

# SKIRMISHERS IN SPQR

## Effective Use of Light Infantry and Skirmishers

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If you've played a few scenarios of **SPQR**, you know the fun and magnetism of the elephants, phalanxes, triarii and cohort extraordinaire pieces, but have you spent any time considering the light infantry and skirmishers? Although they lack some of the sex appeal compared to other units, these useful troops have a meaningful, and surprisingly telling role to play on the battlefield. We will share a few thoughts and specific play ideas for your review and hope to add some merit to your use of these forces. Probably the best place to start is a quick review of rules section 9.2 in the 2nd Edition Rulebook which specifically outlines the capabilities and unique features of the Light Troops. That done, here are some ideas to enhance your play.

### Foes of Rome

The non-Roman player has several different types of skirmishers and light infantry units in the counter mix. They typically share a low TQ, good mobility and some kind of missile weapon. Skirmishers are especially ill-suited for toe-to-toe combat and our expectations should not be to use them in the line of battle. Their strengths, and unique capabilities require more dexterity than plowing head-long into the Velite line for a hero's death.

Here are the key functions of the skirmishers and light infantry (*skirmishers* from here forward) units:

- Break up Roman Line
- Premature depredation of front ranks
- Screen own poor troops / Deflect Roman attack
- Eliminate Routed units
- Slow Roman advance by Orderly Withdrawal
- Deny Missile replenishment of Roman
- Disrupt Roman Command range / line command

Let's take a brief look at each of these battlefield contributions.

### Break up Roman Line

The skirmishers are usually deployed ahead of the main non-Roman line and the question is what to do with them as they stand facing the Roman killing-machine, trembling in their sandals and fingering their missiles. Probably the most significant contribution these lads in

light tunics can contribute to victory is to break up the Roman line formation. Roman success is nearly always based upon being able to issue line commands to successive waves of troops. The non-Roman player should move his skirmishers so that they will force the Roman (usually Velite line) to attack them without using the Velites' full movement (i.e. the other Romans in the line will either have to slow down their advance, or break up their line as some fall behind to dispatch the skirmishers). Your skirmishers can inflict a few TQ hits on

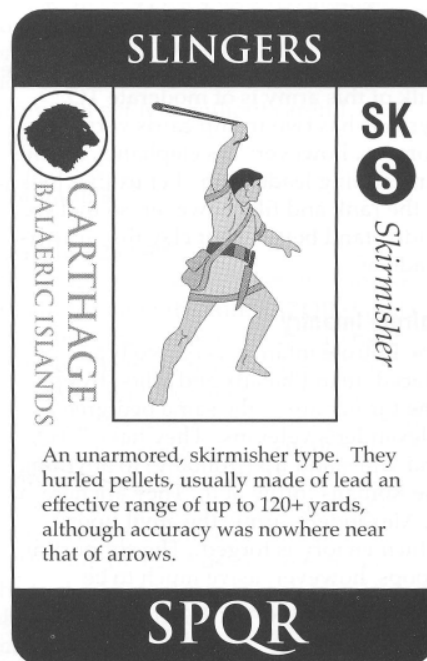
the velites/ legionaries with missile attacks, then again in melee, and if the Roman suffers on TQ checks, you might be able to rout a few pieces, or at least make them weak for their subsequent attacks. The goal is to create a hole or gap in the Roman line of two or more hexes which breaks his ability to perform Line Commands for the entire line. If any of the skirmishers survive the Roman attack (give thanks and animal sacrifices) they can be an obstacle for the subsequent Roman line....and there will be another Roman line! I do not consider it a waste of Individual orders to rally the skirmishers, either! Indeed, early in the battle, they are efforts well spent, since the more damage they do (at little cost since their Victory Point value is small) the non-Roman battle line will be more able to succeed.

### Premature depredation of the Roman forces

The skirmishers can be very effective at *bleeding* the front line or two of the Romans. By using missile weapons smartly, and skillfully falling back, then standing to fight in intelligent places, the skirmishers can take a tally on the TQ hits to many Roman units. The Roman Velites are often TQ 4, which means that they will suffer pre-melee TQ hits frequently and one or two Routing Velites from the center of the line will break it. Skirmishers have to be careful where they decide to stand and melee since the attacker will probably be Attacker Superior which is a near-certain Rout for skirmishers, but they can still inflict TQ hits on the Roman. Knowing that your skirmisher is destined to Rout once they melee, don't leave your skirmishers two hexes in front of your battle line. Routed units automatically move back two hexes and it potentially causes more TQ hits if a Routed unit stops in a friendly hex compared to moving through it. So plan on your skirmishers being one hex, or 3+ hexes in front of your main line for their melee stand.

### Screen Poor Troops/ Deflect Roman Attack

As the skirmishers fall back, use them to position themselves ahead of your weakest troops. This is not practical in all



## Analysis of Light Infantry and Skirmishers in SPQR

scenarios, but where you have a mixed main battle line, help the Light or low-TQ units by deflecting the Roman attack to your better troops, or by inflicting TQ hits on the Romans who are bearing down on your *weak link*. Be clever in your use of Orderly Withdrawal and maintain your skirmisher Line Command potential.

