

# LEPHANTS & PHALANX

## Elephants, Phalanxes and How Romans Deal With Them

BY JACK POLONKA

In SPQR, the Roman legion (LG) units generally enjoy an overwhelming advantage over the opposing infantry units. If one disregards the usual, and depressing, inadequacies of the Roman cavalry in protecting the infantry line's flanks, the legion infantry will have no problem in blowing out the center of the enemy line, with one exception. The exception occurs if the enemy has a line of elephants or phalanxes (in some cases, as in Zama and Bagradas Plain, lines of both types). In such cases, the Roman player has a real pain in the you-know-what to deal with.

These two unit types are the only enemy non-cavalry units which Roman LG units are not attack superior to. In such cases, the Roman attack through the center could easily be ground to a halt or delayed long enough for the enemy cavalry to gain control of the flanks and disrupt the Roman infantry lines. This article gives the Roman player advice and guidelines on how to deal with these problems while minimizing the amount of pain and grief involved.

Even though elephants are very susceptible to missile fire and rampage caused by other stampeding elephants (thus not

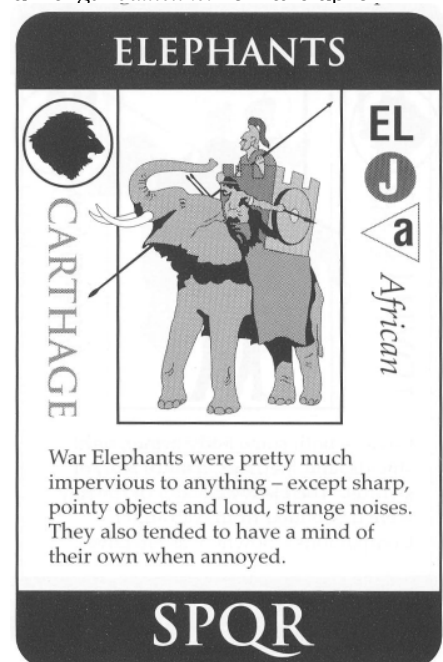
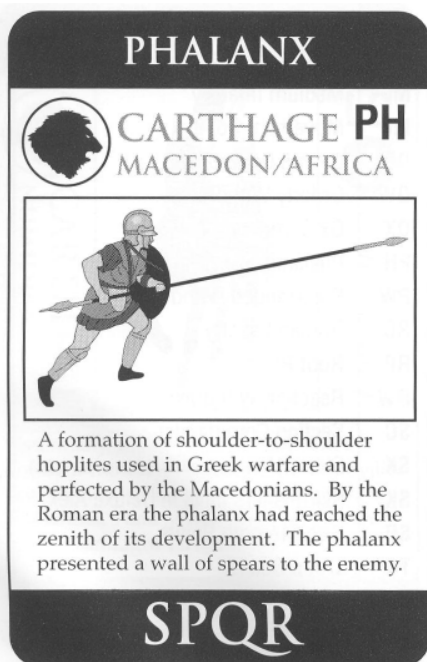
too difficult to dispose of individually or in a small group), they form a quite formidable obstacle to the Romans when deployed in a lengthy line in front of the enemy infantry. One can see the defensive potential of such an array of elephant in Bagradas Plain and Zama (SPQR scenarios). With elephants deployed in this way, the Roman player has a problem in that the elephant line needs to be cleared before the LG units move to engage the opposing infantry, which requires time.

The difficulty in blowing out an elephant line is that it cannot be quickly removed with shock combat alone. The Roman units, as stated above, lack attack superiority and attack so low on the shock table against these guys, they receive more TQ hits than they deliver. During all of this, the elephants are not standing idly by but will return the favor with TQ hits from the elephants screen archers/javelins, if not shock attack themselves. There is also a chance the Roman player will be unlucky by getting smacked with a rampaging tusker and accrue more TQ hits. All of this adds up to a not-so-happy prospect for the Roman player who does not use extensive missile volley preparation. In theory, to sufficiently disrupt the elephant line, two to three missile volleys are required, with possibly some shock combat (ugh!) to remove any lingering tuskers. Theory, being all well and good, does not necessarily give an outline to follow. The prevalent question is, how to deal with these pachyderm guys exactly?

The first Roman units to make contact with the elephant line are the Velites. Using their close volley missile capabilities, the Velites should be able to fire two missile volleys of pilas with the missile hits distributed evenly along the line or concentrated in certain parts of the line for maximum effect. At this point, if the Velites have not been routed by missile fire or a counterattack from the elephants, one can withdraw them behind the LG infantry lines.

All of the above babbling will be a mute point if the Romans have to deal with double phalanxes. Double phalanxes (being double the trouble) nullify the parity and slight advantages the Roman get from using the *ganging up* solution due to their increased size ability to distribute acquired TQ hits between two units plus other little benefits. For an example of their defensive effectiveness, see the SPQR Cynoscephalae scenario.

