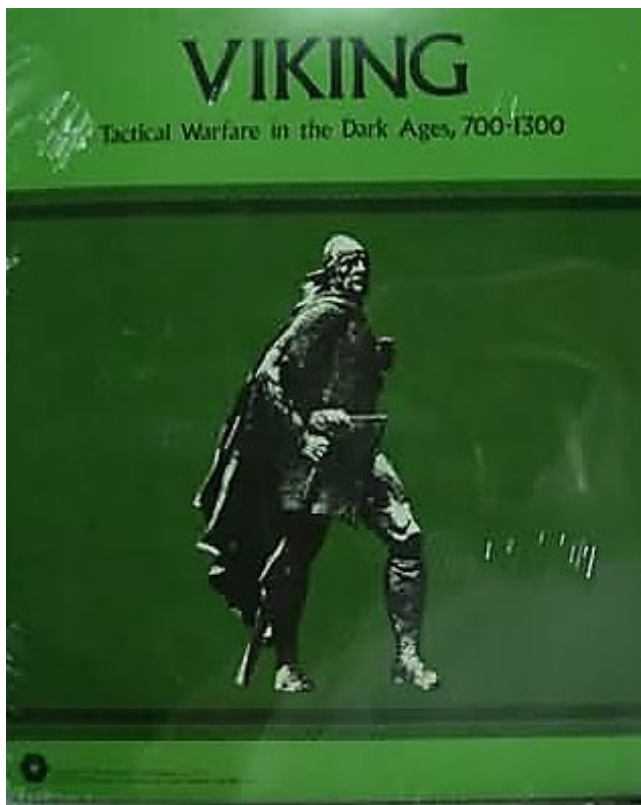

Viking, SPI 1975

Replay by Clayton Martin

Viking– SPI Publications



*This game, covering tactical warfare in the Dark Ages, 700 AD to 1300 AD, offers nineteen scenarios covering the 'devolution' of warfare from large armies to individual groups. **Viking** is warfare in the 'barbarian' period, covering the Vikings, the Mongols, and Arabs and early Franks.*

*This game was part of **PRESTAGS** package of games, designed to use the same rules, but offer exclusive rules for the particular period. **PRESTAGS** was the acronym for Pre Seventeenth Century Tactical Game Series, and it predated – or jump started – the concept of the quads. **Viking** replaced the earlier game, **Dark Ages**, which had been released in 1971. The differences were minor, and the enjoyment remains in this game.*

Clayton is going to take us back to those barbaric times and remind you of just how exciting all these scenarios are! Enjoy! - RHG

JUNK? GOLD!

I recently discovered this game in a box labeled "Husbands Junk" - which was strange as I found no Chinese ship in there? However, I did find **Viking**, from the **PRESTAGS** series by SPI. I once owned all the SPI **PRESTAGS**, but only **Viking** has survived the 50 years of house moving. After a read of the Standard Rules, I quickly recalled how it all worked.

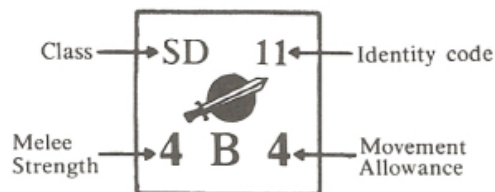
Rules Overview:

A fairly simple mechanic of fire, move, defensive fire, then melee. Only 'fire' units - ones with spears, bows, slings, etc. – may *Defensive Fire*, and the range is really short – 1 or 2 hexes. But if you fire you cannot fire in the next player turn - which calls for some planning to keep units in reserve for defense fire. *Only these fire units exert a ZOC* (even if fired). OK, still straightforward.

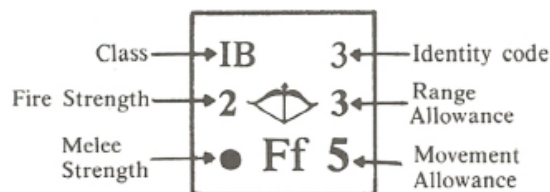
Leaders add the flavor. You need them to move at full speed (unless mounted exempt), add combat factors to melee, plus units stacked with Leaders prevent Disruption - more on this later.

More Rules

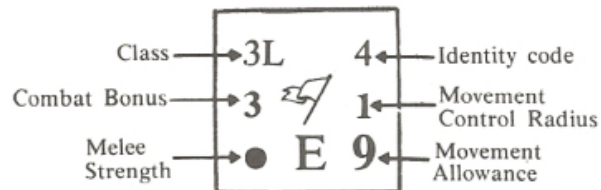
[3.31] Sample Melee Unit



[3.32] Sample Fire Unit



[3.33] Sample Leader Unit



[Editor's Note – elaborating on Clayton's thumbnail sketch of the rules:

- *Disrupted Units may not Initiate Combat, Fire, or Move!*
- *When Disrupted units are attacked, the Attacker gets a +1 Die Roll Modifier.*
- *If Disrupted units suffer another Disruption, they are eliminated.*
- *Disrupted units return to normal at the End of the NEXT Player Turn.*
- *If Defender Eliminated in Melee, the Attacker may advance into vacated hex.*

Class ratings – the big letter in the bottom row.

Militia and Spearmen are Class A.

Infantry troops - Swordsmen, Axmen, Barbarians are Class B

Cavalry are Class C.

Foot troops with Fire Weapons – Bows and Slings – are Class Ff.

Mounted Fire Units – Cavalry with Bows – are Class Mf.

Leaders are Class E and never suffer Disruption.

Main reason Class matters: Stacking, and Melee.

