

# De Re Militari Meridies

## (Of Things Military in Meridies)

May the Divine be praised, for through our travels in southern lands where the stars are strange, we have uncovered a text describing the workings of the mind of that most feared of djinn-spawn, Duke John the Bearkiller, who has vexed our armies of the Faithful on many a battlefield, and it has laid bare his warlike thoughts to our warriors. This ancient text was prepared in the days of our ancestors, may they live eternally in the Gardens of Paradise, in A.S. XIV by the hand of the djinn's servant, Andras Salamandra, may he live in the fires of torment like his namesake. But wondrous are the ways of Divine, the Compassionate, the Merciful, for he has placed these words in our hands that we may be guided to victory over the infidels that beset us. Yet surely, with the blessings of the Divine, the Omnipotent, the All-Present, we may conduct our wars with honour and to the glory of our Maker, and not partake of the djinn's fiendish tricks.

Not all the writer says may be true today, for wars have multiplied since those ancient days, and no longer do the levies of our fair land know only the Arts of Peace. Many have already been fired in the crucible of warfare upon our borders, and of the lessons herein, some must surely have already been learned and improved upon by our valiant defenders. Now we have many individual warriors seasoned in the Arts of War, yet still there are but few units which are known for their excellence upon the battlefield, may the blessings of the Divine, the Bountiful, the Glorious be upon them.

The djinn-spawn called the Bearkiller still ravages the marches of Atlantia, our fair land. His servant Andras, being a lesser demon, may the Blessings of Heaven be upon our holy ones who have bound him in a web of ethereal nets with the power of the True Word, can be invoked to answer the questions of the Faithful. Place yourself before the one-eyed altar of many windows and invoke him with this incantation, [davidwendelken@earthlink.net](mailto:davidwendelken@earthlink.net), but be wary lest you be corrupted.

Translated into the tongue of my people this Twelfth Day of February, A.S. XXXIV, and may the blessings of the Divine, the Compassionate, the Omnipotent, be upon you,

Ahmed ibn Falas

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In which the principles under which feudal warriors may band together to achieve a glorious victory over their foes are explained, and in which many worthless and dangerous ideas are exposed. In which exercises and techniques for the training of the minds and the bodies of warriors are introduced and explained in order to reclaim the lands subject to our rightful rule and drive our enemies unto the furthest reaches of their realms. May the glories of the ancient Imperium be restored from sea to sea under the rightful rule of Meridian Kings and Queens, the only true descendents of the ancient Imperial Family.

Pax Meridies!

## 2 Strategy

Our military practice owes a great debt to the leaders of the past. These lessons can be applied in the field today. Many ancient armies (the Macedonians and their Greek allies, the Romans and the Byzantines) were better trained and more disciplined than the feudal levies of our day.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1 Remember the Objective

How will the war be won? If the battle plan does not move your army closer to winning the war, it is fatally flawed. Pick an objective that can be accomplished and devise a plan to reach it. Do not mistake winning a battle for winning the war. In 279 BC, the Romans were moving into the Greek-held territory of southern Italy. They fought a series of battles with Pyrrhus, the commander of the Greeks. Pyrrhus won each battle, but lost too many men each time he fought. He told one of

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<sup>1</sup> With the exception of the introduction, which suffers from the florid Latin of the late Imperial Period, the remainder of the document is clearly and succinctly written in nearly Classical Latin reminiscent of the writings of the first Caesar (except for occasional textual corruptions no doubt entered by the hands of many copyists over the long years since our forefathers time). Let the All-knowing guide our pens inweeding out the errors of our forebears.

<sup>2</sup> Republican and early Imperial Roman units that had disgraced themselves were *decimated*, which entailed lining them up and executing every tenth soldier, or so it is attested in *??source??*.

his subordinates that another such victory and they would lose the war! Ever since, such battles are called Pyrrhic victories.<sup>3</sup> The basic principle of good strategic planning is to never fight a war you have not already won.

## **2.2 Know the Capabilities of Your Troops**

Remember that your army, as well as that of your enemies, is composed of a variety of units, weapons, tactical skills, and levels of training and discipline. Choose a plan that will allow each of your units to work to its strengths. Never assign a unit to a task for which it is not suited. On the other hand, your plan should attempt to force (or at least encourage) the enemy commander to deploy his own troops inefficiently. Do not expect your heavy infantry to deftly charge through swampy ground, and do not expect light infantry to break a strong shield wall with a basic frontal attack.

## **2.3 Combined Arms**

“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” An old saying, but so important when deploying troops. A combined unit of sword and shield, pole arms, and archers is far stronger than when acting as three separate units.

The sword and shield men act as offensive shock troops or as the bulwark of a defensive position. Armed with javelins, each of these soldiers can engage the enemy even from the rear ranks. At short ranges, such as on bridges, javelins are often more effective than arrows. Throwing axes can be used to break the enemy’s charge or to weaken a key point in the shield wall when charging the enemy.

Pole arms add reach and killing power to the sword and shield men. When placed in the second and third ranks, they can concentrate almost completely on offense because of the presence of a sword and shield buffer. The greater reach of the pole arms allows them to attack from angles that enemy soldiers cannot easily defend against. They can block blows directed against their comrades and can foul the shields of the enemy.

Archers strike at long range, weakening the enemy before he can reach your forces. This attrition can become so severe that the enemy can be forced to abandon a superior position or face losing the battle. Archers can strike deep within the heart of the enemy formation where other troops cannot reach. They can pick off enemy commanders, leaving your enemy leaderless.

## **2.4 Know Your Enemy**

Who are the enemy commanders? What are they like? Are they cautious, methodical, rash, inexperienced, sly, or unpredictable? What would they do in their place? (Not the same as what you would do in their place!) Do they have wiser, experienced officers that they may rely upon to formulate the battle plan and direct the battle? If you kill the enemy commander, will you be better off, or doing your opponent a favor by promoting a more qualified replacement?

What kind of tactics is the enemy army trained to use? If the troops are not drilled in a given maneuver, they will not perform it to peak efficiency. Use this to your advantage. Do not let your counterpart return the favor!

## **2.5 Keep It Simple**

This does not mean point at the enemy and yell “Charge!” Just do not expect complicated maneuvers or split second timing to work unless the troops are of professional caliber. Do not overestimate the ability of average or inexperienced troops to traverse difficult terrain quickly or in formation. Make your directions plain, in simple language. Do not use a lot of statements like “if this happens, then...” After all discussion, quickly recap your orders to each unit commander and have them repeat them to you. Make sure that all unit commanders understand the overall objective and your overall plan. This way, when the inevitable unanticipated event happens, your better unit commanders are more likely to react in a helpful manner.

## **2.6 Reserves**

Unless your troops are very, very well trained and very, very well officered, you can only control them until they engage the enemy. After that, the battle is out of your hands. The average warrior will remember and follow their orders for sixty seconds or one nearby sword-blow, whichever comes first.

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<sup>3</sup> ??source??.

Reserves are troops that are not immediately engaged in the battle. They are held back to reinforce success with fresh troops, take advantage of a sudden weakness in the enemy position, or stop an enemy maneuver from disrupting or destroying your forces.

It is critical to maintain an uncommitted reserve force until a decision point is reached in the battle. Then strike the enemy at their most vulnerable point with all your might. The commander of this force must be chosen for their self-discipline. They must be able to discern weaknesses in your own formation. Their soldiers will be hot for action, they must be able to control them and keep them out of action until the right time. If they are really good, they can get their unit to regroup after engaging the enemy and return to reserve status if their action did not decisively end the battle.

It is extremely difficult and very time-consuming to pull an average unit out of the battle once it is engaged and move them towards a new objective. This is why uncommitted troops, held back under audacious but disciplined commanders, are the only soldiers able to respond quickly to changing situations.

Thus, you want to force the enemy to commit his reserves to stave off defeat before you commit your own reserves. This will allow you greater freedom of action, because your opponent will have more difficulty in parrying your maneuvers. If enemy reserves are already committed, then wherever your own go, the enemy will have no unit to block its advance.

## **2.7 Surprise**

Ideally, the enemy should be unprepared for your attack. Attacks while the enemy is asleep, out celebrating, or during a truce are considered traditional in my native province of Armorica.<sup>4</sup> They are frowned upon in the less strategically enlightened lands of the Imperium. Yet, there are many opportunities for surprise, which simply means doing something that the enemy is not prepared to counter and which does them great harm.

If the enemy cannot be defeated from the front, and their flanks are impassable, surprise them by flanking them anyway. Use a shallow draft ship, such as the Vikings do, to flank the enemy in bridge fights. The terror of something new and unexpected can cause panic in the enemy ranks.<sup>5</sup> The Romans of old used specially trained troops to cross rivers with the help of inflated bags made from animal parts. Perhaps, if it please the Divine and its Holy Servants in the Marshallate are appeased, your troops can discover a hitherto unknown ford in the river which is upstream from a hotly contested bridge. Use terrain to hide some of your troops so that they can flank the enemy when they advance to meet your main force. A feigned retreat may be used to draw in the enemy into a vulnerable position. Smaller, agile fighters can slip under a shield wall where it has thinned and take out the pole weapons in the second rank. More than one warrior may bear the arms of the commander in order to confuse the enemy.

## **2.8 Morale**

Morale is one of the most important tools that you have. It can turn an average force into an unstoppable onslaught. Do what you must to instill in your troops the highest confidence in your abilities and their own. Make sure that they respect their opponent's prowess, but that they also know that they are superior to the enemy. Teach your troops that whether attacking or defending, they must never show fear or indecision in the face of the enemy. They must, through their bearing and conduct on the field, show unbounded confidence in their position. Teach them never to advance with half-measures, but to throw their all into each engagement. Just because the army has taken a defensive posture does not mean that the troops must be defensive in their thoughts and actions. Let your men know that they are to aggressively hold their position.

## **2.9 Diplomacy**

Always remember that if your enemies have annoyed you, they have doubtlessly annoyed others as well. These make natural allies. Find the disaffected among your enemy's host, and bring them over to your side. Diplomacy can bring you victory on the battlefield. Done properly, it can bring you victory before you reach the battlefield.

Address your appeal to what your potential ally values, be it honour, gold, or drink. Yet, if your first thought of them as a potential ally is not 'honour', tread warily with them ever afterwards. The better the fit between the theatrics of your offer and

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<sup>4</sup> May the Divine, the Merciful, be praised that this Andras Salamandra and all his House were lost upon a long journey in the wilderness, after glorying in such perfidy! Such is the Justice that awaits the infidel. Armorica is an ancient name for Brittany.