### Eliminate Routed Units

One of the more satisfying moments of play is to chase down routed Romans and dispatch them before they can rally. If you can use your skirmishers to inflict the one TQ hit needed, so much the better. Ideally, you can achieve the killing TQ hit with missile weapons and continue moving to apply the *coup de grace* on another Routed unit. (See rule 8.33, exception #2, which says that units attacking Routed troops do *not* have to take pre-melee TQ check.) During the middle and late reaches of a battle, the affair becomes more *mixed* and the skirmishers can use their good mobility to weasel their way around the formed Romans and get at the odd Routed unit for the kill. Remember, skirmishers don't pay movement points to change facing, and the non-Velite Romans have no ZOC's in the flanks which comes in handy if you've done a good job of breaking up the Roman lines. A pell-mell broken fight usually helps the non-Roman since their command is better and they have more Initiative to spend on Individual Orders.

### Slow Roman Advance by Orderly Withdrawal

There is more to this feature than meets the eye. One of the key strengths of the non-Roman player (especially Carthaginian) is their cavalry. The longer you can keep the Roman meat-grinder at bay, the more time your cavalry will have to turn the flanks of the Romans and get at the chewy insides. Numidians do wonderful things, but even they take time to move and fight, and if the battle is lost on turn 3, they don't get much accomplished before the army rout number is reached. Skirmishers should be a big part of keeping the Roman out of your main battle line (since Roman Legionaire will probably be facing Medium Infantry over whom they have several advantages) and letting your cavalry have its head accumulating Roman Rout TQ points and win the day! There is also an important *player psychological* benefit in using those *pesky*

*skirmishers* to occupy the Roman's attention and make him concentrate (or fail to concentrate at his peril) on his Command and Line capabilities, all the while having the cavalry roaming his flank and rear. In the main, the longer the battle goes, the better the non-Roman player is doing..... non-Romans have better Rally odds, they have more Individual Orders to spend, Hannibal (*We are not worthy*) will get momentum 80% of the time, followed immediately by the Elite Leader Phase which gives him another round of opportunity. The moral of the story is Stay in the Game, and keep the Roman at bay. Give your Leadership and cavalry time to win the battle!

### Deny Missile Replenishment of Roman

The Roman Legionary infantry is awesome. It was no accident that they kept Rome at the top of the food chain for a few centuries, and it's a tough opponent to face on the battlefield. One of its many virtues is the pilum and its missile capacity with a dandy 70% chance of a TQ hit at a range of one hex. Key to limiting the damage that these bad boys can do is to keep them at No Missile status, and that's where our skirmishers come in to play. No unit can replenish missiles if they are in potential missile range themselves so if we are smart and keep a few of our skirmishers alive and out of the juggernaut's way, they can be sprinkled around the battlefield and keep the Romans from automatically regaining

their missile capacity. (*This same tactic applies to recovery as well, i.e., a unit within missile range cannot remove cohesion hits. — S. Vasta*) The slingers and foot javelin infantry have a range of two hexes, the less common foot archers can use their influence out to four hexes! This is one of the small, but important ways to use your skirmishers and it's the mark of a good player to use all his assets to some advantage. Your Medium Infantry of the battle line will also appreciate having less missile damage!

### Disrupt Roman Command Range/Line Commands

As a battle progresses, the Roman lines will get beat up, broken apart, and gaps will appear. Your own lines will look similar; maybe even worse, but don't despair because the non-Roman can handle a donnybrook better than the Roman can as outlined above. A good Roman player will have a formed, good-order reserve left for the late going, maybe the Principes or the Triarii. If he hasn't been judicious in his leader placement, the skirmishers can move to inhibit or interfere with the transmission of Line Commands to this key reserve. If the game hangs in the balance, and it's a question of who can get the hardest punch in fastest, making a Roman leader forego a Line Command where he could move 8-20 prime units for two or three Individual Orders is decisive! A skirmisher sent as a Forlorn Hope into the breach to confound a Command situation can bring impressive results!

Light Infantry and Skirmishers can play an important part in the non-Roman strategy for success on the battlefield. Take care not to view them as so much chaff in the wind, but as useful troops who can help win a battle! They are not meant to be suitable for blunting the Roman Legions head-on, but they do have effective combat potential, and highly effective *nuisance value* in the form of Orderly Withdrawals slowing down the Roman attack (*Is that a cavalry battle I hear in the Roman rear?*), denying the Roman's ability to resupply their missile weapons and to possibly inhibit the transmission of Line Commands at a key moment in the battle. Skirmishers are best thought of as tools to help your main battle line troops stay alive longer which gives your decisive elements (cavalry, leadership, elephants, phalanxes) time to defeat the Romans.