UNIT STACKING:

Class D and E may stack with any Class

Class Ff may stack with Class A or B.

Class Mf can stack with Class C

Effect on Melee Defense Strength

Attacker (right) / Defender (below)	MS/MI	AX/SD	MC
MS/MI	x1	x 1/2	x2
AX/AD	x1	x1	x 1/2

ELEVATION EFFECTS:

Class A and B attacking from Ground to Slope or Slope to Hilltop ½ Melee Strength

Class A and B attacking from Slope to Slope ¾ Melee Strength

Class A and B on Slopes do NOT Disrupt from Melee or Fire!

Realize we are seeing the bones of later greats in this simple game! Ranged Fire, Differentiated Weapons, Leadership, LOS. Their roots are in the first SPI Tactical Series Games in 1969-1971 (Renaissance of Infantry, Centurion, Dark Ages), were burnished in PRESTAGS 1975, and culminated in Terrible Swift Sword in 1976 and GBACW in 1980! Gaming evolution in action!

Below is a quick rules reference chart to help you follow the action.]

SPI PRESTAGS

RULES REFERENCE SHEET

Sequence Of Play:

Chariots Move (Any unused points can be used in Movement Phase)

Fire Combat (with Class Ff and Mf units that did not fire last player turn)

Movement (Full MP if unit within Leader Command Radius, otherwise, 1/2 MP)

Defensive Fire (Non Phasing Player Ff and Mf units that did NOT fire previous Player Turn)

Melee Phase (Phasing unit may not Fire and Melee same Player Turn)

Mutual Disruption Removal (Remove Disruption from PREVIOUS Player Turn)

End of Player One's Turn—Repeat Seq of Play for Player Two, then advance Turn marker. Repeat.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

Fire Units cannot Fire in successive Player Turns!

Units within Leadership Radius move Full MP otherwise 1/2 MP [min of 1]

[EXC: When Class C exempt by Scenario rules]

Units must end movement when they move adj to Mf or Ff Units.

[EXC: if using Facing, only stop if they enter FRONTAL hex]

Fire Strength compared to Terrain Defensive rating

Melee compares Attacker Strength vs Defender's Strength

Units may be attacked only once per phase. Fire attacks combine all Fire vs a Unit; Melee Attacks combine all Melee strengths.

Disrupted units may not move, fire, or attack. A second Disruption eliminates the unit.

COMBAT ADJUSTMENTS:

• Strength means unit may NOT initial melee. If defending, strength is 1.

[] around Strength means Melee Defense Strength is halved. (Attacker Strength normal)

F flank Attacks – Defender's Strength is Halved. Retain Fractions.

F flank Attack means ALL 6 adj hexes are adj to the Attackers – unit is 'surrounded'

[EXC: if using Facing rule, any attack through the 3 Flank hexsides are a Flank Attack]

Add 1 to attacker's Die Roll where the Defender is Disrupted

Leaders add Combat bonus to Melee (bonus # or 1 if '•')

Leaders stacked with Units in prevent Disruption in Fire and Melee attacks. But if in MELEE, LEADER suffering a disruption is reduced 1 level. (Level 4 leader is eliminated.)

ELEVATION EFFECTS:

Class A and B attacking from Ground to Slope or Slope to Hilltop 1/2 Melee Strength

Class A and B attacking from Slope to Slope 1/2 Melee Strength

Class A and B on Slopes do NOT Disrupt from Melee or Fire!

UNIT STACKING:

Class D and E may stack with any Class

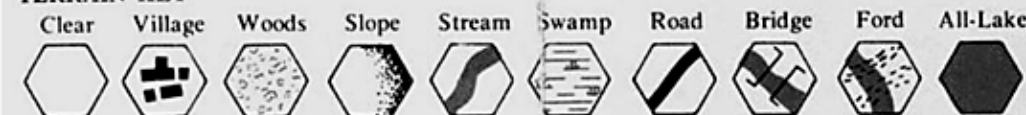
Class Ff may stack with Class A or B.

Class Mf can stack with Class C

[9.0] TERRAIN EFFECTS CHART

Terrain Type	Movement Point [MP] Cost to enter hex	Fire Protection Strength	Effect on Fire when Firing Unit is in hex	Effect on Melee Strength when Unit is in hex and is...	
				...Attacking	...Defending
Clear	1 MP	3	none	none	none
Village	1 MP	5	none	none	doubled
Woods	3 MP	4	none (see 6.3)	none	doubled
Slope	2 MP (see 5.6)	3	none (see 6.3)	none	none (see 14.0)
Stream	2 MP	1	No Ff Fire	halved	none
Swamp	3 MP	4	No Mf Fire	none	doubled
Road	1 MP (see 5.5)	2	none	none	none
Bridge	1 MP (as road)	1	none	halved	doubled
Ford	1 MP	1	No Ff Fire	halved	none
All-Lake	Prohibited	•	none	none	none

TERRAIN KEY



[3.1] Fire Unit Range Effects

Range (in hexes) / Unit (below)	1 hex	2 hexes	3 hexes
BW	2	1	-
IB	2	2	1
HB	1	1/2	-

[3.2] Unit Capability Chart— Effect on Melee Defense Strength

Attacker (right) /	MS/MI	AX/SD	MC
MS/MI	x1	X 1/2	x2
AX/AD	x1	x1	x 1/2

[8.0] COMBAT RESULTS TABLE

Die Roll	Combat Odds									Die Roll
	1-2	1-1	2-1	3-1	4-1	5-1	6-1	7-1	8-1	
1	•	•	•	•	D	D	D	1/2E	E	1
2	•	•	•	•	D	D	1/2E	1/2E	E	2
3	•	•	D	D	D	D	1/2E	E	E	3
4	•	D	D	D	1/2E	1/2E	E	E	E	4
5	•	D	D	1/2E	1/2E	E	E	E	E	5
6	D	D	D	1/2E	E	E	E	E	E	6
7	D	D	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	7

Attacks at less than 1-2 are not permitted; treat greater than 8-1 as 8-1.