<sup>5</sup> ??source??.

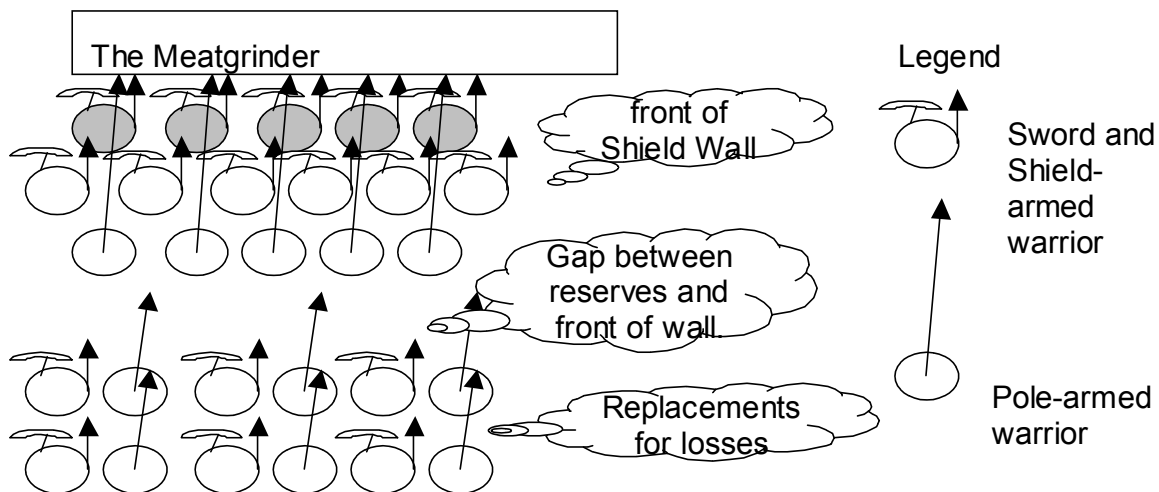
their culture, the more likely they will be inclined to accept. This is not a cynical comment, rather, it is an acknowledgement that the beauty of your argument is best paraded in a fine garment.

### 3 Principles of Defense

This section deals with basic defensive techniques. They will be covered in more detail after the section on basic offensive techniques, when we can then match one technique against another. There are several underlying assumptions behind this assumption. First, you are assumed to be outnumbered by a sizable amount. Secondly, a reasonable percentage of your troops are veterans and have been trained in the fundamentals of small unit tactics. Third, you have a cadre of capable major and small unit commanders, and that you listen to their advice. (Which is not at all the same thing as following it! But be sure to take their comments and objections into consideration when determining what the plan will be.)

#### 3.1 The Fixed Defense

The fixed defense works best when given a static position and secure flanks. A fixed defense is static, that is, it does not move or change direction well. Secure flanks are usually only available through impassable or very difficult terrain. Bridges are a classic example of a position which is difficult to flank. A fixed defense is ideal when your troops have high morale, secure flanks, and are greatly outnumbered. Never give a unit orders to form a shield wall and hold, unless you protect it from being surrounded or flanked.



A typical fixed defense is called the “Meatgrinder.” Warriors with large shields and short stabbing swords, fighting on their knees, compose the first rank. Behind and between them stand a rank of warriors protected by a shield and armed with swords or axes. Behind and between them stand a rank of men armed with spears, glaives, and halberds. The fourth and following ranks should be organized to funnel replacements into the first three ranks and should also be composed of javelin throwers and other missile troops. There should be a slight gap between the third and fourth ranks (about five feet) except when receiving a charge, at which time the fourth rank should move up to lend their weight to breaking up the charge, and then step back so that the first three ranks have enough elbow room. The five foot gap between the third and fourth ranks is to provide a mental barrier to your own men, otherwise they will press forward and crowd your front ranks so tightly that they will be unable to block or swing a blow. Responsible warriors should be detailed to maintain this gap and to maintain a balance of weapons types in the shield wall. Warriors with shields should be interspersed among the back ranks to protect them from enemy arrows and javelins. Note that the back ranks are situated so that a warrior of each weapon-style can easily move forward to fill a gap in the ranks. The archers can deploy on the flanks (along the river bank in bridge fights), in the third or fourth ranks, or in the very back of the army (firing over the heads of their own troops). The last technique is only recommended if you are very, very sure of the skill (and loyalty) of your archers.

If unsure of your troop’s morale, form up in the middle of the bridge. You will have room to maneuver to repair the loss of ground as inexperienced warriors give way under pressure. If the troops will aggressively hold their ground, form up at your end of the bridge. This allows your pole weapons to reach the enemy soldiers from the river banks, giving you local superiority at the point of combat. But you cannot give up even an inch of ground, because the enemy will force you off the bridge and into the open ground.

Keep a reserve force behind your lines. Position it so that it cannot be sent piecemeal into the lines. Hard-hitting, fresh troops can turn the tide of the battle, even more so because they will be really eager to get into the fight and make up for lost time.

### **3.2 The Mobile Defense**

The mobile defense is used when greatly outnumbered, but a fixed defense is not possible or desirable. If the position can be easily flanked or the front that must be covered is just too long, it is not possible. If the enemy has many pole weapons, and your own army has too few, it is not desirable. The basic premise of this defense is that it does not matter how many troops the enemy has, it only matters how many they can bring to bear on you at one time. The mobile defense attempts to achieve a numerical and positional advantage at the moment of battle, do as much damage to the enemy as possible, minimize your own losses, and retreat before the enemy can bring the rest of their forces to bear. The trick is to do this over and over until the enemy is defeated. Your troops must be well trained and disciplined, they must break off combat at a word, regroup, and have the spirit to do this over and over again. They must also have the stamina to move at a rapid pace throughout the entire battle. This works best in a wooded area, where the terrain assists you in hiding your maneuvers. Small diversionary forces, which can be trusted to make a lot of noise and to avoid battle, can spread a great deal of confusion among your enemy, making it harder for them to bring their troops to bear on your main force. Hardest of all is to conduct this type of battle in the open field, your troops must fight at a running pace. If you live through it, study the lessons on strategy again so that you do not have to push your luck twice.

### **3.3 What to Do When Your Unit is Surrounded**

Never, never give up an inch of ground when your unit is surrounded. Not a single inch. Your troops will only become jumbled together, foul their own weapons, and collect themselves into a ready-made mass grave. When surrounded, let the troops know that they are to hold their positions, and that they are to attack, not defend. The more aggressive the defense, the less aggressive the attack. If done properly, you can force the attacking units to back up, which may open up a gap between units that your own forces can escape through. Use your missile troops to pick off enemy commanders. Without leaders, the enemy will no longer be able to mount coordinated attacks from all sides, and they will respond more slowly to your maneuvers.

### **3.4 The Basic Shieldwall**

The basic shieldwall is very similar to that described in the section on Fixed Defense above. The basic difference is that the first rank is probably not on its knees. The basic unit of an Imperial Roman Legion was the cohort, which was composed four hundred to five hundred and fifty men. When deployed in a shield wall, it was formed up four to eight ranks deep and one hundred twenty to sixty men wide. Cohorts were deployed in depth, from two to four deep, with two being the most common.<sup>6</sup>

Note that two units, one behind the other, each four ranks deep is not at all the same as one unit eight ranks deep. Once a unit is actively engaged with the enemy, it becomes very difficult for the commander to redirect it elsewhere. The second unit can be pulled back if not needed and sent elsewhere with much less effort than redeploying "half" of the bigger unit.

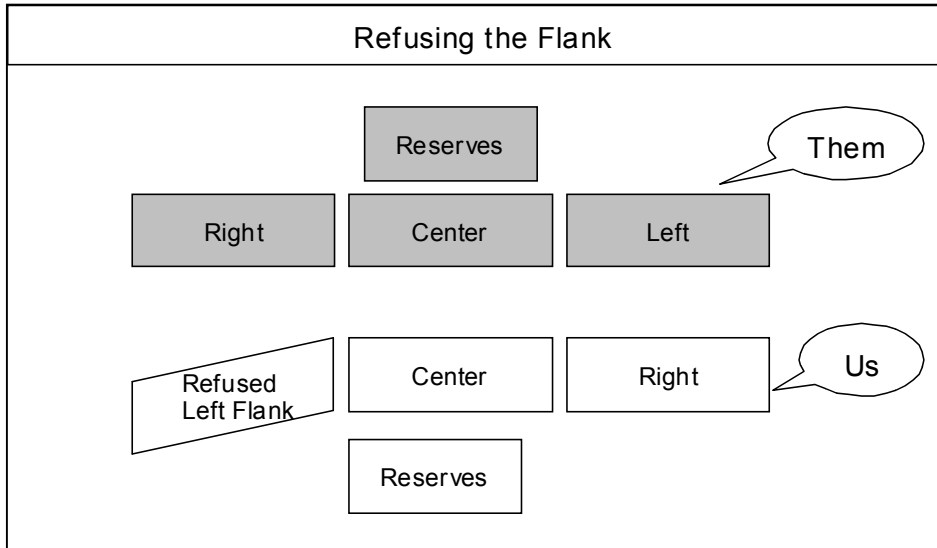
When needed, the rear unit can step forward to "brace" the front unit when accepting a charge, then step back.

### **3.5 The Positional Defense:**

In the comments above, I have repeatedly stressed that forming up an immobile shield wall that can be flanked is fool-hardy and suicidal. While I am not backing away from this belief, there are times when such a formation is feasible. If the numbers are approximately even, the terrain on the flanks is sufficiently difficult to traverse that any flanking maneuvers will develop slowly, or the enemy is not trained to move quickly and decisively around your flanks, you may safely consider a shield wall with exposed flanks. It is important to maintain mobile forces to cover your flanks, and a reserve to counter any unexpectedly fast/strong flanking maneuver. In addition, one or more flanks can be 'refused.' That is, the flank is angled back away from the enemy so that a flanking force must travel even farther to accomplish their mission. It is then less supported by the main body of the enemy and can become a prime target for destruction by your flank unit and your reserves.

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<sup>6</sup> ??source??



