

A tale of the fall of the west

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On 11/9/8 Gary and I played a very enjoyable game of WAB. Neither of us had played WAB in over a year or thereabouts, and decided a game was definitely well overdue.

We decided to play ancients, with me using my Germanic barbarians and Gary his Arthurian Dark Age forces. At the last minute, I heard Gary was going to try out a Warlords army from the Fall of the West (late Roman period) supplement. So I hastily re-jigged my army list so we could have a fully in-period game. My force represented a “Central Barbarian” army, possibly representing an Ostrogothic force from somewhere in the region of modern day Hungary.

The Warlord armies of the period, were a combination of Roman troops (or Romanised barbarians) with additional barbarian troops. This ability to pick the “best of both worlds” for this army list has in part, I think, contributed to some of the criticism of this supplement by some of the WAB fraternity. However others hold the supplement in high regard. Since neither of us had used it before, we thought we would give it a whirl and decide for ourselves.

To battle...

The Warlord commander found himself in possession of a large hill in the left of his deployment area upon which was an enclosed village. From the village, a road led away down the hill and straight over the battlefield to the other side. Part way down this road another smaller road joined the main road at its side. The entrance to this smaller road was flanked by two dominant trees, which were to have interesting effects in the battle. This small road led in a straight diagonal line across the length of the battlefield to the opposite corner where it ended in a barrow mound surrounded by a ring of trees. Down the Warlords right flank a small stream crossed the battlefield. Beyond this stream, was a large hill upon which was a mix of dense terrain including trees, rocks and marshes, and in the midst of all, was a small stone circle.



In front of the village the Warlord deployed a unit of cavalry led by a Regales. Holding the ridge line of the hill were two Roman foot units. Between the hill and the stream were two barbarian warbands, backed by the Warlord and his unit of heavily armed and armoured cavalry. In front of these warbands was a unit of steppe nomad horse archers in skirmish array. Another unit of nomads was positioned on the far side of the stream.



Facing the Warlord, across the central open area of the battlefield, the Ostrogoths lined up their warbands and cavalry. The four Ostrogothic infantry warbands were deployed in a line in the centre, with the two larger warbands in the middle of the line, flanked by the two smaller warbands. A cavalry unit was positioned on each end of the line on either flank of the battle line. Two foot skirmish mobs screened the centre and left of the barbarian line.

The scenario played was a standard pitched battle, and the skirmishers on each side advanced first before battle was properly joined.

As the dice tumbled to see who went first, the Ostrogoths smiled as they received the initial impetus.

On the Ostrogoth right, the cavalry advanced cautiously in support of the two right hand warbands who peeled off towards the right to head off the Regales led Warlords cavalry holding the village. The skirmishers threw their javelins at the nomad horse archers who had ventured a little too close and dropped a couple from their saddles, as the rest of the centre and left flank advanced cautiously initially.



The Warlords forces continued the skirmish exchange at the front, whilst their warbands advanced in support. The Romans holding the hill stayed where they were, and the Regales cavalry tried to manoeuvre in response to the approaching three units, as they found their way impeded by the large trees as the road t-junction.

The next main events were triggered by one of the Warlords barbarian warbands failing its warband check and surging forward towards the Ostrogoth skirmishers, who promptly fled, but this had pulled the warband out of position. They were subsequently charged by the Ostrogoth warband who had failed their warband check in turn. They were supported by their second skirmisher mob.

The Warlord moved his other warband up in support of this melee, which turned out fortuitous as his warband lost the combat but luckily held their nerve, under the gaze of the Warlord. This stalemate allowed the Warlords 2nd warband to hit the Ostrogoth warband in the flank in the next turn.



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Over on the other flank, after more difficult manoeuvring, the Ostrogoths left their smaller warband to contend with the Regales cavalry, whilst the larger warband returned to the centre of the battlefield to threaten the Romans holding the hill, and the cavalry rushed to aid the beleaguered left warband. Meanwhile the Ostrogoth generals warband continued its gradual move through the centre of the battlefield, uncertain which flank to support, and wary of exposing its flanks.

The Ostrogoth warband predictably lost the combat and were routed and ran down. This panicked the supporting Ostrogoth cavalry on their left flank, who, over several subsequent turns, failed to rally and fled the field.



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A lot of chargers now occurred. The Ostrogoths warband charged the Regales cavalry, the returning Ostrogoth cavalry who had come from their right flank engaged the previously victorious warlords warband, and the second main Ostrogoth warband charged the Romans on the hill who had adopted shieldwall formation. The Ostrogoth general found his warband uncertainly positioned in the middle of the field, with combat occurring all around him. However the prospect of a face off with the Warlords cavalry loomed.



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The above combats were not initially clear cut and were fought over a couple of rounds. The Regales cavalry were defeated, routed and cut down by the Ostrogoth warband. The Ostrogoth cavalry defeated the Warlaords warband, and their pursuit found them colliding with the fleeing nomads who had come off the worse in the skirmish melee. The Ostrogoth warband came off worst in their assault on the Romans holding the hill. (I had half expected this but had been surprised how close they could have won it. On the initial charge they managed to miss with all 15 attacks needing 5+ !!. Only their Optimates leader kept them in the fight. Some crazy dice-luck of this nature occurred throughout the game, affecting both sides).

The final situation found most of the victorious Ostrogoth units now out on both flanks, with the exposed generals warband now threatened on multiple sides by various foes. The Warlord threw his all at Ostrogoth general, but they held on round after round undaunted thanks to the presence of their accompanying pagan priest who filled the warband full of hate for their foes, and they would not break (keeping an unmodified 10 for break tests!).

The Ostrogoth forces on the flanks sensed the danger their general was in and headed back to help him as quickly as possible.

As the night fell on the battlefield, bloody slaughter was ongoing in the final fight, with neither side giving quarter or ground, but the oncoming Ostrogothic forces on both flanks, returning to the fray, could have tipped the balance.

In the end we called the game a “winning draw” to the Ostrogoths, who, although their general was in a difficult position, help was on the way, and a count up of casualties caused to this point, and a rough estimation of table possession, had the Ostrogoths ahead on victory points.

A very enjoyable game, where as usual luck played its part, and saw another province of the Roman west, fall to the barbarians!

Some observations from the game...

I expected the nomad horse archers to be more effective, but they only really got involved at a skirmish level, and I don't think played to their potential.

Gary's Regales cavalry, tied up 3 of my units who could have been more useful elsewhere in hindsight, but those trees at the t-junction made for some interesting manoeuvring!

Gary seemed to greatly miss the drilled ability of his Romans troops.

The Ostrogoths were equipped with angons; a heavy throwing spear much similar in effect to the Roman pilum, and this gave the Ostrogoths quite a punch in melee.

I didn't miss the usual frenzied troops the barbarians can field from earlier lists.

As for the supplement itself, it seemed to play well within itself and the opposing forces appeared balanced. One oddity I noticed was that there did not appear to be any option to equip any barbarian units, skirmishers or otherwise, with bows. This may perhaps have been historically based if such barbarians were not known employ this weapon on the battlefield?