Back to Clayton and Joining the Battle!



BC LV

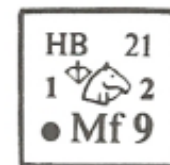


SD CSLVY

A quick battle will show how the game system works. I selected scenario 5.1 as I was keen to see how strong the Byzantine Cataphracts really are as they certainly look the goods.



MI CSVY



HB CV

[5.0] POST-MILLENIUM SCENARIOS - WEST

[5.1] BALTHUSTA (A.D. 1014)

Byzantines: 10SD, 5IB, 5HB, 10BC, 1"1", 1"2". VP 77, PL 31. Deploy: F-3. Stacking: 3. Leadership: Mt. Ex.

Bulgars: 10MI, 5IB, 20HB, 2"3". VP 67, PL 20. Deploy: C-3. Stacking: 2.

Looking at the two sides you can see that the Romans have the edge with 2 good leaders, mounted exempt (Meaning Cavalry can move full without leaders) and stacking of 3. Bulgars have two poor leaders no mounted exempt and stack 2 high. Also all their horses are Dot melee - means no melee attack and defense of 1.

Game-Length: 15 Game-Turns.

Victory Conditions: Byzantines must control hexes "C" and "E". Bulgars must achieve a Substantive Victory. If both sides fulfill these conditions, the Byzantines win.

Terrain Modifications: Ignore all sea, river, bridge, and ford hexes.

Historical Notes: The Bulgars had been giving the Romans a great deal of trouble, expanding southward into the Balkans and displacing Roman control. One of the great soldier-Emperors, Basil II, led a successful counter attack, driving the Bulgars out of Thrace and Macedonia and finally catching them at Balathusta, in modern Bulgaria. There he crushed the Bulgarian army, taking some 15,000 prisoners. He divided the prisoners into 100 man groups, blinding 99 of each group totally and the remaining man in one eye. He then sent them back to their Tsar, Samuel who, it is said, died of the shock, thereby allowing the Bulgarian Empire to collapse. Basil was surnamed Bulgaroctonus - the Bulgar Slayer.



And It Begins!

The Bulgars have formed a defense line as they look to defend their 2 Victory locations.



[Editor's Note: The Bulgars are Yellow, and the 'C' location is dead center of their front line. The 'E' is the small village between the river fork along the road, five hexes behind them.]

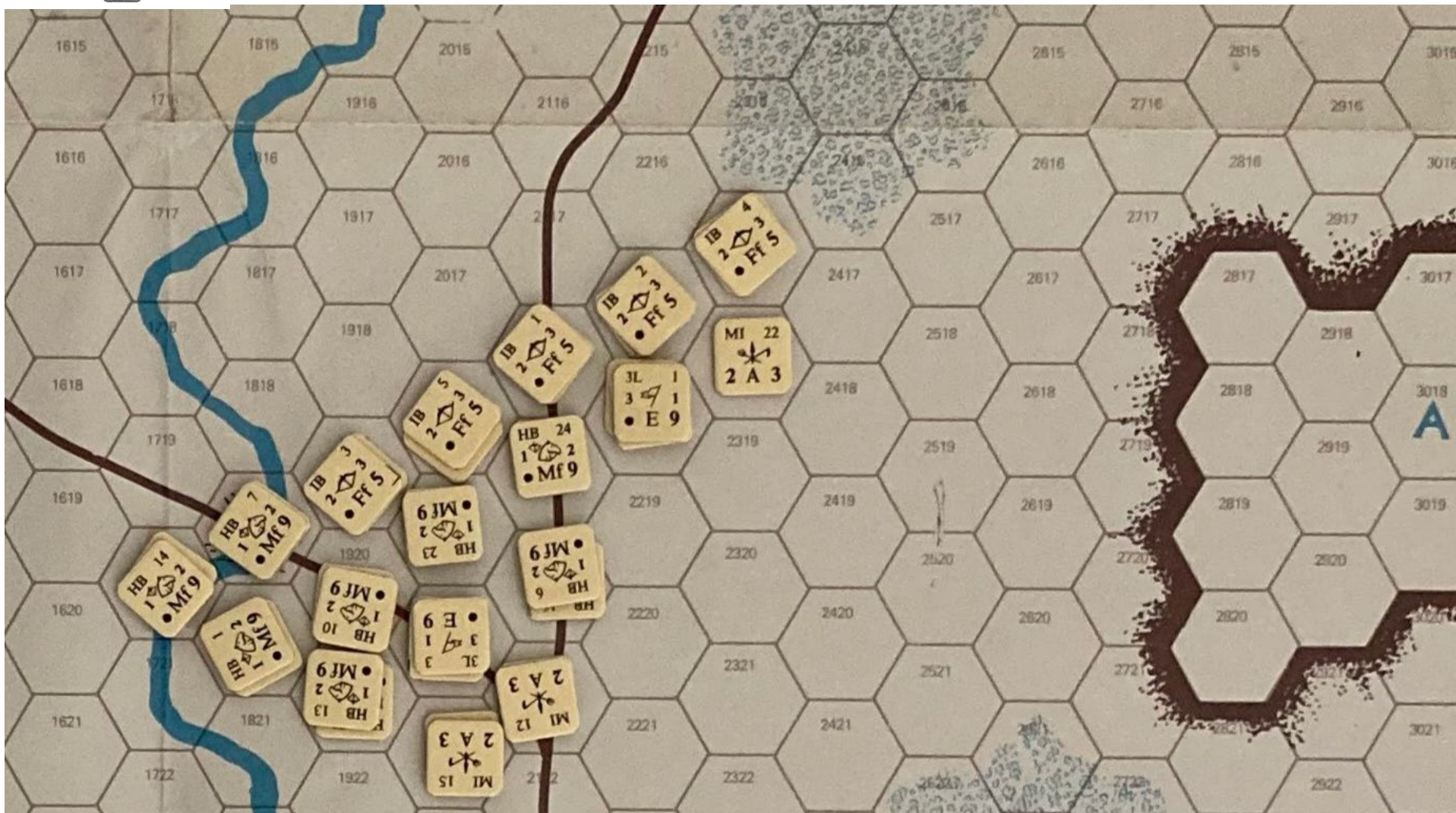
The Bulgars are stacked two deep, most of the Byzantines/Romans are 3 deep.]