Another solution, which is good for both phalanx and double phalanx lines, is *to beat up on the neighbors*. A key point for the Romans to remember is no opposing army will have enough phalanxes, double or single, to construct a line which covers the full length *battleline*. To make up for



## Analysis of Elephants and Phalanxes in SPQR

the deficiency, the opposition will employ MI and/ or HI units to lengthen the line and protect the phalanxes' flank. The Romans have a golden opportunity to blow out the phalanxes with relative ease by attacking these *neighbors*.

Being attack superior to both MI and HI, the LG units can easily rout these units and then turn on the phalanxes' flank. By having the rest of the attacking LG line two hexes away from the opposing line

and unengaged, the Romans will prevent the remaining phalanxes from pivoting to face the oncoming flank attacks. In this way, the Romans can roll up the line without suffering extensive losses. With the *beating up the neighbors* solution being a methodical procedure, it requires the commodity which the Roman usually have very little of, time.

Difficult and formidable as they are, elephants and phalanxes have inherent

weakness which astute Roman commanders can exploit to their advantage. Lines of such units are not totally insurmountable, when using the advice and guidelines given above, as they might seem for the Romans. Hopefully this article helps to get potential consuls of Rome one step closer to victory.



## Rampaging Pachyderms!

BY RICH PHARES



The Perla's before Swine Playtesting Group arrived at Ed McGrady's house one Saturday morn. We spent an hour and a half punching pieces and setting up *Raphia*,

deciding who was going to sit where, and play which flank of what side, and most importantly, who got what munchies. The game finally started, and three turns (about 40 minutes) later, it was all over but the crying. What happened? Well it seems the commander of the Egyptian left flank (uh, we won't mention names here) decided to stay behind his screen of 8 African elephants, secure in the knowledge that his opponent would not dare venture forth. His 12 Indian elephants smashed into and beyond mine (I didn't say 'mine', did I?), rampaging his elephants, my elephants, some elephants next door, and a few in the National Zoo (that's what the reporter said. Honest!). Twenty rampaging pachyderms two hexes from your line of cavalry, peltasts and heavy infantry leads to all sorts of nervous disorders. Also tends to tip the scales in your opponent's favor.

Elephants. Huge brutes. Able to leap tall buildings, wreck fortified cities, eat huge quantities of peanuts. The *Tiger* tanks of the ancient world – or were they? For those of you who expect to wipe Legion after Legion off the map with your wedge of trunk waving horrors, you may be disappointed. Careful use of these gigantic beasts, however, will bring tears to your opponents' eyes – which is always a good thing!

This article will examine some of the ways to use these particular combat units. And to start with, we'll look at a few Do's and Don'ts:

### Do:

- Support your elephant assault with infantry
- Allow for some distance between the infantry and the 'phants
- Remember to use the missile factors when applicable
- Follow up any gains made by the elephants
- Remember to have a leader in position to keep the elephants moving/ attacking

### Don't:

- Forget to use your elephants
- Throw them forward without figuring how many turns it will take to reach the enemy line
- Put your infantry in front of the elephants, or worse yet, in between two opposing forces of elephants
- Fail to notice where your flanks are and what you have exposed them to
- Place your cavalry in support of elephants

So? Pretty simple isn't it? Should be, except most of us have probably done all of the *don'ts* more than once on different occasions, in different scenarios. For example in *Bagradas Plains*, I charged forward with my elephants, and watched gleefully as they sliced through two lines of *Hastati* – only to watch the hole seal itself because I failed to follow up the assault with my infantry line. At *Raphia*, (as stated earlier) I let my elephants sit, and tried skirmishing with my cavalry. This gave the initiative to my opponent, who flung his 'phants forward, sending rampaging elephants from both sides into my infantry. Very messy.

On the other hand, I have had some success in foiling my opponent's efforts to

use his elephants. I had to sacrifice some skirmishers to do it, but in the end it was worth it.

Here are the major points on the use of the grey wonders of the ancient world:

- A)** Use them; don't just let them stand as a force in being
- B)** Make sure if you make the choice above, have a leader near or with them that can continue the assault, or pull them back as need be
- C)** Don't leave them out to be sacrificed
- D)** Frontal attacks against most units are OK. The main exceptions are (1) PH – DS, and only a col of 6 - 9; (2) HI – no superior, col of 6-9; (3) LG – no superior, has javelins, col 7. For those units, you should try for flank/ rear attacks
- E)** Support the elephant assault; follow up units should be able to exploit the holes (if any) or smack the opponents line in one move. Any more is begging the opponent to regroup and come at you
- F)** Don't get caught by your own rampaging elephants. It's deadly, annoying, and highly embarrassing.
- G)** Go after the cavalry if they give you the opportunity
- H)** Don't forget to use the archer screens and javelins when called for
- I)** Don't expect the elephants to win the battle for you. Combined arms is the way these games are won – the elephants just provide a punch where it is needed.

Hope this gave you some ideas to chew on, and some things to try in your next engagement. Keep peanuts aplenty, and happy gaming!

*(This is a digest version of this fine article. The complete six-page article, with examples of play, can be found in C3i, issue Nr.5.)*