5 dice and Battle Back, if eligible, against a Phalanx with 5 dice. They will score hits on Red, Swords, and Flags and re-roll Sword hits for additional hits. If the Phalanx forces the Elephant to retreat, the Phalanx is subject to receiving Rampage attacks.