

End of the Triumvirate: The Battle of Carrhae 53 BC (The Initial Main Battle)

“The Romans halted, expecting that the enemy would come to close quarters with them, since there were so few of them. However the Parthians merely stationed their armored cavalry in front of the Romans and with the rest of their cavalry in loose order, rode all around them, tearing up the plain with their horses hooves, and raising great masses of sand which fell from the air in a continual shower, so that the Romans could scarcely see or speak. Huddled together in a narrow space and getting in each other’s way, they were shot down by the arrows. Nor did death come to them either easily or quickly. In the convulsion and agony of their pain they would writhe as the arrows struck them; they would break them off in their wounds and then lacerate and disfigure their own bodies by trying to tear out by main force the barbed arrow heads that had pierced through their veins and muscles.” (From Plutarch’s ‘Life of Crassus’ describing the plight of Publius’ detachment under the rain of arrows of the Parthian horse archers)

Historical Background

After receiving word from his scouts about the presence of a Parthian army near Carrhae , Crassus seems to have panicked. His troops were exhausted and poorly prepared for battle after a long and fast march through the Mesopotamian desert. He didn't allow his men to rest or make camp, but instead began to form lines for battle. Advised by his officer staff to stretch out in classic formation with the infantry flanked by cavalry, Crassus instead ordered hollow square formations to allow defense against flanking. He commanded the middle while his son Publius and another officer, Cassius, commanded the wings. They advanced toward the smaller and less impressive Parthian force far too confident.

As they approached with 35,000 men, the Parthian force seemed to be only about 10,000 men, mainly light horse archers. However, as they approached, the Parthian commander Surena ordered cavalry positioned at the rear uncover their concealed armor. The vaunted Parthian cataphracts were small in number, but their heavy armor was definitely an impressive and intimidating sight. As the battle opened a hail of Parthian arrows pinned down the Romans. Crassus ordered his son Publius to attack the archers with his Gallic cavalry and a force of infantry. Initially, Publius drove back the horse archers, but found himself far away from the main Roman body. The Parthians cut off his force, surrounding it with horse archers and the cataphracts. Though the Gauls fought bravely and ferociously, Publius was overwhelmed, and the cataphracts seemed invincible. Trapped away from his father and the army, Publius ordered his own death at the hand of one of his men, and the Roman force was butchered.

Crassus meanwhile got word that his son was in trouble, just as pressure was diverted from his own lines to that of Publius' force. Crassus reformed his lines in the traditional Roman style and ordered a general advance. As this was getting under way however, the Parthians who had defeated the Gallic cavalry rode in front of the Romans with the head of Publius on a spear. The Roman advance was stopped fast by the Parthians, and the already rattled Crassus, seems to have lost the will to fight. His legates, Cassius and Octavius ordered a retreat intended to save the army during the night, desperately leaving

the wounded on the field. Remaining cavalry fled the battle immediately, leaving Crassus without scouts. They rode first to Carrhae to inform the garrison of the battle and then hurried on to Zeugma to avoid the disaster that was sure to come.

In the confusion and desperation of the Roman retreat, as many as 4,000 wounded legionaries were put to the sword as the Parthians came in pursuit the following morning. Another 4 cohorts had been separated from the main body and were surrounded and killed, save for 20 men who were allowed to flee for displaying exceptional bravery. Crassus and the remaining Roman army reached the relative safety of Carrhae and probably prepared for a siege. Crassus however, was still obviously unsettled. Once again a Parthian spy duped him, this time into fleeing the safety of the town. The spy led the Romans to inescapable terrain and the Parthian main force approached. They offered a parlay, including an offer of peace if Crassus himself joined the negotiation. At first he refused, but the legionaries, afraid and exhausted, threatened his life if he didn't accept the offer. At the meeting, the Parthians seized and executed Crassus and the Roman party, sending the Romans into further disarray.

In the end, the great bulk of the Roman army was hunted down and killed or captured. Nearly 20,000 were killed and another 10,000 captured. Of the original force, only about 5,000 men under Cassius, and the cavalry that departed early, managed to escape. The Parthians meanwhile, settled the Roman prisoners in an eastern territory called Sogdia. Interestingly, the Han Chinese later captured this area and the Roman transplants were likely among the first westerners to meet the Chinese directly.

