

ALEXANDER VERSUS PORUS

By Chris Hahn

By tripling the core formations of the Indian list found on page G of Armata 2 and then selecting bonus troops from a generous allowance of 300 points, I was able to manufacture an army containing 12 units of elephants, 11 unit of foot archers, 7 units of 4-horse chariots, 6 units of heavy cavalry, 6 units of light infantry, and 9 units of skirmishers.

Using the same process with the Alexandrian Imperial list (also on page G), I created an army with 11 units of pike phalanx, 3 units of hypaspists, 3 units of Greek hoplites, 3 units of Companion heavy cavalry, 4 units of other heavy cavalry, 2 units of allied Indian cavalry, 3 units of Indian foot archers, 6 units of light cavalry (split evenly between Prodromoi, Greek, and Persian contingents), 4 units of light infantry (peltasts), and 19 units of skirmishers.

This rather large and completely fictional action was inspired by the Society Of Ancients selection of Hydaspses as the historical engagement for its 2015 Battle Day event.

I was able to fit all these troops on my tabletop by reducing the dimensions of 15mm Epic Scale units by 33 percent. A unit of heavy infantry now occupied a frontage of 5.2 centimeters and had a depth of 3 centimeters, for example, while a unit of light infantry was represented by a square base/stand measuring just 2.6 centimeters on each side. In order to maximize the available playing surface, movement rates and firing ranges were converted from inches to centimeters. In order to utilize the full playing space, the restricted zones were increased to 5 inches, the flank zones were increased to 13 inches, and the battleline zone was set at 3 feet.

There is much to be said for playing a set of rules as written. There is also much to be said for tinkering with an established set, for play testing rule variations and amendments, or for borrowing ideas from others with more experience in order to provide a more realistic and or more enjoyable game. It is simply a matter of personal taste. If forced to declare, I would place myself in the camp of the tinkerers. The following is a partial list of the rule changes employed for this imaginary contest between Alexander and Porus:

- Heavy or light control rating points are increased by one for each sub-general on the field.
- Hits scored by skirmisher units are treated as fatigue points until unit break point is reached and then hits by skirmishers units are treated as damage.
- Skirmishers may move obliquely.

- Cavalry within 10 centimeters of elephants are considered un-dressed (i.e., disordered).
- Elephants have impetus versus cavalry.
- Elephants are subject to panic and may well run into or over troops from their side.
- Broken units trigger a ðneighboring unit rout checkö for any unit touching the routing unit.
- The rout path of broken units is extended to 12 centimeters.
- Mounted units are permitted to make breakthrough moves of 6 centimeters; the breakthrough move for victorious infantry units remains 3 centimeters.

DEPLOYMENT

The landscape of my tabletop was modeled after the historical field of Pharsalus, as diagrammed on page 171 of ðWarfare in the Classical World.öWARFARE IN THE Classical World.ö For the purposes of my scenario, Porus took the place of Pompey, while Alexander stood in for Caesar.

The Indian left flank was situated in front of and partially on a large gentle hill. This is where all of the Indian cavalry were arranged in two lines of 4 units and 2 units, respectively. Two divisions of light infantry (4 units total) were also deployed on this flank. A thin line of skirmishers armed with javelins screened the main line of the Indian army. Nine units of elephants, arranged in 5 divisions, formed a more significant screen for the long line of foot archers. The general of the Indian army positioned himself behind this solid line with a reserve of 3 elephant units. One of these was rated a veteran formation. The right of the army was protected by 7 units of heavy chariots. These were arranged in two divisional lines of 4 and 3 units, respectively. One of the units in the second line was classed as veterans. The only foot component on the right flank was a small division (2 units) of light infantry.

The left wing of Alexander's deployment consisted of 4 units of light cavalry (deployed in depth), supported by some skirmishers and light infantry. Two divisions of heavy cavalry (4 units total) reinforced this flank. A division of allied Indian archers and another division of hired Greek hoplites were positioned on the left of the center line. Six groups of skirmishers (slingers, archers, and javelinmen) screened the phalanx and hypaspists. The heavy infantry were formed into two large phalanxes. One ðbrigadeö contained 6 units and the other contained 5 units, including the veteran formation. All of the pike units were deployed in depth. Three units of hypaspists were arranged in echelon on the right of the phalanx. Three units of Alexander's heavy horse came next, also arranged in echelon. These experienced troopers formed the main strength on the Macedonian right. Two units of Prodromoi light cavalry, 2 units of peltasts, and 2 units of skirmishers formed the first line of this right wing. A division of heavy horse (2 units and

not Companion cavalry) was also posted to the Macedonian right.

BATTLE SUMMARY

A cavalry battle within the larger action was initiated on the Macedonian right before the skirmishers screens of both armies came to grips. The comparatively poor quality Indian horse held its ground against the better and heavier Macedonian horse, thereby frustrating plans to turn this particular flank. Supporting light infantry was thrown in the swirling melee as well, and a veteran unit of Companions paid the ultimate price when it was engaged by three units of the enemy. After a prolonged melee, the exhausted Indian cavalry collapsed like a line of dominoes and the bruised Macedonians rallied briefly before launching another attack on the second line of enemy cavalry. This assault involved all available units of Macedonian heavy horse and proved just as difficult as the first engagement.