The Romans stack with 2 melee units and 1 fire unit to give that extra flexibility. They want to rush forward and encircle.

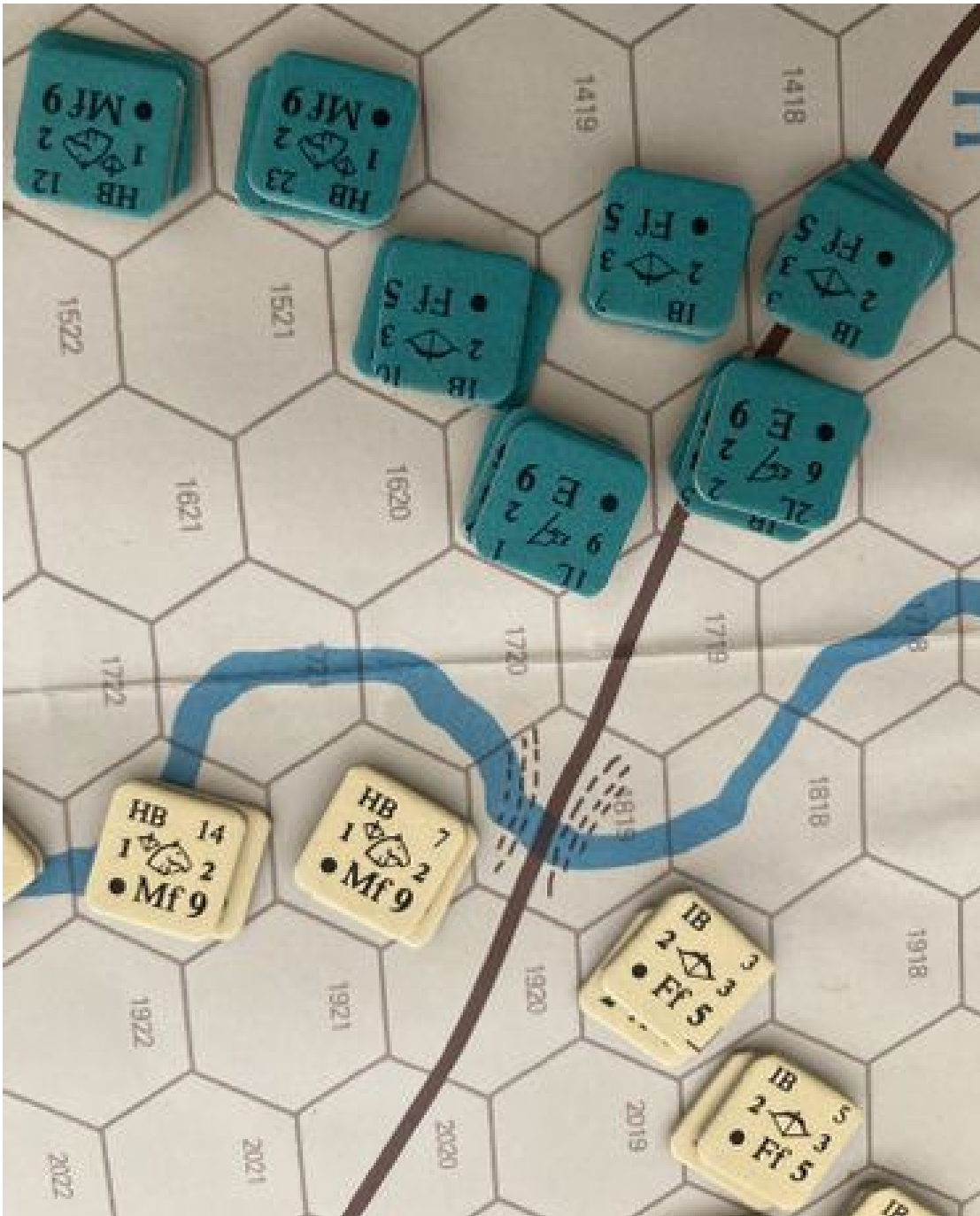


I play most optional rules, so the missile units can only fire through their three front hexes.
 Being attacked on the flank is what the Bulgars fear. They do have their Right Flank protected by a wooded area.

No rivers for this battle - these are ignored. [Note the poor Leadership Clay mentioned – a 1 hex limit. Bulgar units that don't start their Player turn adjacent to a Bulgar Leader can only move HALF their Movement points!]