The death of Crassus helped signal the end of the triumvirate between he, Caesar and Pompey, but even if he had lived its doubtful that civil war wouldn't have erupted eventually anyway. As the Romans were too pre-occupied with western concerns and the political turmoil that was about to erupt, the situation with Parthia was largely ignored for nearly another 30 years. Parthian king Orodes II ordered the death of Surena shortly thereafter, and the Parthians did little to press their advantage in eastern Roman territories. The lost standards of Crassus' lost legions remained in a Parthian temple Rome's first emperor, Augustus, negotiated their return in 20 BC
(The above was lifted with a few modifications from a Historical Website)

Extended Map Setup:

The Carrhae scenario uses an extended two section map to better allow the maneuvers and movements of this "skirmish style" battle between the completely cavalry Parthian force led by Surena and the heavily medium to heavy legionary force under the control of Crassus.. Take a second C & C Ancients map and cut or fold it over lengthwise along the entire center of the "E" hex-row. The two maps are then abutted so that D1 on the now "half-map" is adjacent to A1 and A2 on the main full map; similarly D12 will end up adjacent to A12 and A13 on the main map. The play area is now 13 hexrows deep and 12 or 13 hexes wide depending on the hexrow. The main or full map is referred to as" Map 1" and the four row or half map is called:" Map 2" when charting the locations detailed below.

Terrain Set-up:

X11 Hill Tiles: Map 1: G12, G5, I9, F1, D2, C12, B10
Map2: D2, C3, B7, D10

Initial Setup:

Roman Army: ALL Roman units setup on map 1

X2 Elite Heavy Infantry (5 Blocks Legionary Infantry see special rules): C9, D4

X2 Heavy Infantry (Legionary Infantry see special rules) C7, D9

X9 Medium Infantry (Legionary Infantry see special rules) C5, D6, D7, E5, E9, F5, F6, F7, F8

X2 Light Archers (see special rules): C6, C8

X2 Medium Cavalry: E4, E7

X1 Gallic Medium Cavalry (4 Blocks see special rules): E10

X3 Leaders D7 (Crassus) E10 (Publius Crassus) D4 (Cassius)

Parthian Army: (Use Carthaginian Blocks):

X12 Light Cavalry (Horse Archers—see special rules): Map 1: B10, B11, C12, A3

Map2: D3, D4, D5, D6, D7, D8, D9, D10

X3 Heavy Cavalry (Cataphracti—see special rules) C5/Map 2, C9/Map 2 A12/Map 1

X2 Leaders C9 (Surena) C5 (Parthian Noble)

War Council:

Roman Army:

Leader: Crassus

5 Cards

Parthian Army:

Leader: Surena

6 Cards

Move First

Victory: Use normal Banner rules, however the levels for victory are different depending on the player...

Roman Victory: 6 Banners scored by Roman Player

Parthian Victory: 8 Banners scored by Parthian Player

Scenario Special Rules:

Command Rules:

Surena can cancel a Retreat **and a** Swords result inflicted on the unit he is stacked with. Other Leaders can cancel a Retreat **or a Swords result** inflicted on the unit they are stacked with. Only the first helmet hit inflicted by a unit supported by a Leader in close-combat or battle-back is counted unless the Leader is Surena in which case up to two helmet hits are counted. Both Parthian Leaders may move up to four hexes if ordered to move by themselves.

Units and the Rally Card:. No unit can be rallied to beyond five blocks or its strength at the start of the game whichever is less. If a Player rolls “swords” when attempting to rally he may freely chose which unit gets a block back.