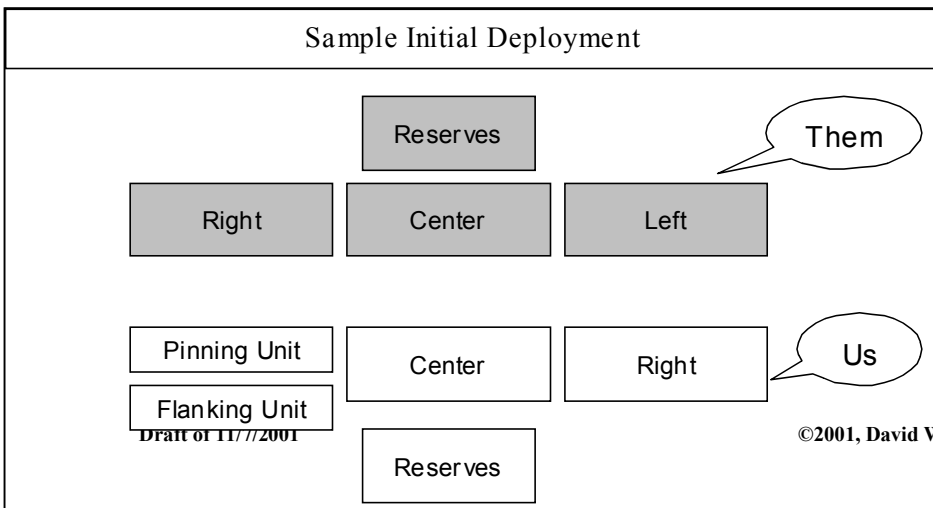
Ideally, you should deploy the main line just behind an obstacle such as a gully, or at the top of a ridgeline or hill. Even a sharp rise of a foot or two can be decisive. One of the biggest weaknesses of a positional defense is the natural tendency of soldiers to give ground when pressed hard by the enemy. If you are making use of such a terrain feature, before the battle is joined, instruct (and motivate) your warriors to hold the position and not allow themselves to be pushed back. Make sure that during the battle the men are constantly encouraged to hold their ground. Be ready to send in shock troops to push back any enemy soldiers who are forcing your front line off the obstacle, but make sure that the shock troops withdraw back into the reserve, and others take up the position on the line.

An alternative method of absorbing attack pressure is to trade space for time. If there is not useable terrain to base your position upon, it does not make much difference where you fight. Provided that you can keep from being flanked, your line can gradually move backwards. If your line maintains its integrity and does not give ground too quickly (and thus become boxed into a small area), you can maintain a favorable attrition rate. All things being equal, as long as your formation is intact, an attacker will take more casualties than you will. This is because the attacker must expose themselves to push forward into your formation. Your men can pick off individual attackers (who tend to be the bravest and most aggressive) as they attack, then step back to relieve the pressure. As this cycle is repeated several times, the enemy army loses its ability to aggressively press home an attack. (It is for this reason that a surrounded unit should defend very aggressively.)

It is important to have your men only give ground when YOU want them to, not when they want to! Capable small unit commanders can assist you in this. It is critical to consider the effect of retreat on the morale of your warriors, your army can quickly develop a defeatist attitude instead of an aggressive one. Your troops must be aware of, and believe, that it is part of a clever ploy to weaken the opponent (and not a reflection upon their abilities), and that they are to be consistently and continuously aggressive while giving ground.

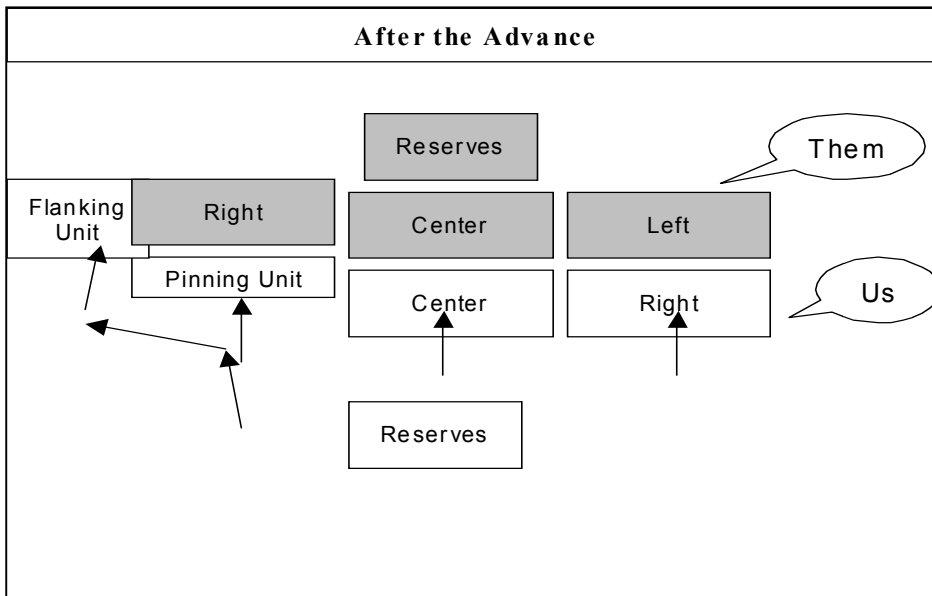
### 4 Principles of Attack

The following concepts will concentrate upon advantageous circumstances to work towards. The next two diagrams illustrate many of the issues below. The first shows a standard deployment on the part of the enemy, and a similar, but different deployment of our own. The second depicts the aftermath of an advance towards the enemy.



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Note that, to the enemy, our left flank looks like a single unit, even though it is actually two separate units with two separate tasks. One of the joys in discussing left and right flanks is that our left flank is their right flank, and vice-versa.

## 4.1 Pinning

Pinning is the act of tying up large numbers of the enemy's troops with your own (and preferably fewer in number) troops. For example, you are planning to maneuver around the enemy's right flank in an open field battle. This is difficult to accomplish because all the enemy has to do is shift his troops to the right (extending the line), or angle his right flank backwards (called "refusing the right flank"). Because they have a smaller distance to travel, they can complete the maneuver before your own warriors can flank them. Instead, some of your troops (possibly fewer than the enemy!) must maintain enough pressure to force an enemy unit to remain engaged in combat, but not press so hard that your unit takes unacceptable casualties. This allows you to concentrate the remainder of your forces at a decisive point and time while fixing in place larger numbers of enemy soldiers. Once a unit is pinned in place, it becomes much easier to flank.

## 4.2 Envelopment

Few formations can defend in all directions at once. Those that can, the Roman *testudo* ("tortoise") and *orbis* ("circle") are not highly mobile and require a substantial portion of the units strength be facing in directions that may not face attack.<sup>7</sup> Barring the above formations, envelopment is attacking the enemy from a direction that his unit cannot easily defend against. Pinning is often necessary (unless surprise is achieved) to prevent the enemy from merely pivoting in place so that it will face you. The meatgrinder is a classic example of a formation that is very strong from the front, but it is inflexible and hard to move or pivot. Attacking it from the side or behind allows you to close with the pole weapons, who will lack shield cover and room to maneuver.

## 4.3 Compression

The enemy troops on their far right flank will give way under sustained pressure. Since they cannot move straight back (due to the presence of your left flanking unit), they must move towards the center. This will compress the enemy formation so that the enemy soldiers lack the room to move, block, or throw blows. When attacking, it is equally important to maintain distance between (and within) your own units so that they do not suffer the ill effects of compression themselves.

<sup>7</sup> ??sources??

## 4.4 Superiority at the Point of Decision

The purpose of the above maneuvers is to allow you to concentrate more combat power (numbers of warriors, shock effect, momentum, etc.) than your opponent can at a single decisive location. It does not matter how many men your opponent has as long as you can outmatch them at the decisive point of contact.

## 4.5 Fragmentation

The enemy will usually form up into a coherent, organized mass of soldiers. When you fragment their formations into small, unorganized, unsupported groups of men, several things happen. First and foremost, the enemy commander will not be able to control the actions of their disorganized troops. They must be rallied piecemeal, and this takes valuable time. Most soldiers, unless very well trained or led, will not take decisive action on their own initiative, and will usually lack the resources (being part of a small, fragmented group) to successfully interfere with your plans. If your objective is to destroy the enemy army, then your formed units will be able to quickly overrun and slaughter the enemy stragglers, creating a numerical superiority for your side. Your larger, cohesive, formed units will have a distinct advantage over a fragmented force composed of small units and stragglers.

One caution: do not confuse the size of a unit with its cohesiveness or its effectiveness in combat. A large, unmanageable mass of warriors can be outmaneuvered by smaller, fast-moving, hard-hitting units.

## 4.6 Penetration

Penetration refers to forcing one of your own units into (and typically through) an enemy unit. This is not the same as moving your unit against an enemy unit. If an enemy unit is between you and your objective, and you do not want to take the time to fight it, penetration is an option to consider. (It is assumed that going around it is not feasible.) Successfully penetrating an enemy unit will tend to fragment and compress it. (Unsuccessfully penetrating it will tend to compress and envelop your own unit.)

## 4.7 Indirection

Indirection means to disguise the nature of your maneuvers, particularly when under observation by the enemy. Notice that the flanking unit does not travel in a wide, visible arc around the enemy right flank. Instead, it advances behind the pinning unit in front of it. It should travel a bit slower than the pinning unit so that a bit of a gap forms between them. Although the outer edge of the unit should not move to the left, the troops may mass more to the left so that approximately 60% of the force is on the left. The movement should come from the back ranks, not those in the front. This hides the fact that a flanking maneuver is being prepared, because, to those in front of the pinning unit, it just looks like a ragged advance.

A pinning unit is generally weaker in manpower than the unit it is assigned to pin. Therefore, the object is to tie up large numbers of enemy troops without using very many to do so. Because the pinning unit does not really want to furiously engage their counterpart (until it is flanked!), they should not actually slam into the enemy formation. They should start the advance at a walking pace, then steadily increase their speed so that it appears they are going to charge full tilt into their opponents. Just as they are about to reach the enemy ranks, they should suddenly slacken their pace so that they arrive a step out of synch from when the enemy thought they would arrive. This will both minimize casualties and keep the pinning unit from being too closely engaged.

Any ability to hide the actual numbers, nature, deployment or movement of your units will rebound to your advantage.

# 5 Command and Control

## 5.1 Marching in step.

We do not field armies of trained, full-time professional soldiers who must follow strict discipline or face corporal (or even capital) punishment. Our warriors will simply not show up if they are not having fun, and the kind of drill necessary for precision maneuvering in formation is not fun. It is dull, dull, dull. It also takes more training time than our feudal levies have to spend.