The Romans close and only expose 2 units to fire. But each of these stacks have a leader - which means they are fully protected from fire. How cool is that! Those Bulgars are nervous!



[Units stacked with leaders will not disrupt. The units can suffer ½ Elim or Elim – but at this range they can't reach those odds.

Fire is handled by comparing the Fire Strength to the Hex's Fire Protection Strength (FPS). Clear hexes in this game have a FPS of 3, while units on a Road (assumed to be marching in close order) have an FPS of 2.

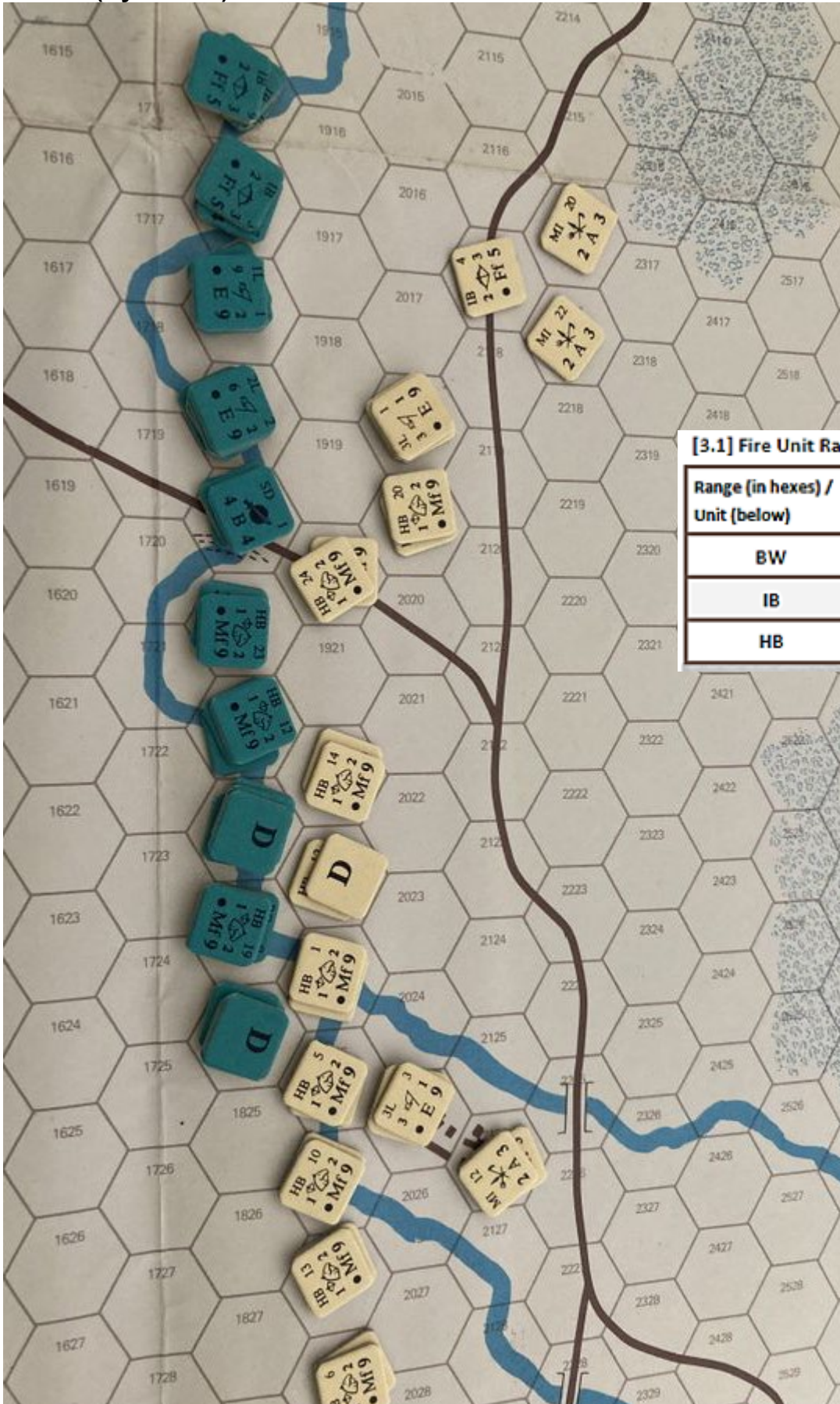
So with Horse Bowmen (HB) at ½ at 2 hexes, not much chance of damage, except to the leaders who would reduce if there is a Disruption result.

But Leaders also give a bonus in combat melee, so the Bulgars have a reason to be nervous!

As Clayton pointed out, Leaders are vital in these games. If you don't start your player turn in a leader's effective range, you only move half your movement allowance. The Bulgars Leaders range is 1 hex! The Byzantine (Roman) Mounted Units are exempt from this, as noted in the scenario by Mounted Exempted.

The Movement factors are listed on a unit's bottom right corner. So you can see with no nearby leaders, these Bulgars can only move 2 hexes in the clear!]

Roman (Byzantine) Movement:



The Romans move in and Bulgar Defensive fire disrupts a stack of 3 units.

Fire affects all units in a hex (3 in this case).

The defense factor is based on the terrain in the hex (clear is 3 – remember, rivers do not exist in this scenario).

[3.1] Fire Unit Range Effects

Range (in hexes) / Unit (below)	1 hex	2 hexes	3 hexes
BW	2	1	-
IB	2	2	1
HB	1	1/2	-

This chart is used to calculate the odds.