On the opposite flank of the field, the Indian cavalry allied with Alexander proved rather less stubborn than their loyal countrymen. It seemed only a matter of minutes before the Indian contingent had broken and routed from the field. Incidentally, the nearby division of foot archers was trampled by elephants and lost two-thirds of its men as casualties or survivors scrambling for safety. The heavy chariots did not do as well against the other allied and proper heavy cavalry, however. These vehicles were also harassed by Macedonian light cavalry and annoyed by skirmishers. The slow moving heavy chariots were able to break through part of the Macedonian left flank but could not take advantage of their local victory. Farther out on the Macedonian left, the heavy cavalry did better against the chariots and in fact, managed to break a unit. As these melees were taking place, a division of elephants stormed forward to engage a waiting line of hoplites. These hired soldiers did much better than the ruined foot archers. Although the beasts did tear a few gaps in the line of locked shields and long spears, the Greeks emerged victorious. Half of the elephants were killed or captured while the other half panicked and ran from the hoplite phalanx.

The contest in the center was slow to develop in comparison to what happened on the flanks. The skirmishers of both sides jockeyed for position and then opened fire with a variety of missiles. After these arrows, javelins, and sling stones failed to do anything, the skirmishers of both sides decided to charge each other. In these lightweight melees, the Indian skirmishers did better than the Macedonians. To be certain, the Indian skirmishers did not do as well against the massive pike phalanxes. What missile fire there was only served to aggravate and or annoy the pikemen. A steady advance of pike units soon addressed the presence of enemy skirmishers. (These units were either dispersed by contact or ran away to hide behind friends.) Next, the elephants tried to take on the hypaspists and pike phalanxes. These mobile battering rams did a lot of damage in a couple of instances -- nearly routing two units -- but in the main, the charge of the elephants was held and then broken by the deep ranks of pikemen. In point of fact, Turn 8 proved especially costly for the Indian army, as four units of elephants were destroyed/routed during the melee phase.

Porus conceded the battle on the following turn, after making a critical survey of the field. His army had not reached its determined breakpoint but it was dangerously close. For the record, the loss of 15 key units would have spelled defeat for the Indians. Porus and his subordinates had lost 12 key units trying to stop the Macedonian attack. In contrast, Alexander had lost only 5 key units and 4 of these were allied Indian units.

EVALUATION

I have yet to decide if I am going to refight the historical battle of Hydaspes using my functional terrain and troops. I have a lot of time to think about it. To be honest, I have already started exploring some options. There's a mini-campaign in there somewhere. I just have to figure out how to play it solo. In the meantime, I've already begun planning an adaptation of the battle of Magnesia. (I read about this historical engagement -- and other contests wherein the legion went toe-to-toe with the phalanx -- in the April issue of *Wargames Illustrated*.) I intend to use the rule variations that were adapted, borrowed, or created for this most recent wargame. It appears that there is always tinkering to be done. To a large degree however, I think that the additional rules worked very well. The rules governing panicked elephants were especially good, at least in my opinion. At one point in the battle, there were three units of elephants retreating toward their friendly baseline. Early in the battle, a unit of elephants panicked and started heading toward a unit of foot archers. In the only action they would see during the fight, these archers and two neighboring units unleashed a storm of arrows at the panicked elephants. As the dice would have it, the beasts reversed course and stampeded toward the enemy formation that had caused the initial panic.