The simple truth is that the ability to field mass armies with the maneuvering precision of the ancient Romans *in the open field* is beyond the capability of a more than very small group of individuals. Untrained individuals who attempt to advance “in step” spend a huge portion of their attention on walking instead of on maintaining a “war spirit” and focusing on how

they are going to damage their enemy. This is a bad idea and a waste of the precious few hours of training a feudal levy gets in unit tactics.

A slavish emulation of the ancients, without discerning the major differences between their times and our own, is the source of this error. For example, the Roman Vegetius made much of marching in ranks in precise step, going so far as to say "Nor is anything of more consequence either on the march or in the line than that they should keep their ranks with the greatest exactness, and makes mention of a common military step for that purpose."<sup>8</sup> Our armies are composed of noblemen and their retainers, not full-time citizen soldiers who have signed away their rights as nobles in military service.

### 5.2 The Chain of Command.

The ancient Romans had highly evolved chains of command composed of many different layers of professional soldiers.<sup>9</sup> This is a worthless concept for a feudal levy in the open field. An untrained assembly of warriors understands remarkably few commands. They are:<sup>10</sup>

Hold!	Yes, I do mean the basic marshalling command. And they don't do this one well at all. Given that this is the <i>only</i> command that their <i>lives actually depend upon</i> , one can expect that all others will be followed more poorly than this one is!
Charge!	Run straight towards the nearest enemy in front of the unit.
Follow Me!	Almost the same as a charge, but the warriors run in the direction that their leader takes.
Run Away!	Scatter to the winds, every warrior for themselves.

Anything more complicated than this is lost on untrained troops.

The basic assemblage of warriors will follow the plan for 60 seconds or one nearby sword blow, whichever comes first. Anything more complicated won't happen. After this point in a battle, leaders can only rely upon their own voices and those who will repeat their commands for others to hear in the din and confusion of combat. Untrained troops will often not hear the commands or will not respond as they will be unsure of what to do. Most will not repeat the leader's commands, so most will not hear the leader's commands.

Trained warriors will hear the commands more often and will repeat them for others to hear. They will get the attention of their immediate comrades and get them to obey. You cannot appoint a person to do this in a feudal army. They either grasp the concept and do it on their own initiative, or they do not. They either do it well, or they do not. Let the warriors know what is desired and the right ones will rise to fulfill the need.

A unit with advanced training can respond to additional commands. They are:

Regroup!	Scattered troops will quickly reform into a Splatter (explained later under formations). Individual warriors will take up the call and rally around each other at a small remove from the enemy. They will get the attention of their fellows so that their comrades regroup also.
Disengage!	This is used when a unit is embroiled in combat and unable to quickly defeat its foe. The troops will take up the call, repeat it, get the attention of their comrades, and quickly step backwards to get away from the enemy unit. Once out of range, they will run to where their other comrades are regrouping and form up into a Splatter. Although the desired result is the same as a Regroup!, the starting situation is radically different. Only well-trained troops can Disengage! correctly.

<sup>8</sup> The scholarship of this infidel is exacting, for I too, after much diligence, have found this very reference in Vegetius' De Re Militari, in Book I, under the heading of Initial Training. Flavius Vegetius Renuatus was a Roman in the late Empire, believed to have written during the reign of Valentinian II. He was a scholar, not a military man, and gathered his information from ancient manuscripts, regulations, and military customs. His main sources were Cato the Elder, Cornelius Celsus, Paternus, Frontinus, and the ordinances and regulations promulgated by Augustus, Trajan and Hadrian. Vegetius was well regarded by Richard Coeur de Lion and his father, Henry II, as well as Foulques the Black, Count of Anjou, and the commanders of Charlemagne. So says the translator of my own copy of Vegetius' De Re Militari, the venerable John Clarke as edited by T.R. Philips in Roots of Strategy, volume I.

<sup>9</sup> ??source??

<sup>10</sup> No other ancient writer has been known to organize information in this manner, in boxes clearly labeled with an explanation following the label. It is, so far as my studies have revealed, an invention of expression ignored for over fifteen hundred years.

### 5.3 Complicated Maneuvers in Formation

A collection of warriors untrained in unit warfare can make use of these formations before the battle starts and they physically engage the enemy at close quarters. It is a very limited repertoire.

Shield Wall	Shield and weapon warriors stand in a rough line, fairly close together in the first rank of troops. Given a few experienced individuals to guide them, halberd and glaives will be placed behind and between the individuals in the first rank. Pole axes and spears will be placed in the third rank, behind and between those in the second rank. Once engaged in combat, or having to maneuver, the cohesion of the unit will begin to disintegrate. With untrained troops, this is a brittle formation, but the best that can be arranged for a static defense of a position. Pressure upon it will cause it to give ground. Increasing pressure will cause it to crumple in places. Once broken, it will not be reformed. Once engaged with an enemy unit, virtually all command control over it is lost. Can pin an enemy unit.
Splatter	This is named after the shape of a bird's droppings when it hits the ground at an angle. It is rounded in front, and tapers back to a narrow but long tail. A group of warriors moving at any speed over open ground will assume this formation naturally. Faster warriors will form the front of the curve. The bulk of the remainder will spread out and lag a bit behind. Those who cannot keep up become the tail. The longer the distance covered, the more of the body of the splatter narrows and the longer the tail gets. Once engaged with an enemy unit, virtually all command control over it is lost. Can fragment and compress an enemy unit, particularly if enveloping it at the same time. Can pin an enemy unit.

A unit which has some rudimentary training can also use the above formations. For the record, the majority of any feudal army will have, at best, only rudimentary training. Rather than repeat the description of the formations above, comments about how a partially trained unit's behavior will differ are used.

Shield Wall	The warriors know the basic place each weapon system belongs and organize themselves into a series of semi-cohesive clumps within the wall. Warriors fight more closely packed together, particularly the front two ranks. If properly motivated beforehand, they can be encouraged to stand their ground rather than give ground under pressure. If they give up ground, they will give it up slowly. As thin spots appear in the line, appropriately armed warriors will move forward to take the place of fallen comrades. (They are sent forward on their own initiative or due to the instructions of a more experienced warrior nearby.) The line is unlikely to crumple until it is thinned by attrition (or flanked). Once engaged with an enemy unit, virtually all command control over it is lost unless the enemy unit is destroyed.
Splatter	More of the troops remain in the body of the splatter and do not straggle back into the tail. More experienced stragglers will attempt to roll around the flanks of the enemy unit if that is possible, otherwise they will spread out to make contact with the nearest enemy. Once engaged with an enemy unit, virtually all command control over it is lost unless the enemy unit is destroyed, in which case the splatter can be directed at another unit.
Wedge	Hard-charging warriors with big shields form an inverted V shape. More fill up the inside of the V. They charge the point of the V into the enemy formation and attempt to punch through it. They are trained not to attempt to kill anyone on the way through the enemy formation. Their task is to disrupt the formation and punch through it. Skilled individual fighters follow the wedge through the enemy formation and kill the disoriented and confused defenders as they pass through. Once engaged with an enemy unit (after the initial punch-through attack), the unit takes on the characteristics of a Splatter. If the enemy formation is too deep or too closely packed to punch through, all command control is lost. Compresses an enemy formation, and if successful, fragments and penetrates it. This formation was called the cuneus by the ancient Romans. <sup>11</sup>
Beam	This is similar in intent and behavior to a wedge, in that the troops are arranged in a very narrow formation two or three warriors wide. The troops attempt to punch through the enemy line and engage warriors behind the main line. This is used when the target of the unit is an enemy commander or enemy missile troops, and when the intervening formation is not very deep. Unlike the wedge, there are no "follow-up" troops to widen the gap. Ideal for penetrating an enemy unit.

<sup>11</sup> ??source??

A unit with advanced training can perform well in all of the above formations. Here is how a well-trained feudal unit handles the formations:

Shield Wall	The warriors do not passively remain in place. Small groups of them form spontaneous mini-wedges, impact the enemy formation as they sense weak spots, then quickly step back before they take casualties. They cooperate with one another to gang up on individual enemy warriors. They have a much higher kill rate per unit of time than less well trained troops. In addition, the unit, when properly motivated and instructed, will not give any ground under pressure while replacements are available to fill the gaps in the line. The unit can quickly form a shield wall <i>after the battle starts</i> given instructions and an obvious place to form it.
Splatter	Even more of the troops remain in the body of the splatter and do not straggle back into the tail. The unit will self-regroup and often self-disengage. It will self-select the weakest nearby unit and charge it.
Wedge	Given a forceful leader, a disengaged splatter can be formed into a wedge. The warriors who form the sides of the V are less likely to die in the line of march and clog the opening for their comrades who follow them.
Beam	The warriors who form the beam are less likely to die in the line of march and clog the opening for their fellows. Once enemy units are fully engaged, it is easier to go around them rather than try to punch through them. Thus, it is unlikely to be used more than once in any given battle, because most enemy units will be engaged very quickly once the battle starts.

## 6 Building a Unit

How can one motivate the feudal levy to turn out in large numbers for both wars and training sessions? This discussion assumes that a new unit is being formed or an existing one needs to be re-vitalized with energetic new members.

First, let us look at the common qualities that elite military units tend to have. They are: Motivation, Morale, Discipline, Aggressiveness, Training, Equipment, and Leadership. The first four comprise what is often referred to as Esprit de Corps. A unit with these qualities can often accomplish a great deal more than a much larger unit lacking them. We will discuss the elements of Esprit de Corps in order, then skip Training and Equipment to discuss Leadership. Training is covered later.

### 6.1 Motivation

Motivation is listed first, because without it you will not have soldiers! Without motivation, people will not become soldiers or will desert the ranks and become civilians again. So, why do people fight in wars? When asked, they will say it is because of honour, love of country or loyalty to a liege-lord, religion, duty, or the ways of their people, even fear of punishment. In fact, that may be why they join an army, but it is not why they *fight* instead of melt away. Simply, they fight because they do not want to let down their comrades-in-arms and do not want to be thought poorly of by them.<sup>12</sup> In some armies, such as the ancient Romans, men also fought because they were more afraid of their own commanders than they were of the enemy!<sup>13</sup> However, since we do not torture or kill those who refuse to serve, as that would not be to the glory of their Meridian Majesties, this is not an effective motivator. That is why, throughout history, successful armies have identified what motivates their members to fight - and have taken strong measures to strengthen that motivation any way they can.