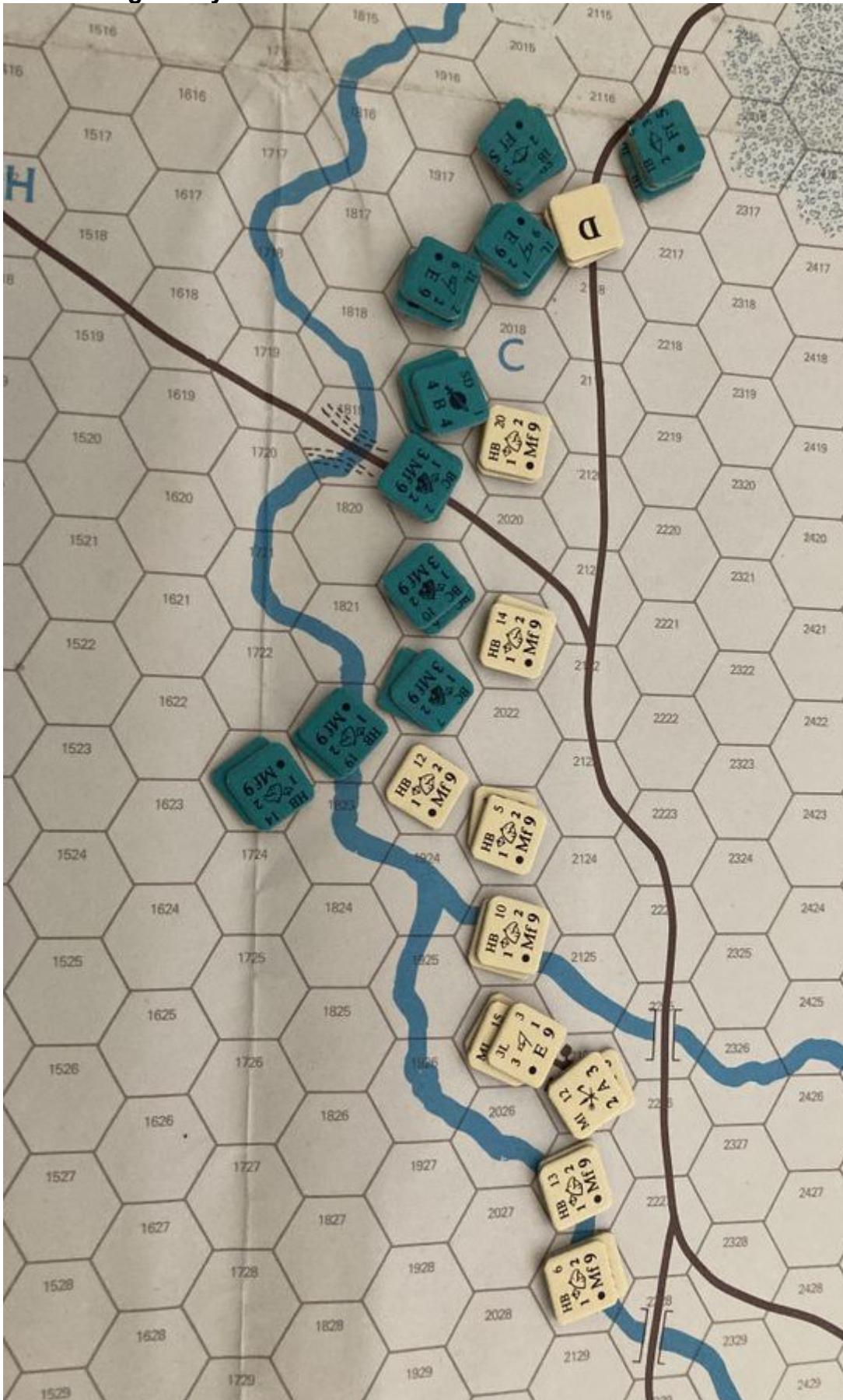
So each HB - Horse Bowman - has a Fire Strength of 1, and that is x1 at 1 hex range. And x1/2 at 2 hexes. The bottom unit is hit with $(2 \times 1) + (2 \times 1/2) = 3$ vs a hex defense of 3 = 1:1. A Roll of 4-6 on 1D6 nets a D result.

(Note the Foot Fire troops are x2 at 1 or 2 hexes, and 1 at 3 hexes!)