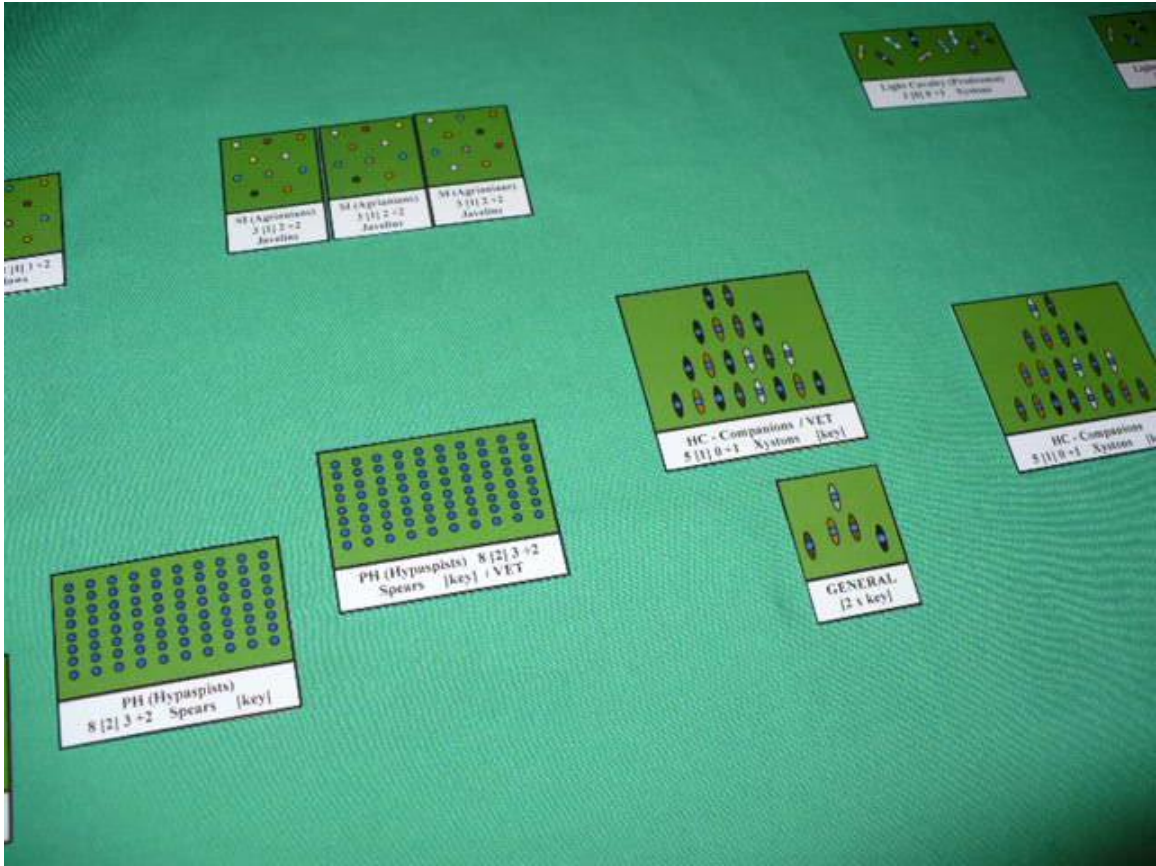
I confess I was somewhat disappointed -- but not all that surprised -- with how poorly the elephants did in the engagement. I wondered if it was a product of deployment, a product of luck, or a combination of the two. (I wonder how their historical counterparts will do when the 2015 Battle Day arrives? I do know that I look forward to reading these future battle reports.) Had the Indian elephants been placed on the flanks, I am sure that the Macedonian cavalry would have been greatly discomfited. Where then, would the heavy chariots have been deployed? It did not seem accurate/viable to place them with the elephants, so that would leave the center of the line. I am not sure how well heavy chariots would do against a phalanx bristling with pikes. I do not believe they would have done very well. Perhaps I should have placed the Indian foot archers in the first line? This would have allowed them to shower the opposition with several volleys of arrows before contact was made and melees started.

It seems that I am going to have to review my procedure for deploying opposing forces when it comes to my manipulation of Magnesia. I am thinking that I could ask for volunteer generals to draw up arrangements and basic battle plans. This option seems quite dependent on the interest, involvement, as well as kindness of strangers. I suppose that I could draw up half-a-dozen plans for each side and then let a roll of the dice decide. This approach might (emphasis on the might) produce either a very interesting game, a very wild game, or a completely one-sided game. I am not sure that I want to take that risk.