So, why do our citizens fight? The main reason is that they hope that it will be fun. So, *the expectation of fun* is why they show up at their first war. If they enjoy it, they will show up for the next one *with all of their friends* who want to have fun, too! Thus, successful motivation also means successful recruitment. Many people have moved to our fair realm because its citizens act as an extended family. People enjoy the comradeship of others who share common interests, and the feeling that they 'belong' to the group. The lands that most of our citizens emigrated from upon the continent of Mundania strongly lack these features, hence the attractiveness of an 'inclusive' military unit. It stands to reason that the more the members of the unit do things together, the stronger the bonds within the unit. This rule should be followed at all times, not just on the battlefield. Unit fighter practices, revels, and armor-making workshops are all obvious activities, but do not forget camping together, feasting together, or even travels to visit the lands in Mundania together. The stronger and more visible the group bond is, the more likely that members will stay in the unit long enough to become veteran warriors. Remember one other point, avoid being a closed clique at all costs! Your unit should be open to all who have something to contribute, who are willing and able to do so, and who will (or can learn to) behave in a desirable manner. This includes non-combatants! They have energy and skills to contribute that can make - or break - you on the battlefield.

<sup>12</sup> ??source??

<sup>13</sup> ??source??

Sometimes the most successful tourney-style fighters are the biggest obstacle to getting a unit started. After all, if they can wade through an unorganized mass of warriors and kill most of them single-handedly, why would they be motivated to share the glory and be part of a team? They are often the natural, charismatic leader of the nascent unit. What can be done to get their cooperation? If all else fails, I can only suggest that two or three warriors who are interested in unit tactics work together to kill off the natural leader every single time they take to the melee field. After a few times of being run ragged or killed outright by unit tactics, they will either lead or get out of harm's way!

## 6.2 *Morale*

Morale is next. How do units go about building up the morale of new recruits? They attempt to toughen the recruit, both mentally and physically. Rigorous physical training conditions the body and mind by preparing the recruit for the stress of warfare. The recruit is also imbued with a sense of identity with the unit and its history. They learn to see themselves as an extension of all who have gone before, they learn the glorious exploits and exclusive traditions of their unit. These are held up as examples to follow. Just as importantly, they share in the courage of those who have served before them, just as they share in the glory and excitement of their predecessor's exploits.

Let us contrast this with what happens to a typical new warrior in their first battle. They go into the battle line by themselves, wonder what they are supposed to do, and get run down in the first sixty seconds of the battle. What is worse, after crawling ignominiously off of the battlefield, the new recruit must listen to (what seems like) everyone else brag about their own exploits, without having any to add of their own. Result: no fun, and no second time at the wars. Solution: make sure that the new fighters from your group fight with you, make them feel part of the group, and give them instructions (in a non-patronizing way) so that they know what is going on. When it is all over but the bragging, make sure that you use the magic word "WE". For example, "We killed seven of them in the battle," not "I killed seven of them in the battle." This gives the new recruits something to feel good about and to brag about. The bragging takes the place of history books listing the unit's exploits, so it is very important. Those who accomplish great things for the unit will be emulated. New recruits can share in the unit's glory (and its comradeship), but this will motivate them to try even harder so that next time they can be the hero of the unit. This also acts as an effective advertisement for your unit, creating more interest in joining it, staying on it, and hiring it!

## 6.3 *Discipline*

The next quality of a successful unit is Discipline. There is a world of difference between ten fighters standing next to one another and a unit of ten fighters. Discipline brings order out of chaos and separate directions. It focuses the power of all the members into one direction much like a magnifying glass pinpoints the sun's rays into one tight beam capable of setting the world on fire! How do armies maintain discipline? Pride, Pleasure, and Punishment. Pride derives from proper motivation and morale, a proud *soldier* will not do less than his best *for the unit*. A proud *individual* will not accept less than the best *from themselves*. Pleasure stands for rewarding those who do well. When good work is noticed and rewarded publicly, more good work is encouraged. How can you punish in a voluntary association of warriors? There are several ways, expulsion from the unit or society, exclusion from pleasurable activities for a period of time or until some condition is met, and withholding rewards until behavior changes. Often, the most valued reward is the feeling that one is accepted and respected by the entire unit, and withholding that feeling is therefore the most powerful of punishments. Naturally, punishment should be a last resort, as the other techniques are far more powerful due to the nobility of our citizens.

One warning. Just because the bad behavior is obvious to everyone else, you must assume that it is not apparent to the perpetrator. Someone with tact and with the respect of the perpetrator must kindly, gently, but *incredibly plainly* explain what is being done wrong, and what behavior is expected in its place. Otherwise, you are being discourteous, because you are assuming that the person knows that they are acting in an unacceptable manner, and chooses to do so. One important thing to remember: guilt must be expiated so that the shame is no longer an issue. A soldier cannot be effective if they are ashamed of themselves. If a member has done something wrong, find a way for them to "clean the slate" in the eyes of everyone.

## 6.4 *Aggressiveness*

The next quality is aggressiveness. A timid soldier is a worthless soldier. A soldier who cannot master their fear of death is of no value, in fact, they are like an infection that can spread a disease of the spirit into their comrades. Motivation, Morale and Discipline all contribute to aggressiveness. Aggressiveness is a state of mind, body and training. The mind must be prepared to seek out and vanquish the enemy. The body must have the strength to accomplish the task, and the soldier must be so well trained that they instinctively and without hesitation fight the enemy. The veterans must make it clear that the enemy is to be reckoned with, a worthy enemy, one that *could* win the battle, *but not as dangerous as us!*

In fact, the enemy is almost to be pitied, because they just do not understand (yet!) how we are going to take our finely honed war-band and trounce them so hard. . . . If the warriors do not take their enemy seriously, they will not do their best. If the warriors believe that they cannot win, they will not do their best either. The key is to find the middle ground where the enemy is tough enough to require the best the soldiers can offer, but not so formidable as to cause them to despair of victory. If the latter is not possible, and neither is retreating, then it would be wise to come up with a pithy saying to inspire them to superhuman efforts.

## **7 Leadership**

### **7.1 The Leader's Job**

The leader's job is to excite other warriors to become part of the unit, train with it, and go to battle with it. The leader should do what can be done to increase the morale of the unit and to build the social momentum necessary to support the unit for the long term. The leader must not show favoritism to cronies, but must instead recognize ability and self-sacrifice among the unit members and reward them socially for their good work. These are the most important parts of the leader's job.

In short, the leader's job is to make sure that a sizeable unit of trained and equipped warriors arrives on the battlefield in good spirits.

All other tasks pale in significance.

### **7.2 The Job for Senior Warriors**

Sometimes a good leader is also a good tactician. This is not always so. In fact, it is often true that good leaders are not good tacticians.

Here is what to do when the leader is not a good tactician. Senior warriors with good tactical sense should direct the unit in battle. The leader should defer to their judgement. The leader should let the good tacticians point out the weak points in the enemy positions and then lead the troops to that point. The ancient Romans had a member of the Senatorial rank as the commander of a Legion, but the most rank of *Primus Pilus* (Latin for "First Spear") was given to the senior Centurion (a "professional") and his advice was strongly considered by any sensible commander.<sup>14</sup>

In all cases, senior warriors act as "mini-leaders". They repeat commands and mobilize nearby troops to follow them. They keep their comrades "tuned in" with their voice so that they are less likely to separate and lose their "sub-unit" cohesion. They recognize when the unit's kill-to-time-expended ratio has dropped to low and Regroup! or Disengage! their team as needed. They direct warriors forward to fill gaps in the shield wall. They keep an eye out for flanking opportunities (or flanking dangers) and direct their team accordingly. The most senior warrior should stay near the leader to advise when the unit should Disengage! and be ready to direct the newly formed Splatter formation in a more useful direction.

### **7.3 Techniques to Demoralize the Enemy**

Taunts, the display of captured trophies from prior wars, fearsome war chants and aggressive spirit are old standbys and should always be used, as should the size and might of your army if it outnumbers the enemy. I have actually caused gaps to form in a shield wall directly opposite my unit with a particularly aggressive and (apparently) crazed war chant.

Personally, however, I prefer tossing the heads of their already slain relatives in amongst their ranks, then charging whilst they are filled with puzzlement and dismay.

### **7.4 Techniques to Boost Morale**

Everyone who participates in the unit's activities gets to share in the glories earned by any member of the unit. This does not mean that they "steal" the glory earned by a single member of the unit on the battlefield, just that they get to share in it. In this way, the success of the unit becomes the success of all. More warriors will answer the call to raise the feudal levy if their comrades ask it of them and if they feel a successful and useful part of the unit.

Grant honours to those who help the unit succeed. Do not limit the honours to those who are very successful fighters. Recognize that victory is a dish prepared with many ingredients, and that those who help equip, finance, transport, or cheer

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<sup>14</sup> ??source??

your comrades on have all contributed to the victory. Make them feel honoured for their contribution and, more importantly, respected as a valuable member of the unit.

There are many kinds of honours. Rather than a “hierarchy of formal awards and ranks,” consider unique gifts chosen for their suitability to the recipient. This may be nothing more than a nickname or a short poem. A warrior whose courageous resolve held the shield wall together might be called “the Steadfast,” or given a small rock from the battlefield suspended from a chain in honour of their immovable defense.

### **7.5 Techniques for Issuing Commands**

The careful reader will noticed that all sample commands in this manual of arms are followed by the exclamation point. This is intentional. A military command is a forceful, imperative statement. It is always stated in the imperative, “do this now” positive action mode of speech.

It is a serious mistake to issue commands in the negative action mode of speech. For example, “Don’t Retreat!” is a catastrophic command, and I have seen battles lost just by issuing it. Half of the warriors hear the word “Don’t” and the other half, well, don’t. This means that half the warriors in the unit retreat and the other half hold their ground, to the speedy destruction of them all. Speak in the positive, stating what you want them to do. “Stand your ground!” is a far safer command to issue.

Explain the standard commands you wish to use and make sure that all understand them and what their response to them should be. Always use the same command to mean the same action. Do not command “Advance!” sometimes and “Forward!” the rest of the time if both mean the same thing. Pick one and never vary your choice.

