Three Weeks North of Londinium
A Solo Wargamer Takes Another Stab at Hail Caesar
By Chris Hahn

Interested in tuning up my wargaming engine for the rapidly approaching Little Wars Convention, as well as road testing a number of rule variants (either developed on my own or freely adopted from more clever individuals), I decided to stage a scenario set in late 1st century Britannia on my 24-square-foot tabletop.

Armies (In General & In Detail)
I used the Early Imperial Roman and Ancient Briton lists found on pages 176-177 to create the opposing and completely fictional forces. The Roman army consisted of six divisions and amounted to roughly 1,000 points of troops. The transport and baggage of this comparatively large expeditionary force was concentrated in one of these formations. Two of the divisions contained legionary units. (The Transport Division also contained a couple of cohorts, but these were classed as raw recruits.) An equal number of divisions contained auxiliary foot. The mounted contingent of the army was grouped in a single division of five units.

Division I
5 units of Veteran Legion Infantry

Division II
7 units of Legion Infantry
2 Scorpion Bolt Throwers

Division III
5 units of Medium Infantry Auxiliaries
1 unit of Medium Auxiliary Archers
2 Scorpion Bolt Throwers

Division IV
4 units of Light Infantry Auxiliaries
2 units of Light Auxiliary Archers

Division V
2 units of Medium Cavalry Auxiliaries
3 small units of Light Cavalry Auxiliaries

Division VI
6 units of Transport/Baggage
2 units of Raw Legion Infantry
2 units of Medium Inf. Auxiliaries
2 units of Skirmishers

The general of the Roman army commanded Division I. He enjoyed a leadership rating of 9. This accomplished patrician possessed a combat value of two dice. The other five division commanders were rated as õGoodö leaders; each gentleman had a leadership rating of 8 and a combat value of one six-sided die.

The alliance of Ancient Britons would also field six divisions but would not deploy any baggage. Two of the divisions would consist of warbands screened by skirmishers. Another pair would contain warbands with supporting cavalry or chariots, in addition to a screen of light troops. A division of cavalry and a division of chariots rounded out the barbarian host. In terms of value, this alliance of tribes was able to put approximately 1,500 points in the field.

Division A
11 Warbands (Standard)
2 Warbands (Large)
1 Warband (Fanatics)
5 units of Skirmishers

Division B
7 Warbands (Standard)
2 Warbands (Large)
4 units of Skirmishers

Division C
5 Warbands (Standard)
2 units of Lt. Chariots
3 units of Skirmishers

Division D
6 Warbands (Standard)
1 unit of Light Cavalry (Standard)
1 unit of Light Cavalry (Small)
2 units of Skirmishers

Division E
1 units of Medium Cavalry (Standard)
2 units of Light Cavalry (Standard)
3 units of Light Cavalry (Small)

Division F
5 units of Light Chariots

With regard to leadership abilities, all of the barbarian commanders were given a rating of 8. To reflect their imagined ferocity and skill in combat, these tattooed warriors with wild hairdos were given a melee value of two dice. The overall chieftain, even more tattooed and bearing many bracelets, as well as arm bands, was given three dice.

Terrain
The central feature of my dotted-by-hills, rather wooded (both heavy and light), and completely fictional battlefield, was a river. This unnamed course of fresh water ran the length of the tabletop, splitting the field in two. The entire river was deemed fordable but was classified as a linear obstacle. As explained on page 38 of õHail Caesar,ö any formed unit negotiating the frigid thigh-high water would have to pay a full move.

Solo Mechanics
I envisioned a set-piece battle wherein early morning fog or mist concealed initial deployments. To this end, 12 plans (six Roman and six Celtic) were sketched once the orders of battle had been finalized. Each plan was assigned a number. The deployment of each army would be determined by rolling a 1d6. With this simple procedure, I tried to model what happened in an õArmatiö game, a convention game, or a map-moves-initially Charles Grant game. In summary, I tried to recreate what might happen if I faced an actual opponent and had to draw up a plan based on whatever information (or misinformation) was provided in the umpireøs briefing. I elected not to bother with programming the movements and or reactions of one side while I played the other. (I chose to play the Roman commander, of course.) I figured that both armies would be of an offensive mind set, and would be very eager to bring the enemy to battle and destroy him.

Rule Variants
The majority of the rule variants were taken from the Mutford House Rules, a document posted to the files section of the Yahoo Hail Caesar Forum in January of this year. Additional rules regarding warband divisions (not yet finalized as an addition to the

Mutford amendments) were borrowed from Mr. Tim Twineham, a right honorable gentleman from somewhere in Suffolk.