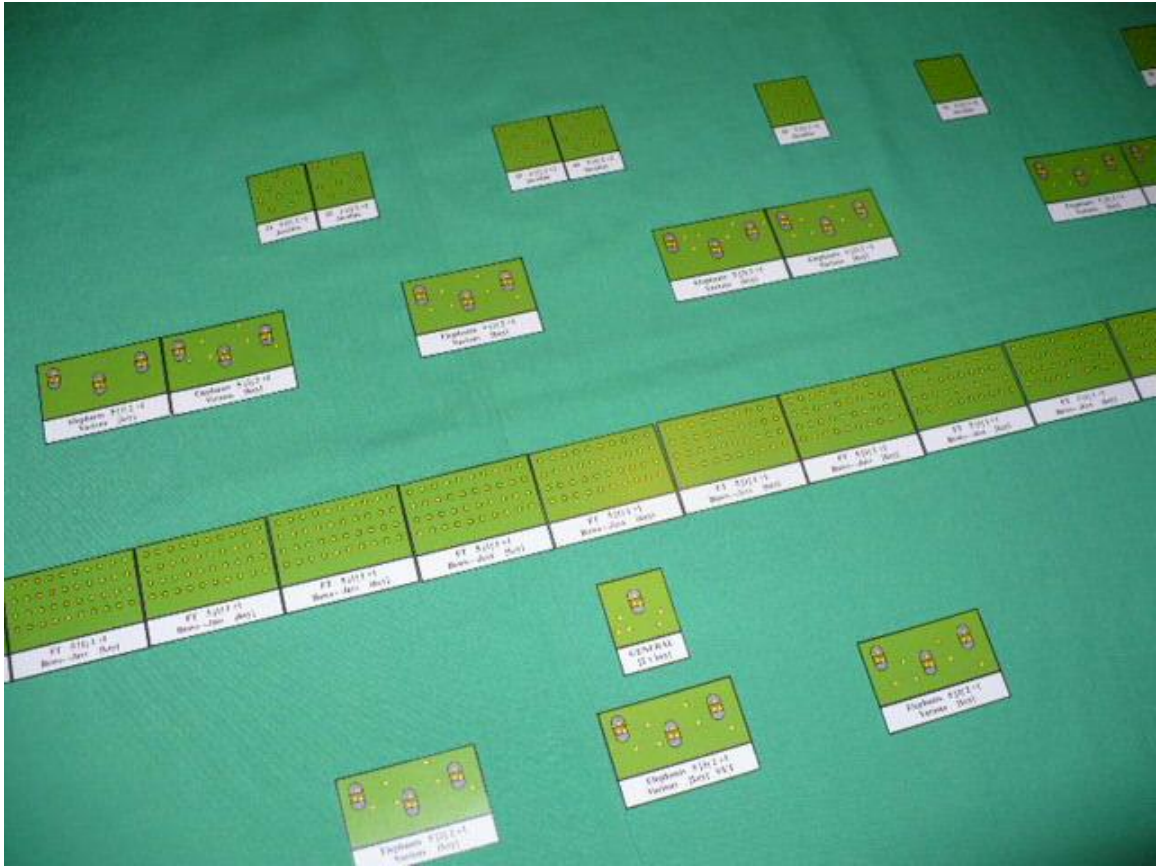
The recently completed engagement adhered to the deployment rules (albeit slightly modified) diagrammed in Armata 2. There were troops lined up from short table edge to short table edge. There was not a lot of maneuver, nor was there a lot of room for maneuver. It was, essentially, one of those "line 'em up and charge!" kind of wargames. Admitting this basic point, and acknowledging the complete lack of impressive terrain and spectacular looking miniatures, the nine turns played over the course of six days still provided an enjoyable experience. At the acknowledged risk of being corrected, I would suggest that these nine turns also provided a fairly historically accurate representation of what happens -- or would happen -- when pike phalanxes, heavy cavalry, and lots of skirmishers meet heavy chariots, elephants, and masses of foot archers. Hopefully, my planned Magnesia project will match the level of fun I had while playing both Alexander and Porus.



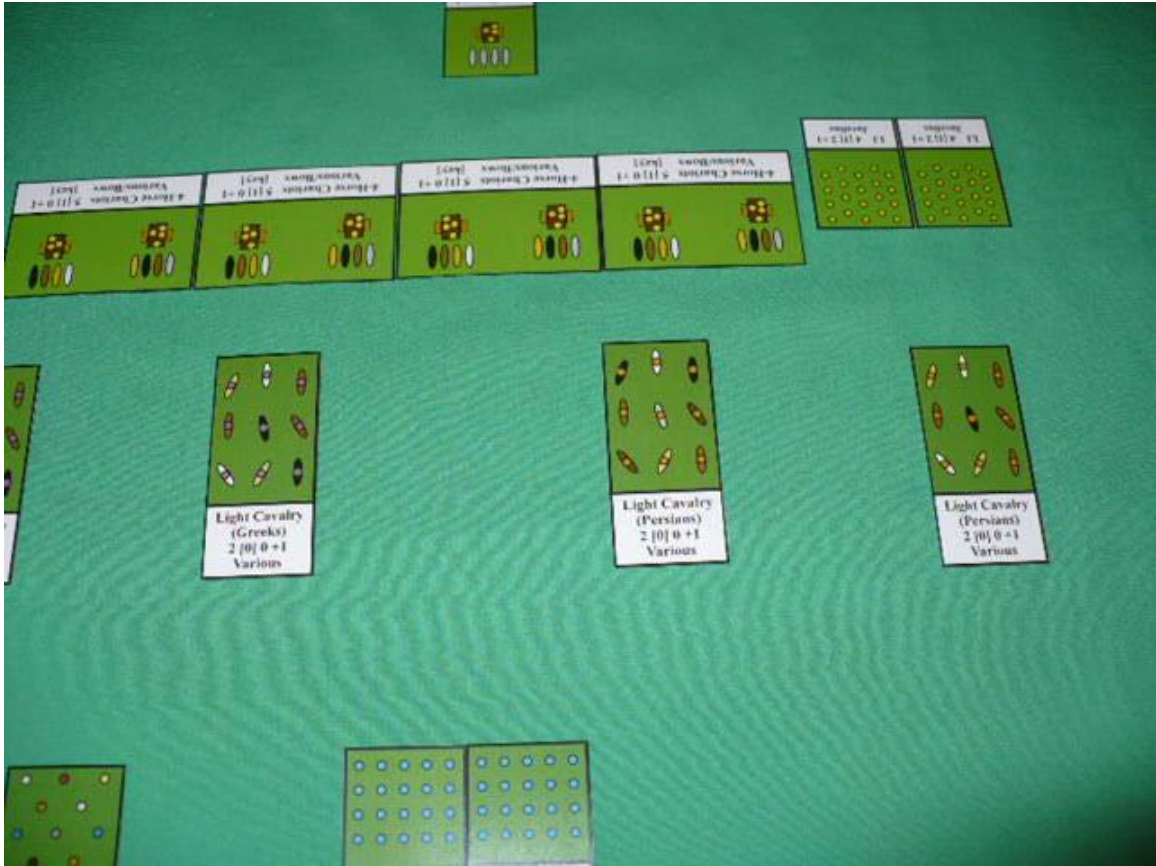
[A] - A long view of the field of battle taken from the Indian right/Macedonian left. The river and marshy ground can be seen at the bottom of the photo; the hills and rough ground can be seen in the upper left. Alexander's army is on the right. The two blocks of deep phalanx are in the center of the formation. The Indian formations are on the left side of the picture. Porus has placed skirmishers, elephants, and a long line of archers between wings of mounted troops.