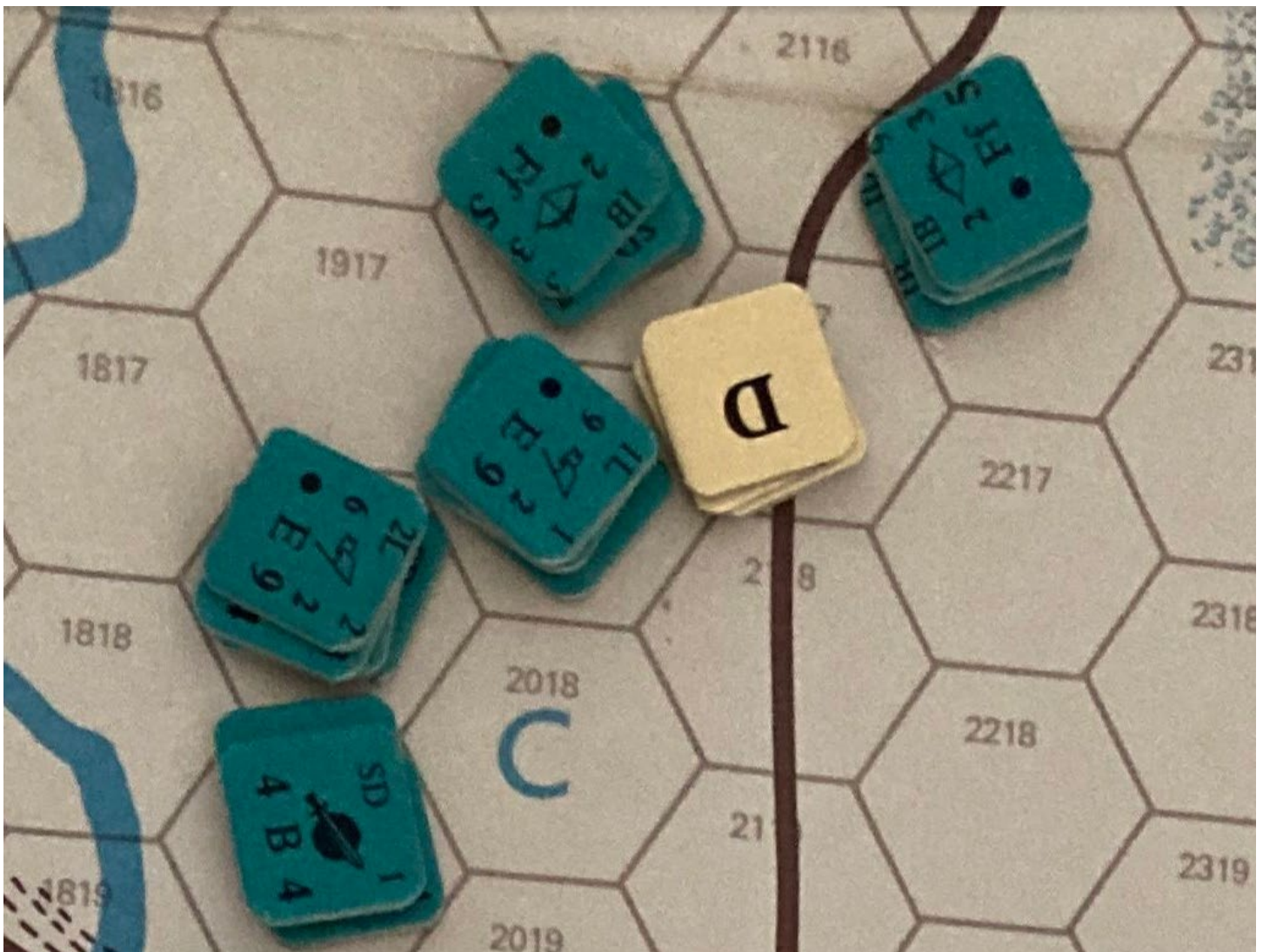
So, it is easy to get a result on a stack that does not have leader protection. Here Bulger fire was poor – which is really the end for them.

[5 attacks, 2 results – but while 1:1 is a 50-50 chance, at a 1:2 odds only a 6 will get a D result -ugh.]

A later Bulgar Player Turn:



Bulger Offensive fire gets another disruption on the Roman stack already disrupted and it is destroyed! Yea! But, too little, too late.



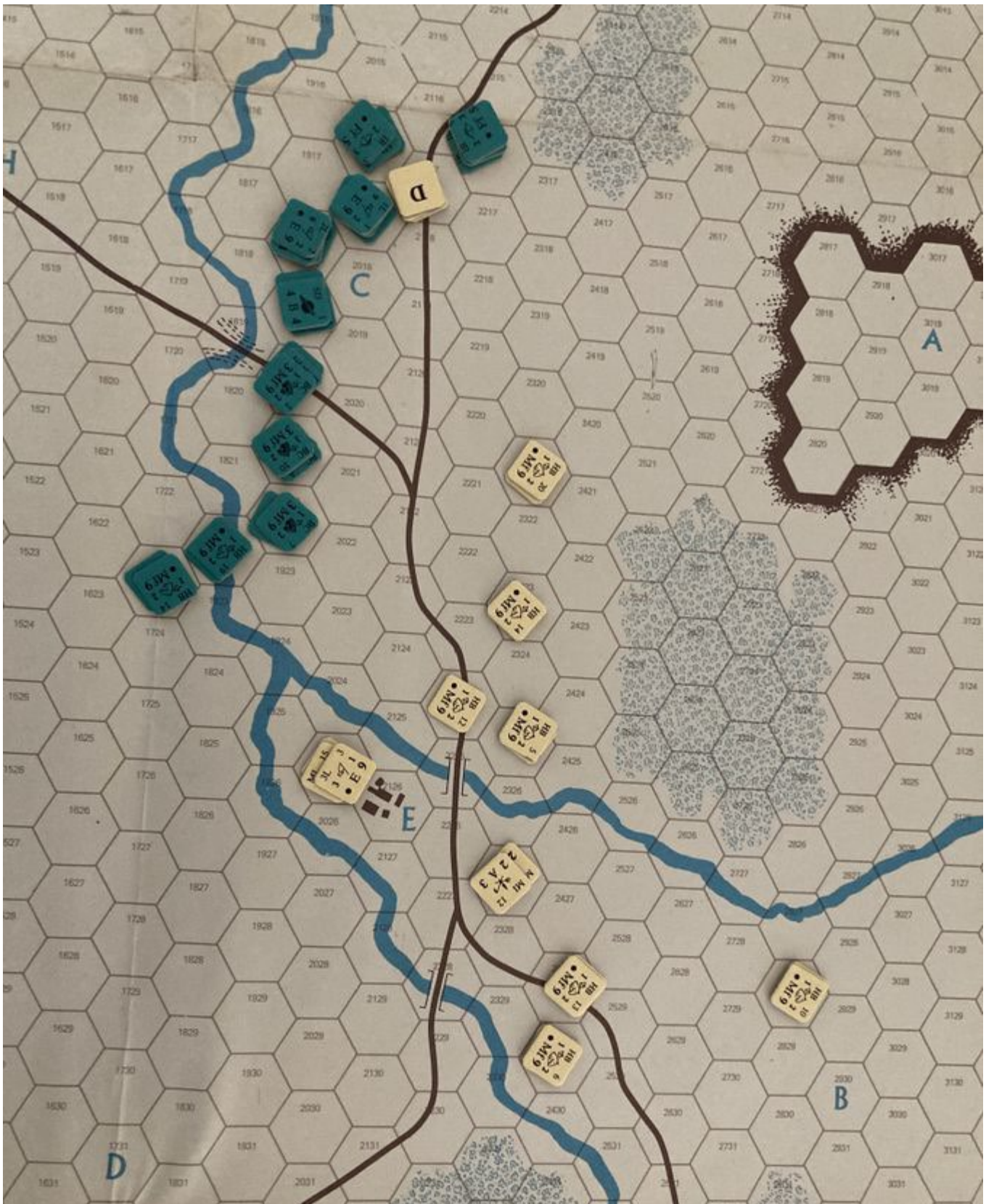
With better dice rolls I can see that Defensive fire can be a killer. Not today as the Romans use cold steel to destroy many units of Bulgars.