My tinkering with the basic rules of õHail Caesar,ö as evidenced by comments posted to the aforementioned forum, was not very well received. I changed the game move sequence by allowing Side B to fire after Side A had completed its movement phase. (The idea of a friendly formation moving up to but not engaging in hand-to-hand with an enemy formation and not taking any defensive fire struck me as odd.) In perhaps the most blasphemous move, I decided to provide for the possibility of orders being given to and movement being possible for disordered units. To be certain, there were command penalties involved and the usual negative modifiers for being in a disordered state in combat still applied. (This idea was borrowed after a few readings of Lorenzo Sartoriøs õImpetusö rules.)

A Warband Runs Through It
The deployment die rolls strongly suggested that the barbarians õgot the jumpö on their Roman adversaries. The legion infantry, auxiliaries, and cavalry contingent were arranged in a fairly traditional manner. The veteran legion was posted on the right of the army. These tough troops were followed by the baggage and transports. Additional legionary units held the center of the line. These were not veteran cohorts, however. To their right rear were the five units of cavalry. The auxiliaries were tasked with holding the Roman left. The light infantry and archers led the advance on this flank. They were followed by the medium infantry formations and two õbatteriesö of scorpions.

Briton tribesmen blanketed the open spaces on the other side of the river. The largest division, along with its command -- the leader of the confederation -- was deployed opposite the main line of legion infantry. Smaller divisions and their less-accomplished leaders arranged themselves to the left and right of this main formation. Both the division of light chariots and division of light cavalry were hidden on the Roman side of the river. These formations were under orders to strike the (hopefully) exposed flanks of the enemy. The general plan was to disrupt and slow down the Roman advance, and then break it into little pieces with the weight of successive charges by massed warbands.

Summary of the Tabletop Action:
The battle did not begin well for the Romans. The first command roll for the Roman general produced a blunder. As a result, his formation of veteran legion infantry was required to withdraw a move. This put the serried ranks of heavy infantry nearly on top of the baggage and transport units. This division decided not to move so as to avoid compounding the potential traffic jam. The cavalry division also remained stationary for the first turn. The other divisions of the army moved forward slowly.

The Roman left came under attack when the massed chariots of the tribal alliance rolled onto the field. Both the light and medium auxiliary contingents were hard pressed by the lightning nature of this advance. Through a combination of some deft maneuvering and some determined dice throwing, the auxiliary units were able to stall and then defeat the barbarian chariots. This local success came at no little cost, however. The medium

auxiliary division was decimated though, fortunately, not broken. The medium archers were gone and two units of infantry had been routed. The attached scorpions never had the chance to set up as they were pushed back by units forced to give ground. Fortunately, there was very little coordination between the chariot attacks and the divisions of warbands opposite the Roman left. The auxiliary infantry managed to turn back and then break the chariots before another threat could develop.

The larger division of Roman heavy infantry marched up to their bank of the river and formed a wall of shields. Scorpions were placed on either end of the line. This invitation was quickly answered by a mad rush of howling tribesmen. Tattooed warriors waving swords and spears choked the river from one end of the legionary line to the other. When the two bodies collided, the noise could be heard all across the battlefield. Initially, things went well for the Romans. The cohorts on the left end of the line closed ranks and dealt measured punishment to the near-naked savages who rushed or were pushed against their position. The barbarians drew away, leaving scores of their brothers face down on the enemy bank of the river. To their credit, the Britons took a fair number of Romans with them. The rest of the Roman line did not fare as well. One cohort and its support was pushed back in disorder. There was no time to recover; the barbarians never broke contact. On the other end of the line, the fighting was even more bloody and fierce. One cohort was stomped into the ground by sheer weight of numbers. The units to the left, right, and rear closed ranks and soldiered on, making the barbarians pay a significant toll for every yard of ground won.

After two turns of botched command rolls, the barbarian cavalry finally made an appearance on the Roman right flank. As this side of the field was heavily wooded, their advance was not as rapid as the chariot attack on the opposite flank. Even so, the arrival of enemy horse on his right flank was the last thing the Roman general needed. It would be something of an understatement to remark that pressure was building all along the Roman line.

That pressure continued to build and by the middle of Turn 5, the writing was definitely on the wall for the Roman army. Turn 4 witnessed the obliteration of the light auxiliary formations by screaming and surging waves of long-sword-wielding warriors. These irregular formations fell on the second line of auxiliary troops -- those of the medium auxiliary division -- and pushed them back with significant loss. The attached õbatteriesö of bolt throwers were overrun, and the victorious warband made a sweeping attack in order to fall on the exposed flank of the hard-pressed auxiliaries. The Roman-trained soldiers sold themselves dearly, but were disordered and forced to retire by the crush of barbarian units.