Outflanking---*This is an easy way of introducing facing and flanks to the game with little fuss—it can be retrofitted to other scenarios where appropriate:*

A unit is said to be “Outflanked” if it is surrounded **in all** six adjacent hexes by either enemy units, or hexes adjacent to an enemy unit. The presence of friendly units or impassable terrain does not negate an “Outflanked” situation **in any way**. Units on the board edges (and not surrounded by six adjacent hexes) **cannot** be “Outflanked”. Effects of being Outflanked: “Outflanked” units when battling back roll only half the normal number of dice they would be normally entitled to rounded up—to a maximum of only two dice—“Outflanked” units when battling back **never** hit on helmet rolls even if supported by a leader. A unit’s “Outflanked” situation is judged at the instant it battles back.

Retreat & Evasion Scenario Special Rules:

In this scenario units & leaders may retreat or evade in any direction ---there are no set map-edges in the scenario for the players to retreat or evade towards. Please follow the special rules outlined below for retreat and evasion by both players.

Cavalry Retreat: ALL Cavalry in the game need only retreat, and are allowed to retreat only two hexes **per** uncanceled Flag—not the normal distances listed in the rules.

Retreats in Carrhae: Units retreating due to Flag results **must end** their full retreats in a hex not adjacent to enemy units. Failure to make a full retreat draws the usual penalties outlined in the rules. A retreating unit must end its retreat the full number of hexes taken in the retreat from its pre-retreat hex location.

Roman Legionary Retreat: A Roman Legionary unit which suffers one or more Flag hits may retreat up to 2 hexes (in lieu of the normal one hex) to satisfy the first Flag hit being taken—this is only done at the option of the Roman player and in accordance with the other retreat rules outlined in this section.

Evasion in Carrhae: Units **must end** their evasion move in a hex not adjacent to enemy units at least two hexes away, if such a hex is not available one hex away is OK. Units that can only end their evasion adjacent to an enemy unit MAY NOT evade. Leaders alone may end their evasion adjacent to an enemy unit, but must evade the full number of hexes chosen away from their initial hex position. Otherwise use normal rules on evasion.

Parthian Army Special Rules:

Parthian Cataphracti:

All Parthian Heavy Cavalry ignore the first swords result inflicted upon them in close-combat or battle-back—they may also use this capability to ignore “sword” pilum hits.

Parthian Horse Archers:

All Parthian Light Cavalry are considered to be elite Horse Archers and have the following additional capabilities:

- 1) Their normal Missile range is 3 hexes—when firing at 3 hex range only one dice is used and the unit must remain stationary during the Parthian Player-turn before the missile attack is executed.
- 2) When Parthian Light Cavalry Battle-back only they do hit on swords.
- 3) Parthian Light Cavalry, which evade when not in an outflanked situation may choose to attempt a “Parthian Shot” at their attackers while evading. The attackers first resolve their attack vs. the evading unit normally and if the evading unit survives it throws one dice for the Parthian Shot and inflicts a hit (remove one block) if it shows the correct color of the attacking unit. If the “Parthian Shot” roll shows a Flag result the evading Parthian unit **must** evade normally four hexes (to an eligible hex four hexes away instead of the normal two hexes), if unable to evade the full four hexes the “Parthian Shot” unit evades normally and loses 1 block. All other Parthian shot results rolled; other than Flag or the appropriate color have no effect. The attacking Roman unit, if subjected to a Parthian shot, **may** advance into the just vacated Parthian unit’s hex, but may not move further or attack again.
- 4) Roman Legionary units (see below) may not toss pilum at evading Parthian Light Cavalry that are not outflanked in the hex they started the evasion from, the Romans simply retain their pilum, in this case, for possible later use.

Roman Army Special Rules

The following types of infantry units in the game the Roman side are assumed to be Roman Legionary units: ALL Roman Heavy & Medium Infantry.

Roman Pilum:

Each Roman Legionary Infantry unit starts with a Pilum Marker. The Pilum is a one-time use weapon that is generally fired right before a Roman Legionary unit attacks in close-combat or is itself attacked by the enemy in close-combat. Once the Pilum is fired the Pilum marker is removed from the Roman unit to indicate that the Pilum has been expended and the unit may not throw Pilum for the rest of the battle.