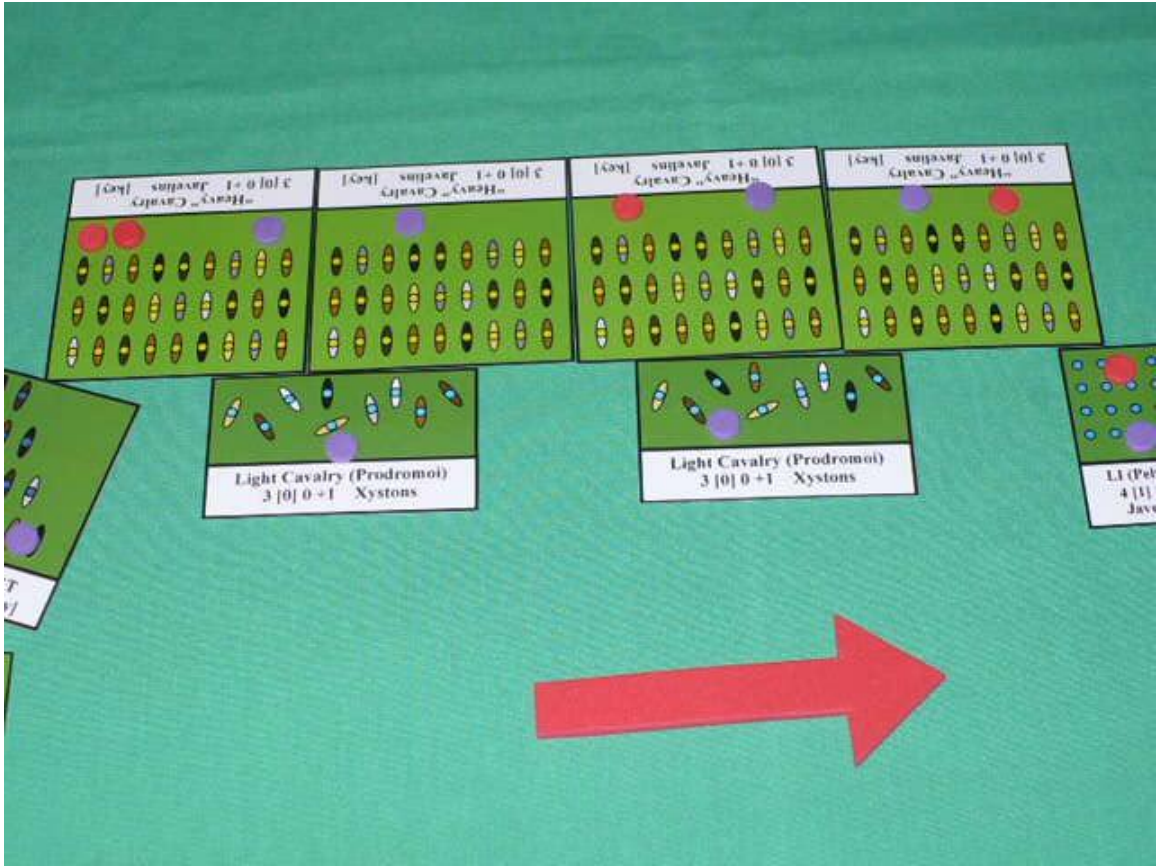
[B] - A close up of the Macedonian center-right, showing units of Companion cavalry and Hypaspists. Skirmishers and light cavalry provide a screen for these battle troops. Alexander and his entourage are represented by the general stand (valued at 2 key units) positioned just behind the veteran unit of Companions.