In the center of the field, a hole was punched through the legionary line when two warbands sliced through a decimated cohort and then chewed up its supporting unit. Of seven original cohorts at the start of the engagement, only four remained, and three of these were shaken. Two of these three were disordered.

Only on the Roman right was there any hint of success. After dispatching an impetuous warband, the veteran legionary infantry stood firm and dared other enemy units to charge across the river. Weighed against the disappearance of the left flank and decimation of the center, this localized victory was meaningless. Technically, the Roman army had not been physically broken. Its fighting spirit was, however, in complete tatters. The auxiliary cavalry faced the herculean task of fighting off hordes of Celtic warriors. The baggage and transport was at risk of being captured. The cohorts of the veteran legion, though relatively untouched, faced the distinct possibility of being surrounded and destroyed. Taking a quick look at the long odds he and his surviving units were facing, the Roman commander made the decision to quit the field.

Evaluation
As is often the case with my solo wargaming projects, it seems that with this effort the idea proved better than the execution. If I were to assign a grade to the short exercise, I think a B-minus or C-plus would be an acceptable assessment. A certain level of fun was had; in truth, I did enjoy aspects of the wargame. However, I was not õwowedö by the experience, nor did I find myself õitchingö to return to the tabletop after the first few turns. When deploying the armies (and especially after the appearance of the Celtic chariots), it became immediately apparent that my battlefield was too small for the numbers engaged. This realization was a little disappointing as I had taken care to shrink the standard dimensions of the various units listed in the rule book. There was also a degree of disappointment related to the non-decision of the õminiatureö battle. In the dozen or so HC games that Iøve waged against myself, there has never been a case where the broken army rule was realized. The spirit or morale of one side (commanded by yours truly) seems to weaken and then collapse before this calculated breaking point is reached. In some respects, I find this kind of decision-- as opposed to one determined by a certain percentage of units or points eliminated -- more historically accurate.

A brief note or two about my choice of terrain and figures. I readily stipulate that my approach is primitive -- perhaps even offensive -- when judged against current standards. (Just look at the pages of *Miniature Wargames* with *Battlegam*es or *Wargames Illustrated*.) This format is certainly lacking in visual appeal and does not provide inspiration but it is also very inexpensive, very flexible, and to my taste at least, very functional. For nearly two decades now, Iøve been able to conduct wargames in miniature without using miniature figures. I would not be surprised to find that some readers consider this a kind of heresy. Related to this particular point, I was recently re-reading the October 2012 *Wargames Illustrated*. (This is the massive õbookö celebrating the 300th issue of the magazine.) On page 142, in an article titled õThe Last Fight of the Revenge,ö well-known wargamer and writer of rules Andy Callan remarks, õThere is no ÷rightø way to do an historical wargame. Part of the fun of the hobby is that there are so many ways of skinning any given cat.ö If a survey of 100 or even 1,000 wargamers was conducted, I wonder how many would agree with this principle? I wonder how many actually practice it? There is a difference. In following certain threads in forums on TMP, I have read similar statements about the variety of rules for certain periods. The number of sets of rules and subsequent variety of choice is celebrated instead of being a point of worry. Anyway.

Turning to an equally brief assessment of the solo mechanics, I would offer that the dozen plans (sketches) for battle worked rather well. The weight of decision was largely removed from my shoulders. It was due to the dice that a barbarian double envelopment, fairly large in scale, was put into effect. Unfortunately for the Romans, this particular deployment put their formations in an immediate state of peril. Instead of a slow advance across the field (a problem in many of my other HC games), elements of both armies were quickly engaged in a life-and-death struggle.

One of the purposes of this fictional engagement was to assess some rule variations. Due to the nature of the contest, not every rule revision was able to be fully field tested. My re-ordering of the game move sequence seems to work well enough. Even though there were not many occasions when missile troops could fire in response to enemy movement, I still maintain that this makes historical and wargame sense. My õhereticalö rally from disorder amendment was not used a lot as formations from both sides were almost immediately involved in melee. Timøs warband rules, and the better-tested house rules from his group did add more color to the proceedings. I did find that the warband divisions, especially the large central group, quickly became fragmented due to the impetuous nature of its integral units. I also thought that it was fairly realistic -- as well as a bit frustrating -- to have to recoil beaten warbands into supporting ranks. This created a õreverse accordion effectö and produced a number of disordered units.

I came to the HC õcampö from a primarily õArmatiö background. Though both sets of rules cater to individuals with an interest in the ancient, medieval, and very early gunpowder periods, they are quite different in their philosophy and approach. In addition to õHail Caesarøsö õlooserö and definitely more verbal style of play, it did take several games to get comfortable with its dice-heavy approach to movement, missile fire, and melee resolution.