Just before a Roman unit with Pilum is attacked or is itself attacked by the enemy for the very first time in the battle in close-combat it throws its Pilum—roll one die and apply normal hits for swords, color, or a Flag/retreat hit Afterwards remove the Pilum marker. The act of throwing the Pilum **is not** considered to be part of the Close-Combat—so any result of the Pilum throw is resolved before the Close-combat. An attached Leader may use his special ability to cancel a “swords” hit that was inflicted via a Pilum hit (see special Command rules) on the unit he is stacked with.

Roman units, adjacent to the enemy, that have not expended their Pilum may also be ordered to throw Pilum if the card “Darken the Sky” is played by their commanding player. The Player picks one adjacent enemy unit and throws two dice—apply the results just as one would before close combat—and remove the Pilum Marker.

Roman Relief Moves & Cohort Maneuvers:

Adjacent and on the same side Roman Legionary Infantry, instead of moving, may switch places in a “Relief/Cohort Maneuver”. Relief/Cohort Maneuvers may only be conducted through the play of Section cards ONLY. Instead of ordering one unit via a section card, the controlling Player may order a pair of adjacent Legionary Infantry units to switch hexes—at least one of the units switching places must not be adjacent to an enemy unit. A unit that switched places via the Relief/Cohort Maneuver into a hex adjacent to the enemy may close combat in the same player-turn.

Roman Veteran Initiative:

Up to Two Roman Legionary Heavy Infantry units per Roman Player-turn that are ordered by Line Commands or an “Order Heavy Troops” card may move two hexes and close combat at their option.

Roman Light Archers:

“They merely kept on shooting their great strong bows, curved so as to give maximum impetus to the arrows, and the blows fell powerfully and heavily upon the Romans.” (From Plutarch’s ‘Life of Crassus’)

The Parthians utilized composite bows and probably seriously out-ranged the Roman mercenary Archers attached to Crassus’ army. Therefore all Roman Light Archers have a range of only two hexes in this scenario.

Roman Gallic Mercenary Cavalry:

The Roman Medium Cavalry unit, which starts the game with 4 blocks, represents the 1,000 Gallic mercenary cavalry that Caesar had lent to Crassus from his Gallic campaigns where Crassus’ son Publius had served as a junior officer. (Publius had distinguished himself as a cavalry officer at the Battle of the Vosges in 58 BC against the Germans and in other actions). Besides the extra initial one block advantage this Gallic Cavalry unit adds one dice to its normal throw in battle back or close-combat if the unit is at three or four block strength at the instant the dice are rolled. By all accounts these crack troops died bravely fighting with Publius’ detachment.

Historical Footnote: The End of Publius & His Detachment:

“However, the Gauls who were not accustomed to either heat or thirst, suffered very intensely from both. They had lost most of their horses through driving them onto the long spears (of the Parthian Cataphracti). And so they were forced to fall back to the infantry, taking with them Publius, who was now badly wounded. Seeing a small hill of sand nearby they all retired to it, fastened their horses in the centre, and made a ring of locked shields on the outside. They imagined that in this formation they would best be able to resist the attacks of the natives, but it turned out in just the opposite way. On level ground the front ranks do afford a certain amount of protection to those behind; but here on the rising ground made them stand, as it were, in tiers, the man behind always being higher up than the man in front of him. There was thus no escaping the arrows which

rained down on them all alike as they stood there in misery at having reached this inglorious and ineffectual end.”

“With Publius were two Greeks, Hieronymus and Nicomachus, who lived nearby at Carrhae. They both urged him to slip away with them and escape to the city of Ichaë, which was friendly to the Romans, and not far off. But Publius said that there was no death so terrible that, for fear of it, he would abandon men who were dying on his account. He bade them farewell and told them to look after their own safety. Then, since he was unable to use his hand, which had been pierced through with an arrow, he presented his side to his shield-bearer and ordered him to run him through with his sword. Censorinus, they say, died in the same way, Megabacchus killed himself, as did others who were of most note. The survivors fought on until the Parthians came up the hill and rode them down with their long spears. Not more than 500, they say, were taken prisoners. The Parthians then cut off Publius’ head and at once rode off against Crassus.” (From Plutarch’s ‘Life of Crassus’)