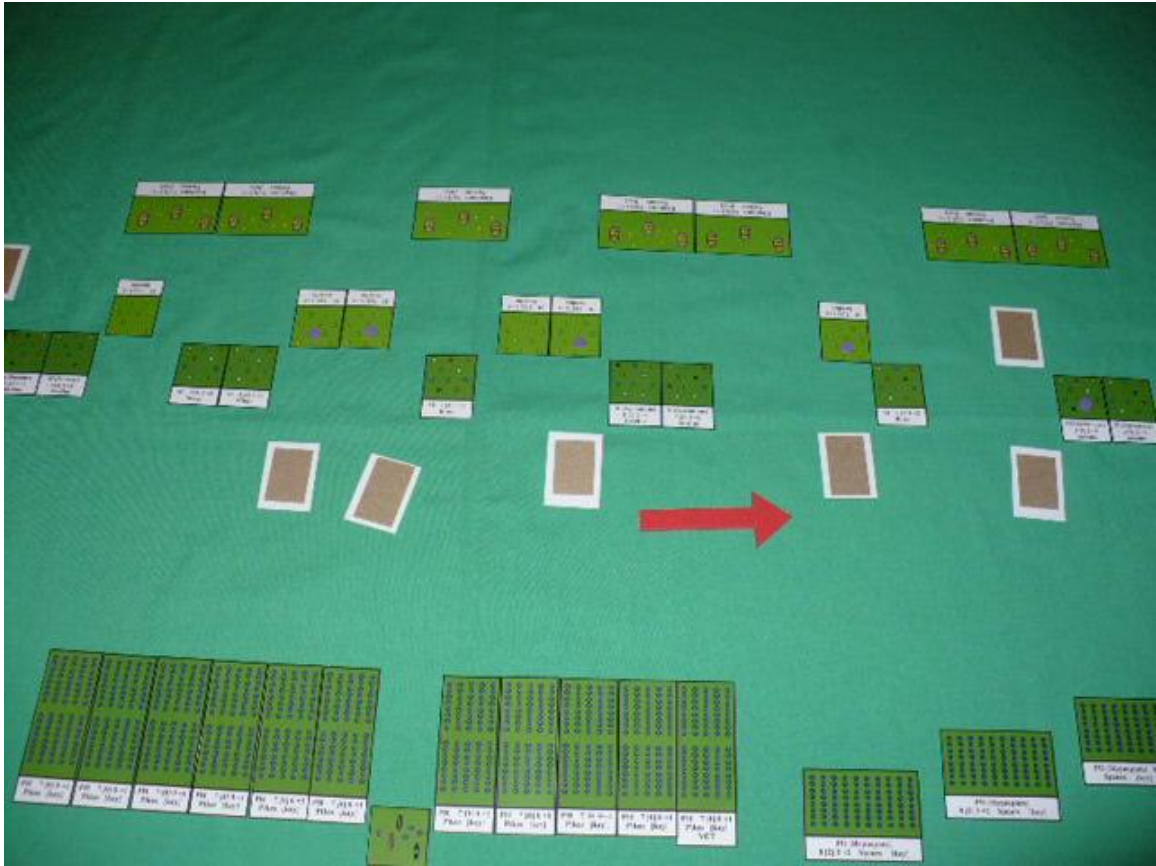
[C] - A look from behind the Indian center. Porus has established a reserve of 3 units of elephants. These animals wait behind a veritable wall of foot archers (11 units in total). In addition to more groups of elephants arranged to the front of the archers, there is a screen of skirmishers.



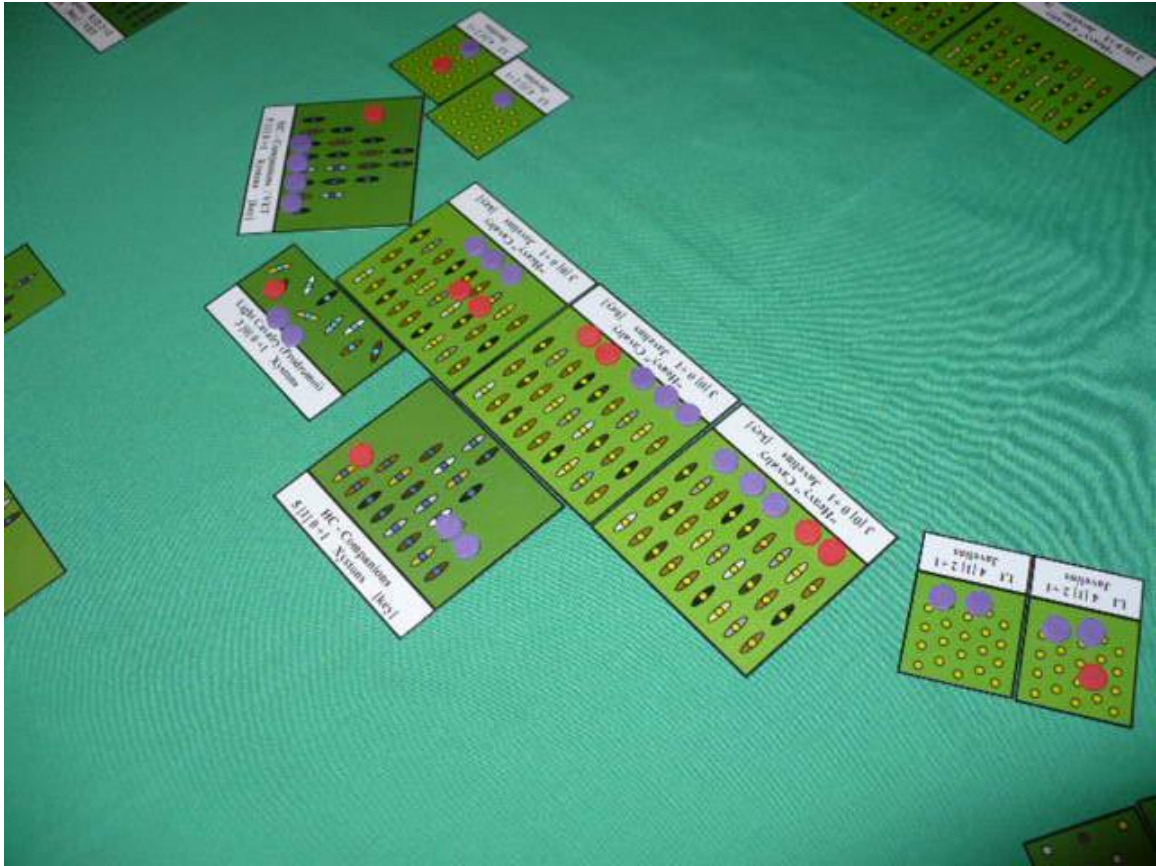
[D] - This is a photo of the Macedonian left flank, where allied light cavalry units attempted to slow down the advance of Indian heavy chariots. Both sides had units of light infantry in this sector as well. The Macedonians brought in a unit of skirmishers and several units of heavy cavalry to counter the chariot threat.