*[An optional rule in most **PRESTAGS** games: If the Defender in a Melee is Militia (MI) and the Attacker is Swordsman (SD), or Axman (AX) the Defender's Strength is halved. Wooden Staves vs sharp, heavy weapons? Ouch!]*

*Also note in this picture, the Bowmen (IB) have no melee strength, and thus cannot participate in Melee. We see at least one Swordsman (SD) counter in the Roman stacks. If there is another in the right hand IB group, that would mean the Disrupted Bulgar would be flanked as well next Roman Player Turn. In **PRESTAGS**, the CRT does not feature a Retreat. You stay in contact, and Disrupted units may not Melee. However – they will 'rally' in the next player turn's Mutual Disruption Removal Phase – if they survive!*

Also remember, even if the Fire units had a Melee strength, if they are the phasing player, they may not Fire AND initiate Melee in the same Player Turn!

In this game, a unit suffering a flank attack defends at half-strength. And in any attack where the defender is disrupted, the attacker adds a +1 to his attacking die roll. All in all, this Disrupted unit may not be long for this world!]



The Bulgars soon reach their Panic Level (based on the strength factors of destroyed units) and turn tail and run. The stack under the remaining leader is not impacted. The Disrupted unit cannot move. This is the end of the game after 7 turns with a very easy victory to the Romans due to some bad defense fire results by the Bulgars - they had one chance and blew it.

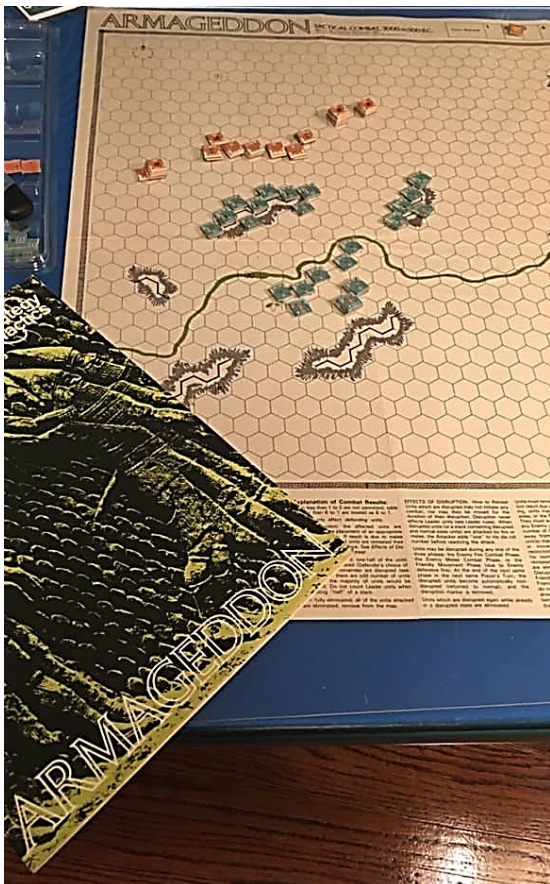
That was fun. It did not take much time to play and was an enjoyable game. I think that it was an accurate reflection of the battle and the tactics of the historical units. Will give that another spin. I

need to get hold of a more modern ancient tactical game to compare with (hahahaha "modern ancient" LOL). – Clayton Martin

[Ed. Note: I hope this brief playthrough got players interested in trying the **PRESTAGS** system. What I like is we could play this same scenario again, using a different defense based on what we learned – and the result may be completely different.

Also realize, you can play any of the games that preceded **PRESTAGS** with the later rules. Those earlier games are almost the same and **PRESTAGS** rules were based on those games. The major difference is all the special rules for that game's era are in their rules, not in the exclusive rules.

So - realize ALL of these – **Armageddon**, **Centurion**, **Phalanx**, **Dark Ages**, and **Renaissance of Infantry** may be played with the **PRESTAGS** rules instead! Use of the Quick Reference chart on page three above will likely carry you through these games.



Also, I have a LOT of added new scenarios for all these games at SPIGames.net Enjoy! ---Russ Gifford]