## **8 Basic Concepts and Training Techniques for Them**

Once an assemblage of warriors has been exposed to properly conducted unit warfare, they will grasp the fundamentals. If they practice as a unit, they can become rudimentarily trained on their own initiative. They will also often pick up the misconceptions about formations, the chain of command, and complicated battle plans we discussed above. For these exercises, we assume that the warriors are competent and authorized combatants for paired combat. Any references to being “untrained” refer to their not having been trained in small unit tactics.

### **8.1 Teamwork Exercise**

This is a basic drill to turn warriors into trained war fighters. It is fun, simple to explain, and easy to learn.

1. Divide the fighters into two (hopefully) evenly matched teams.
2. Explain this simple concept to them. “A warrior alone is dead meat. Regroup immediately with your comrades-in-arms.”
3. Anyone *standing alone* on the melee field is the primary target. They are called stragglers. Stragglers, regardless of original side, are to be killed first by everyone, *even their own team members*, in fact, *especially* by their own team members. If a straggler is *actively moving to rejoin their own comrades-in-arms*, only the enemy side considers them target number one.
4. Explain the “Disengage!” and the “Regroup!” commands.
5. Laissez Allez! (Lay On!)
6. Adjust the membership of the teams to get more evenly matched sides and repeat. Try to keep those who *actively* work together on the same team. Do not confuse “actively working together” with “passively occupying nearby space together.”
7. As the warriors become more proficient (and if the number of warriors on the field allows), redefine stragglers to be two or three people alone together.

This exercise serves several purposes. Here they are:

Isolation becomes feared.	Warriors instinctively feel safe when they are nearby their comrades. They “self-regroup” without being commanded to do so.
Targets of Opportunity are seized.	The warriors learn to recognize weakness and attack it on their own initiative.

Successful Teamwork Techniques are developed.	This is a tactical crucible. Successful techniques will be copied, unsuccessful ones will be dropped. As you balance the teams, you may find that a few of the warriors “get it” better than the others will. Place them in one team where they are significantly outnumbered. They will get more aggressive and accelerate their teamwork and tactical development to survive. The less capable team will see what works and begin to emulate it. As they do so, the teams can be adjusted until the numbers are basically even.
Command Responsiveness is increased.	As teams of two to five stabilize, they learn one another’s voices. A familiar voice is recognized and thus responded to more quickly than a strangers’. Team members learn to “tune in” to each other’s voices.
Kill to Time-Expended Ratio is improved.	A two to five man unit, once stabilized, learns to recognize the “right time” to lunge forward to attack an enemy shield wall, then return. They learn how to time their blows to hit the same target at the same time from different directions. These mini-wedges increase the kill to time-expended ratio because the front rank is no longer passive, it actively attacks on the defense. Of course, it is also more effective in the attack for the same reasons.
Unit cohesiveness is improved.	The team members, because they know and trust one another, are less likely to lose heart. They are more likely to be aggressive and mobile in their response to danger, rather than passively awaiting the moves of the enemy.
Morale is Improved.	Warriors who know what to do in battle are more likely to do it. As they recognize that others do not have their war skills, their morale increases even more.
Army Size Increases.	An average fighter who fights alone in a battle doesn’t live very long. It’s not very much fun to die right away. With no “bragging rights”, they lose out on the social aspects of fighting as well. Attendance at wars suffers. Now, if they fulfill their part of the plan, they get “group bragging rights” and feel successful, even if they died quickly. They are “part of the team.” Attendance at wars improves.
Command Depth Increases	Anyone who shows ability to lead a team comes to the forefront on their own initiative. They are rewarded socially and on the battlefield for doing so. This technique grooms an entire generation of potential war leaders. In addition, if the leader is slain or separated from the unit, one of the team leaders will have the skills and social authority to effectively take command. This is a far better method than appointing cronies to formal positions of military rank.

## 8.2 Slotwork Drills

In tourney fighting, the warrior focuses their entire attention upon the foe directly in front of them. Since most practices consist of one-on-one fighting pairs, this tendency is reinforced with each practice session. In a melee, however, the person directly in front is not the one who is easiest to kill. Instead, pick someone to either side and attack them.

To learn how to do this successfully, sit back and watch two teams fighting each other. Watch how, as someone strikes the person directly in front of them, they are opened up to those diagonally in front of them. The same is true when the person defends against someone, particularly on the diagonal. Or, as someone steps forward to attack the person directly in front of them, notice how they probably had a better opening against their opponent on the diagonal. The skilled warrior understands and makes use of this knowledge. The skilled team of warriors also understands this, and works together to open up slots through their opponents’ defenses faster than would occur naturally.

In order to demonstrate this, have the warriors form up into two opposing teams and advance to combat range. This demonstration should be short and to the point, because warriors have short attention spans. Explain the concept in no more than five sentences. Take a position in the front rank of one of the teams. Demonstrate by having one of your diagonally placed opponents take a half-step or lunge forward to strike the person in front of them. Show how open they are to a diagonal slot shot. (Don’t hit the warriors hard when you demonstrate this type of technique, it tends to annoy them!) Then, take a half-step or lunge forward as if you were going to attack the person in front of you. However, aim for the person to their side. That’s it. No More. Let them start. Make the demonstration clean, quick, and deadly. Then let them fight to try it out.

When they fight, they are not allowed to strike the person in front of them. They are only allowed to attack the persons diagonal to them.

Before each slotwork drill, highlight one or two diagonally based techniques. Again, brief, crisp demonstrations of technique, then allow them to fight. When demonstrating a technique, use as few words as possible. Never mix in talk of other, advanced techniques that they will learn later. Extra verbiage and extra topics just feed confusion. This is perhaps the single most important training lesson to learn - and apparently the hardest one for most instructors.

Here are some more techniques to teach in this drill:

Pin the Shield on the Donkey (Donkey! Now!)	Pin an opponent's shield in place so that they can not use it to block an attack from another direction. This can be done with a pole axe, a spear thrust, a shield press or punch, or whatever else comes to mind.
The Gut Churner (Gut Churner! Now!)	A spear in the second rank of a shield wall wielded from a kneeling position has an entirely different angle of attack from one wielded standing up. In combination with head shots from swords or pole weapons, the defender's shields tend to both rise up and have their bottoms angle forward. This opens up a wonderfully satisfying gut shot.
The Ole' 1-2-3 (1-2-3! Now!)	Pick one opponent and have two warriors in the front rank with sword and shield, and one (or two) in the second rank with pole weapons simultaneously strike the opponent. One should go for the legs, one for the body or arms, and one for the head. One or two passes at the same person is usually enough to finish them off. (If it doesn't, it usually kills their morale, because they will be focusing solely on defense instead of attack.
Down Under (Head Shots! Now!)	This can be done when faced with an enemy shield wall that is not too closely packed together and when the Divine and its Holy Servants in the Marshallate are well pleased with the valour and decorum shown upon the field, for it is a most unfortunate warrior who assays it just before the Marshallate brings the battle to a Hold. Spears and pole axes rain a flurry of blows down upon the heads of those in front of them. The opposing shield wall will quite naturally raise its shields and weapons. One or two pole weapons attempt to table two enemy shields in the front rank that are next to one another. Now is the time for an agile sword and shield warrior in the first rank to duck down and slip between two soldiers in the enemy front rank, doing so underneath their shields. This is an excellent way to take out a troublesome (meaning deadly accurate) pole weapon in the second rank. A few quick hammer blows along with a hip snap to the shieldmen to either side tends to thin the enemy ranks of both warriors and courage. Before the enemy can mobilize and strike back, duck back down and return your own lines.
Defensive Weapon Work	This is a defensive technique that is used in response to an enemy attack on a comrade. Thus, there is no activating command. Basically, one uses one's weapon to deflect an enemy blow directed towards another. In this drill, no one is allowed to actively block a shot to themselves (unless, of course, they are attempting to avoid an injury during training). Instead, they must rely upon their teammates to do so. A shield-bearer may pre-emptively place a shield where blows might occur (such as when they spring forward to attack another), but they cannot move their shield to block a shot that they are aware of or suspect. This is a passive block and is allowed by the drill. The same restrictions apply to blocking with weapons. In order for a team to be successful with this technique, they must balance attacking the enemy with defending one another. Failure to defend one another well means they lose quickly, failure to attack means they lose slowly. Whilst not intended as a team battle tactic, this drill builds team-member awareness which is essential for other techniques to work.
<Insert Memorable Name Here> (Nickname! Now!)	As your warriors develop more slot techniques, give the techniques a good name. A good name is descriptive of the technique in some way, sardonically memorable, and, when abbreviated, makes a good imperative command. If you know who originated it, add their name to it also. This is a good way to get more techniques created! This also gives your team leaders instructions to guide their team with that are within their scope of command.

Note that the imperative form of the command is in two parts. The first part lets the team know that they are to act together and prepare themselves. The "Now!" lets them know exactly when to strike. Team leaders should always issue the orders at

the same pace so that their team members are not wondering when the order will come just as you are puzzled by when this sentence will end.

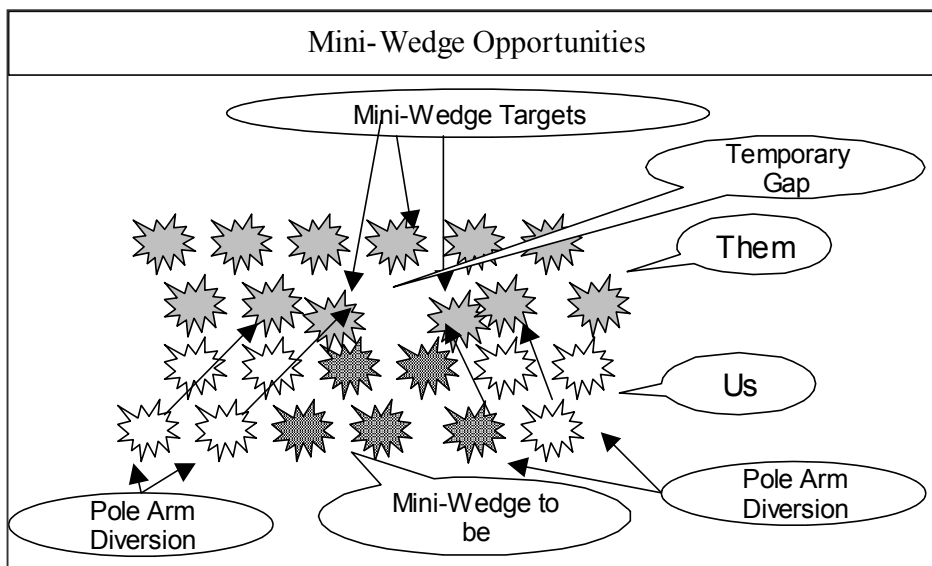
### 8.3 Mini-Wedge Formation Drills

The warriors in the first rank should not just be passive defenders of the pole arms in the second rank. Two to three warriors, along with one or two supporting pole arms should form spontaneous wedges and push into the enemy shield wall. A weak point is exploited, a few enemy are slain, and the warriors leap back into the shield wall. This is a quick, in and out type of maneuver until the enemy shield wall becomes too thin (via attrition) to hold firm.