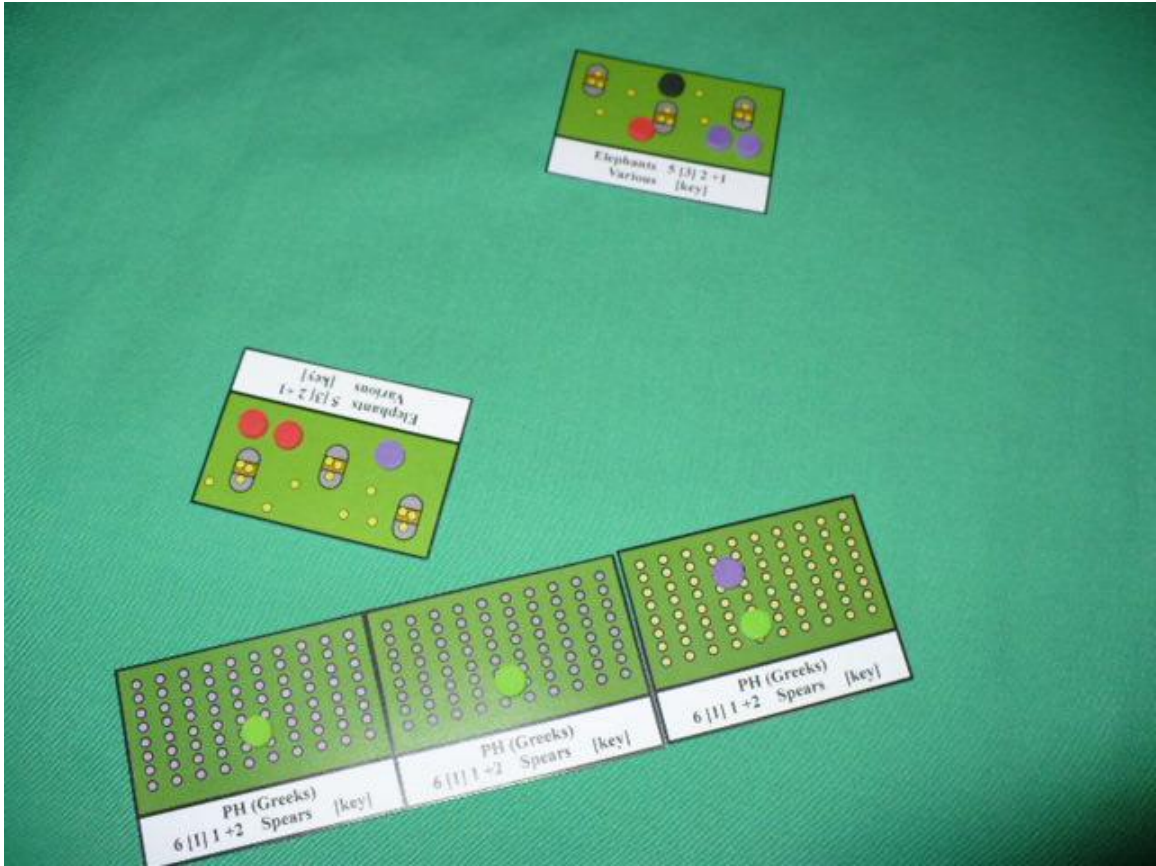
[E] - On the Indian right flank, their first line of “heavy” cavalry was almost immediately engaged by Macedonian horse. This picture shows the units of Prodromoi and a veteran unit of Companions (on the left of frame) engaging the enemy cavalry. The red markers indicate casualties, or loss of unit breakpoints. The purple markers indicate fatigue, which can impact melee ability. The red arrow is a reminder of the melee direction, decided by the army that wins the move option.