To a large extent, the stated goals were achieved. My wargame engine was sufficiently tuned up (ironically and interestingly, I could not find a single õHail Caesarö game on the program for Little Wars) and I was able to test a few rule variations. To be sure, more testing and experimentation is required before I can reach more informed conclusions. That said, I cannot help but wonder how the tabletop battle would have gone had I used the rules as written? I do suppose it would be a simple enough matter to find out, but I have a tendency to follow my interests, and repeating the same battle is really not high on that unwritten list of things I like to do in solo wargaming the ancient period. However, I do like to try out new rules. As stated previously, Iøve read õImpetusö a number of times. Maybe itøs time to give Lorenzo Sartoriøs Impetus a try?

(Twelve photos showing the course of the battle are below.)

Photo 1 -
A view of the finished terrain (simple ... crude even, but functional and very inexpensive), showing the meandering course of the river, as well as indicating the position of hills, heavy woods, and light woods.
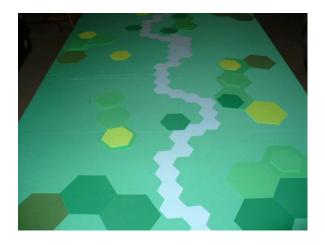

Photo 2 -
Another look at the tabletop on which I tried to represent a stretch of ground somewhere in late 1st century Britannia.

Photo 3 -
A general view of the Roman deployment, from right to left, as determined by the roll of a six-sided die. The veteran legion infantry division is at the bottom of the picture, followed by the division responsible for the baggage and transport. Another formation of legion infantry occupies the center. Auxiliaries are on the left flank, at the top of the frame.

Photo 4 -
A view of the barbarian deployment. The largest group of warbands is in the center of the field. The units are stacked three deep. At the corners of the Briton table side, the divisions of light chariots and cavalry wait to be placed on the Roman side of the river.

Photo 5 -
A view of the battlefield before the first turn was played.

Photo 6 -
Toward the end of the chariot assault on the Roman left flank. The drivers and warriors have succeeded in pushing the Roman auxiliaries back onto themselves. Lives were traded for time and space as units were fed into the swirling melee. The attached bolt throwers never got a chance to set up and engage the enemy; they were always pushed back by units giving ground. The upper right of the photo shows three units of light chariots pushing hard against three units of Roman medium auxiliary infantry.
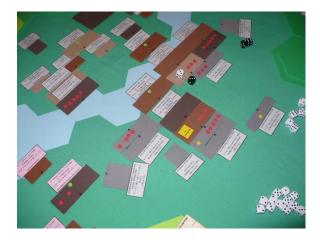

Photo 7 -
A view of the action in the center of the field at the conclusion of Turn 3. The Roman wall has been breached by a wave of warbands. The Roman left held, but the center was forced to give ground and the right was nearly overwhelmed. On this end of the line, one cohort faced four units of screaming tribesmen.
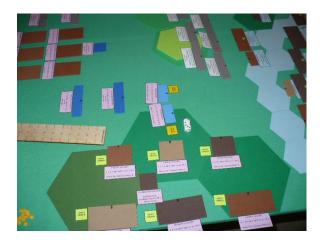
Photo 8 -
A glimpse of the Roman right flank, showing the belated arrival of the barbarian cavalry. All six units are marked as õopen orderö due to the nature of the terrain. The veteran legion infantry are the gray counters at the top of the picture. The baggage and transport are represented by the brown counters in the upper left corner.

Photo 9 -
The Roman left about to meet its end. Five warbands (two of them large units with a clash value of 11) charge into contact with light archers. The ensuing melee is catastrophic for the auxiliaries. The bolt throwers are next to go, and the second line of medium auxiliaries finds itself engaged by warriors on a winning streak.

Photo 10 -
A view of the center where the regular legion tried to deny the Celts a foothold on the Roman side of the river. The wall of cohorts has been cracked in several places. Quite a few barbarians wait for their turn on the far side of the melees. The bolt throwers in this sector are about to meet their end as well.

Photo 11 -
The barbarians keep winning and keep pushing back the Roman heavy infantry in the center of the field. (The red markers indicate casualties; the yellow markers indicate disorder.)

Photo 12 -
A picture of the Roman right at the end of an abbreviated game. Barbarian cavalry has come on the field through the woods. A number of warbands and two units of light chariots (on right of frame) prepare to cross the river. The veteran legion cohorts, represented by the gray counters, are in danger of being surrounded, as the Roman left and center are in a severe state and there is nothing left to stop the advance of over a dozen warbands.