This is a dangerous tactic to employ if done poorly, but a highly effective one when done correctly.

If the soldiers advance with erratic, uncoordinated timing, the most aggressive of them will die quickly. This is catastrophic for the unit (not to mention the soldiers).

In addition, the timing of exactly when to advance is very important. As already discussed under slotwork drills, pole arms (and all other weapons) should be used on diagonally placed opponents. At certain times during the melee, two widely separated pole arms will strike contiguous enemy troops from different directions. This will cause them to turn to face their attackers. In the instant that this happens, a small gap may form between the two adjacent warriors who were attacked from opposite directions. In addition, since they are momentarily facing somewhat away from one another, they (and the pole arm behind and between them) are now vulnerable. This is the time to strike!



There are several components to practicing this technique. First, stand off to the side and watch two shield walls facing one another. Watch for the times this opportunity appears at random. Learn to recognize it. Two, watch for it to happen from the front rank. This is a technique where you want the same people all around you, so practice with your teammates. Not only must you learn to recognize the opportunity and act upon it, they must do so also. Rather than attack at first, call out "Now!" when you spot the opening and would be ready to attack it. Several things happen from this. First, your comrades in arms learn to spot the opportunity and be ready to act on it. Second, you know they will support you. Third, you learn when your team is vulnerable because your opponents are trying to do the same thing to you. At some point, you want to have the pole weapons on either side the opposing team learn to cause this to happen on purpose. This drill can be mixed and matched with other drills. For example, one side might be assigned to a slotwork drill whilst the other is given this drill to do. Do not let the sides know what their opponent's drill is.

### 8.4 Wedge Formation Drills

One side is formed up into a wedge, the other into a splatter, a shield wall or a meat grinder. Vary the angle of attack on the wedge, do not assume that one must hit the unit in the center. Try hitting it at an angle on one flank and see what results. If there are enough warriors on each side to have multiple units on each side, try to force your wedge between the two units if they do not join up tightly together. Choose hard-charging warriors with plenty of spirit and with big shields for the outer rank of the wedge.

Many units have difficulty in penetrating an enemy shield wall. One reason is that many fighters do not understand what is required of them -- they are literally doing the wrong thing! Many believe that they are supposed to run *up to* the enemy shield wall and bump into it. In reality, what is required is to run *through* the shield wall. This means that the fighters must, when they impact against the wall, be aiming for a point at least fifteen feet past the *last* man in the shield wall. Many fighters aim for a point one foot *in front of* the *front* man in the shield wall.

If you have been assigned to the front rank of a wedge, consign your soul to your God(s), kiss your sweetheart goodbye, and run *through* the enemy line. Aim *between* two enemy warriors, not *at* one of them. By doing this, you will bump the two warriors out of your way and save the force of your impact for the following ranks. As you push through the first rank, angle yourself so that you are aimed between two soldiers in the next rank. As you lose momentum you must exaggerate the 'bounce' off of your opponents and change the angle of your motion to find the weakest point in front of you. Keep moving!!!

If you keep in motion by 'bouncing off and through' each new rank, it will be more difficult for the enemy to hit you. There are several reasons for this. First, the warriors that you bypass have been knocked off-balance and they must deal with your friends following directly behind you. In addition, as your wedge forces its way into the shield wall, the enemy warriors on the sides of your wedge become packed too tightly together. They are knocked off balance and are too close together to shrinkback or even defend. In addition, the angle of attack for the enemy pole weapons on the flanks is all wrong, their own comrades are in the way. Also, by no longer moving in a straight line as your speed is slowed, it is much more difficult for the enemy to predict your path and pole-axe you. Note that your *task*, as a member of the first rank in a wedge, is to break through the enemy line and create such confusion in their ranks that your own comrades are able to follow you through. Swing at the enemy on the way through, it gives them something to worry about besides drawing a bead on your helm. (Remember, anyone in front of you is your enemy, your opponents do not have that advantage once you are inside their formation!) You break up the formation, knock them off balance, and confuse them. Your comrades in the second wave must provide the mass and momentum to keep the gap you made open, keep up the pressure on the defender's formation, and follow you through the gap. The third wave will kill those that were bypassed on your way through.

Paradoxically, the less you and your comrades are afraid of shoving through quickly, the better your chances of kissing your sweetheart *after* the battle too! Attackers who run up to the shieldwall and timidly bump shields with the enemy die like lost sheep in a very hungry wolfpack. If you do die on the way through, die outwards, into the enemy, rather than downwards into the path of your comrades.

Successfully masking the fact that a penetration of the shieldwall is about to take place at least doubles the likelihood of success and more than halves the losses. This is too much of an edge to ignore. Not only is the enemy commander unable to deploy reserves to bolster the line before the penetration is underway, the enemy ranks will be physically and psychologically unprepared for the onslaught. To stop a wedge requires a thick enough line, iron will, and proper bracing. Defenders who receive a surprise wedge attack will lack the latter two qualities.

A wedge is very deadly in the hands of the reserves, after the front units have thinned out a bit, because they usually do not see the attack coming until it is too late.

## **8.5 Beam Formation Drills**

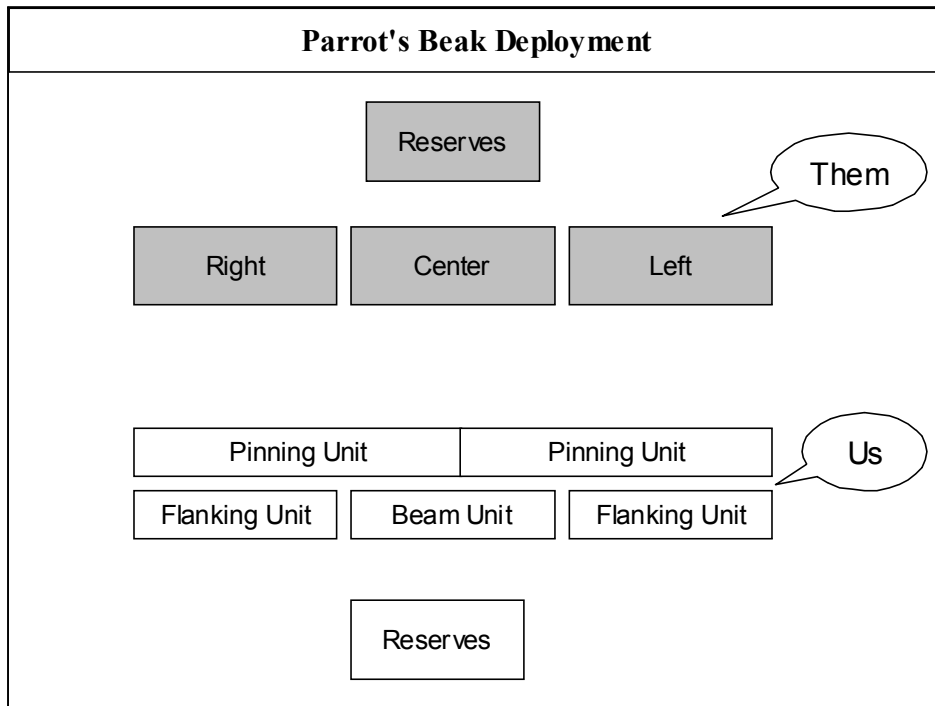
Practice the beam formation just as you would a wedge. Your reserves might want to consider multiple beams hitting nearby once the enemy shield wall begins to thin out.

## **8.6 Shield Wall (Meatgrinder) Drills**

The assumption is that this unit is formed up where it cannot be flanked. Therefore, restrict the width of the field to the width of the meatgrinder. You may optionally define bridge and river boundaries. One of the things to stress in this formation is that it does not, repeat, does not give ground. Once that lesson has been learned, form up the unit on the river bank side of the bridge and spread pole arms and missile weapons along the river bank. If you can trust your soldiers not to retreat, you can get more manpower at the point of contact. The opposing force can be a wedge, shield wall, or another meatgrinder.

### 8.7 The Parrot's Beak Drill<sup>15</sup>

This is an advanced battle plan that assumes the soldiers already know the other drills and tactics and are proficient in them. If they are not, they will lack the skills to pull this off. Here is the initial deployment of troops.



Note that, from the enemy's point of view, the deployment looks just like their own. They cannot see the unit boundaries between the flanking/ beam units and the pinning units in the front rank.

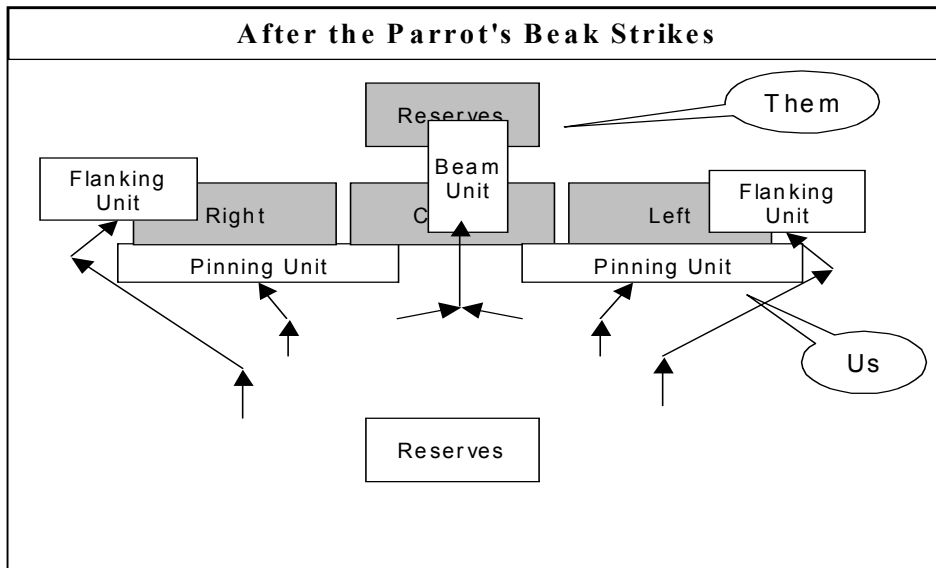
If you lack sufficient troops to practice this with two different sides (as is likely), two to four defenders holding pole weapons sideways (to represent the location of the front rank of the enemy shield wall) can be used. Do not have one of these "placeholders" stand directly where the beam unit will strike. Instead, have two "placeholder's" poles butted together at the point of impact. Since the attackers are already assumed to know the individual techniques, they only need to practice the timing of them together.