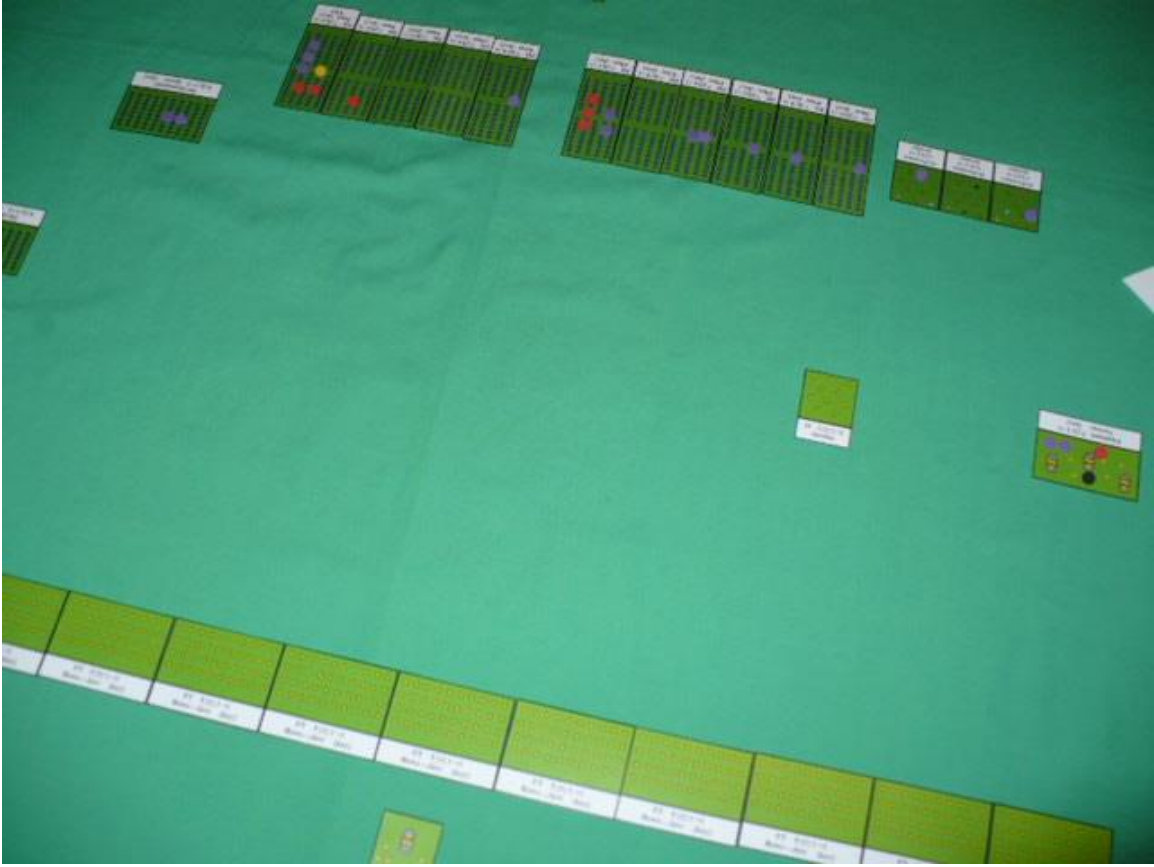
[F] - As with many ancient battles, the skirmishers of both sides in this fictional contest were soon involved against each other. The phalanxes of the Macedonian army can be seen at the bottom of the photo. There are 6 units of elephants at the top of the frame. Again, the red arrow indicates the melee direction. At this stage of the battle, the Macedonian skirmishers are “getting their hats handed to them,” as 5 units have been broken/destroyed compared to just 2 units of Indian skirmishers.



[G] - There was a prolonged cavalry battle on the Indian left flank. Here, their “heavy” cavalry proved to be rather stubborn in the face of attacks by Macedonian Companion units. The Indians also brought in units of light infantry. The Indian horse were soon exhausted (the purple markers indicate fatigue points) but still frustrated the Macedonian effort.



[1] - After trampling some archers, the elephants employed by Porus advanced on Greek heavy infantry in the service of Alexander. Having braced themselves for the impact of the charging beasts, the hoplites were able to force one unit to panic and retreat. The second unit of elephants would wreak havoc on the middle of the Greek line, however, and do significant damage, but would not break the hoplites.



[J] - The Macedonian phalanxes have survived the attention of enemy skirmishers and elephants. Each division of pikemen has taken some damage but is ready to continue the engagement. Fortunately for both sides, the battle is decided before the main lines have to meet. The Indian archers did not get one volley of arrows off against the Macedonian heavy infantry.