The two pinning units will advance at a gradually increasing pace, as if they are going to charge in their last three or four strides. However, it is important that they do not do so, and in fact, do not advance too quickly. (See the description of pinning and indirection in an earlier section.) About two to three strides away from the enemy ranks, they suddenly slacken their pace and advance diagonally, not straight ahead. This opens up a gap between them in the center and throws off the timing of the defenders, who have been fixed on an opponent charging them from directly in front. The flanking units perform their task just as described in the section on indirection above.

As the pinning units advance, the beam unit lags behind. It is originally formed up lengthwise across the width of the center. As it moves forward, it transforms into a splatter formation and gradually increases its pace to start closing the distance between it and the pinning units. Just before the pinning units slow down and separate in the center, the beam should have reached full speed and should be stretched out into a column of twos or threes. As the slow moving pinning units separate, the beam should appear at full speed as if out of nowhere. The psychological effect upon the defenders is typically devastating, as is its physical impact. The beam punches through the center and engages the reserves so that the flanking units on either side have free rein.

<sup>15</sup> It was common for the ancients to name their military techniques and formations based upon the behavior of animals or commonly understood daily activities. Given an illiterate mass of warriors, the very name of a formation would convey a tremendous amount of information about the technique quickly and accurately. The reasoning behind this particular choice of name, however, is lost in the depths of time. Who but the Divine, the Omnipotent, can fathom the workings of the mind of one so fierce as Duke John the Bearkiller?

As the pinning units advance, the flanking units gravitate outwards, but do not move past the outer edge of the pinning units. Once the enemy is pinned, the flanking units swing out and around to strike the enemy's flank.



The flanks, the pinning units, and the impact from the beam compress and fragment the enemy units. The beam pins the enemy reserves, leaving our own reserves free to destroy the best target of opportunity. If there are no enemy reserves, then the beam unit should regroup and turn on the left or right flanks.

Ten or fifteen minutes practice over four to eight practices should be sufficient to get the timing down.

### 8.8 Nullifying Enemy Missile Weapons

Any time enemy missile units are vulnerable, crush them. Once the archers are focused upon targets to their front, they too become much easier to flank. One of two warriors, strolling slowly (and apparently apart) in a non-threatening manner, can often walk right into the midst of a group of archers from the flank or behind and kill a number of them silently. A polite statement, gently expressed, to the effect of "Excuse me, but you are dead." administered along with the coup de grâce, will often allow a single soldier to slay a number of archers before being discovered. Failing that, a quick charge lead by those with large shields will usually scatter the archers, but few heavy infantry can catch up with the archers once they take flight (unless they cannot escape the immediate area).

More problematic are archers placed behind enemy formations or terrain obstacles such that your own forces cannot close with them. In this case, take pains to keep your units out of range until their presence within range can help you. Train your units that are not engaged with the enemy to have people with shields watch out for (and block) enemy missiles.

Few enemy archers are very accurate in placing their shots.<sup>16</sup> Those that are should be considered very dangerous. Your own missile troops should barrage the enemy archer from a variety of angles, preferably at different times. The more accurate of your own archers should attack from an angle that makes them largely invisible to their target (which, incidentally, is good advice for any archer).

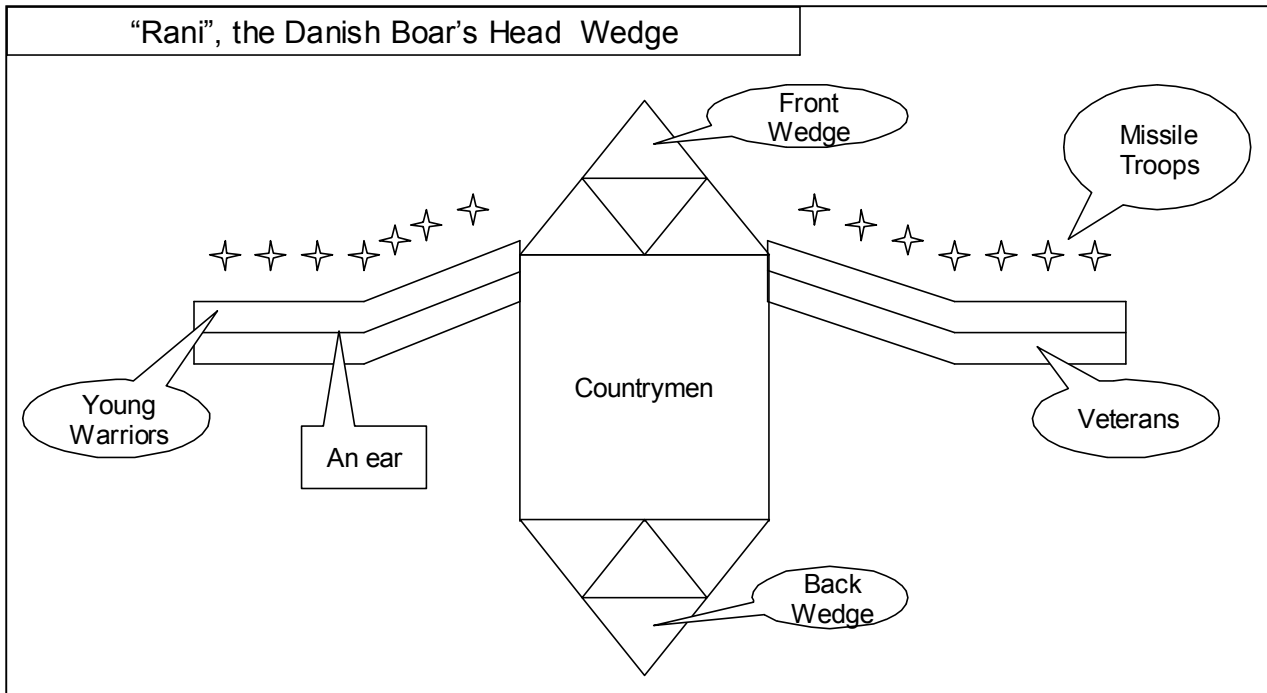
## 9 Untested Historical Formations

The following sections are outside my personal experience, yet they were deemed worthy battle tactics by the warriors of their time. Some of them may be easily adapted to our own times, others may not. Yet, the thoughtful practitioner of warfare may well find something of value in them, for they were designed to solve certain problems with specific techniques. A reconstruction of the thought processes behind these formations may aid us in devising new stratagems and tactics.

### 9.1 The Danish Boar's Head Wedge

<sup>16</sup> The Divine be praised, for now our levies rain death down upon the Meridians in clouds of arrows and our marksmen feather the throats of their bravest and most skilled, for archers are honoured in this land, and the arts of archery lag in Meridies. Long may they ignore the noble bows and fleet arrows, that we may go from Victory to Victory over their hosts!

This historical formation was recorded by Saxo Grammaticus, a fourth century (AD) Roman who travelled in Northern Europe. The wedge has two fighters in the front rank, three in the fourth, four in the fifth, etc. The ears to either side have



missile troops in front, backed up by a thin shield wall. Note that the back end of the unit is also a wedge. The men in the unit can turn around in place and charge in the opposite direction.

The missile troops can retreat back through the ears before they can be engaged in hand-to-hand combat. They can harass the enemy shield wall and weaken it before the heavy fighters close in for the kill.

The ears are extended whilst the line stays back from the enemy, they retract and become the sides of the "countrymen" when the wedge charges. Given the right terrain, the ears may also mask the depth of the wedge.<sup>17</sup>

Why is it called the Boar's Head? The name simplifies the plan! Every Dane knew how a boar attacked. A boar charges with hellish fury out of a hidden lair; surprises its foes with its speed, momentum and attack; tucks in its ears; gores the enemy to right and left; and doesn't stop until well after it is killed. Seems a lot simpler explained that way rather than with the text description and diagram above.

## 10 Conclusion

There are many facets to forming and maintaining an excellent battle unit whether it is composed of three comrades or three hundred. The principles and techniques are identical, only the scope of possibility (and the mercenary's fee!) increases with unit size.

It is too much to expect feudal levies to maintain unit cohesiveness during the shock of melée combat. So, proper training does not focus on keeping units together on the mobile battlefield so much as it does on constant, continual, rapid self-motivated regrouping in the heat of battle. It is not whether a unit stays cohesive at all times that matters, it is the relative amount of time the unit does so compared to its enemies.

Second, a trained unit of one hundred is really twenty-five trained units of three to five people. Creating these trained mini-units is the real way to gain dominance on the battlefield.

These two concepts are the key to understanding what is possible for a feudal levy to accomplish and finding a workable way in which to do so.

In Service to the Imperial Crown of Meridies,

*Andras, Seigneur de la Maison de la Salamandra, Chevalier du Roi du Meridies*

<sup>17</sup> Hrafnuson, Steinhar Hilditonn "The Boar's Head Formation" Early Period No XIX.

**Ahmed ibn Falas** is a literary figment of the author's imagination that allows him to brag about his liege-lord, Duke John the Bearkiller and poke fun at himself at the same time. Although the motivations are different, attributing a scholarly work to "a long dead and illustrious person" was a time-honoured medieval tradition.

**Andras Salamandra** is believed by some scholars to be a sixth-century Breton war leader reknowned for surprise tactics in the Forêt Broceliande. Other scholars claim he is a fourteenth-century Breton knight, known for lightning raids upon his French foes. All agree he was a learned man for his times. Regardless, he may be the only leader of a war unit that was promoted by both sides for the same acts in the same battle.

**David Wendelken** is a Partner of and Chief Technology Officer for CASEtech, Inc., a professional consulting services firm that specializes in Oracle software development technology and business rules-based software development. He is an internationally recognized expert in his field, with one book and over sixty technical articles and papers to his credit.

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