

By Mark Backhouse

KEEPING 'ONE EYE' ON EUMENES

PARAETACENE 317 BC

Following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, his empire broke down as the leading generals fought for supremacy. Antigonus 'One eye' defeated Polyperchon's fleet in 318 BC, securing control of Anatolia. He then turned to face his rival Eumenes in Persia. Eumenes blunted an over-confident attack by Antigonus at the Koprates River, forcing him to retire and regroup. The two great generals then both went onto the offensive. Marching their armies head on against each other, they met at Paraetacene.

Antigonus had a force of around 28,000 heavy infantry and 11,000 cavalry. Supporting this he had a force of around 10,000 light infantry and 65 elephants. The lighter half of his cavalry was positioned on his left flank, commanded by the governor of Media, Pithon. In the centre was Antigonus' heavy infantry, made up of 9000 mercenaries, 3000 Anatolian troops, 8000 local troops trained in Macedonian pike tactics, and around 8000 Macedonian phalangites. The right flank was made up of Antigonus' heavy cavalry, including his elite Companions and other guard cavalry led by the King in person. The elephants and light infantry covered the front line and a smaller number were used to guard his right flank.

Eumenes' army was probably slightly smaller in size with around 35,000 infantry and 6300 cavalry, supported by 114 elephants. His left flank, led by Eudamos, the governor of India, was made up of around 3400 cavalry, largely from his eastern allies, along with a unit of lancers. The centre consisted of 6000 mercenaries, 5000 foreign troops trained to fight as Macedonian pikemen, and 3000 of the venerable elite Silver Shields, veterans of Alexander's campaigns, with a further 3000 veteran hypaspists on their right. Eumenes himself led the right wing, with 2900 cavalry, 900 of which were his elite Companions. The elephants were deployed in front of the army, supported by a very sizeable light infantry contingent, roughly similar in numbers to the total of the heavy infantry.

THE HISTORICAL BATTLE

Antigonus attacked first with his light cavalry on his left flank. Eumenes struggled at first to deal with the fast moving light cavalry, but eventually managed to flank the opposing light horse by weakening his own left flank and bringing his own light cavalry over to support his right flank.

On the right of his line, Antigonus waited cautiously. His heavy cavalry were overawed by the sight of so many fearsome elephants guarding Eumenes' flank. In the centre, Antigonus ordered the advance of his phalanx to engage the opposing phalanx. Owing largely to the superior experience and aggression of the Silver Shields, his phalanx

started to falter and fall back. Antigonus' heavy foot sustained a large number of casualties and, at the same time, his outflanked light cavalry had been thrown into disarray. To many participants, the battle must have seemed a certain victory for Eumenes.

Antigonus, however, kept a cool head and realized that the success of Eumenes' centre had opened a large gap between it and his weakened left wing. Leading his elite Companions in a charge, he shattered the opposing cavalry wing, which disintegrated under the assault. Eumenes, having now routed the opposing centre, turned his pike block and right wing around to face Antigonus' heavy cavalry. Antigonus retreated with his Companions and tried to reform his exhausted army. Eumenes likewise withdrew to reform his troops.

Deployment and terrain

The battle was fought in the land of the Paraetaceni in Persia. Antigonus' army descended from some high ground to engage Eumenes on a plain. Antigonus' right flank was secured by the hillside, as was Eumenes' left flank. The hillside should be strewn with boulders and brush, making it entirely unsuitable for formed foot or horse. The rest of the battlefield seems to have been a fairly open plain, very slightly sloping down towards Eumenes' army. This does not seem to have greatly affected the battle and therefore can be safely ignored.

Special rules

Most sets of Ancients rules will work effectively for refighting this battle. For my own attempt, I wanted to capture the huge size and diversity of the troops, so I opted to play *Hail Caesar* rules by Warlord Games at 6mm scale. The advantage with *Hail Caesar* is that it allows a large engagement to be fought out in an evening, and for big armies to be purchased, painted, and (probably most critically) stored more effectively than their larger brethren. However, we also played out the battle using 'double *DBA*' in a very satisfactory hour and a bit. Regardless of the rules you are using, special consideration needs to be given to Eumenes' Silver Shields. At both Paraetacene and the following battle at Gabene, they played a critical role in breaking Antigonus' phalanx, so they should receive



Eumenes' phalanx clashes with that of Antigonos in 6mm.

a healthy bonus, both in terms of morale and in terms of an attack that allows them to punch a hole in the enemy's line.

“Eumenes’ men were victorious because of the valour of the Macedonian Silver Shields. These warriors were already well on in years, but because of the great number of battles they had fought they were outstanding in hardihood and skill, so that no one confronting them was able to withstand their might. Therefore, although there were then only 3000 of them, they had become, so to speak, the spearhead of the whole army.”

- Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*.

Both commanders should be rated as good. However, whilst Eumenes was an experienced commander, Antigonos seems to have displayed a knack for timing and delivering cavalry charges at the critical moment. Therefore, for one turn only, he can choose to receive a command bonus to represent this. Depending on the rules you use, this might include a +1 bonus to the number of PIPs in a DBA game, or to a bonus in leadership for *Hail Caesar*.

The dust created by the movement of large numbers of troops inhibited both commanders and prevented them from getting a clear picture of the battle. In a game with a referee, this can be easily recreated through use of hidden movement on a map. Large bodies of cavalry and, to a lesser extent, infantry should create dust clouds behind them that can be represented by coloured cotton wool or hamster bedding. This should block line of sight and prevent charges being issued and missiles being exchanged. A wily commander could use this to his advantage to shield the movement of their troops behind the front lines and to allow them to keep their cavalry reserve hidden until the final fatal moment. Without a referee, hidden movement is still possible, but relies on a degree of goodwill between players.

Victory

The death of either commander should result in defeat for their side. Technically, whoever has control of the majority of the battlefield at the end of a fixed number of turn should be deemed the winner. Depending on the rules you are using, the number of turns will obviously vary, but there should be enough turns for a reasonable fight!

Alternatively, calculate victory by the amount of losses caused. Losses to the vital Macedonian troops should count as worth double, and losses to the even more significant Companions and Silver Shields should count as triple. This should mean that both generals need to think carefully before deploying them. Eumenes had a plentiful supply of elephants from India, but Antigonos had a finite supply that could not be wasted. Antigonos should therefore be penalised for excessive losses in this part of his army.

RESULTS AND AFTERMATH

The following day, Antigonos advanced to claim the battlefield. Eumenes meanwhile was forced to bow to the pressure of his experienced Silver Shields to secure their baggage area. In Greek warfare, whoever controlled the battlefield was normally regarded as being the victor. However, for Antigonos it was a pyrrhic victory. He had lost around 3700 infantry killed and a further 4000 wounded. Eumenes' losses were considerably lighter, with only 540 killed and 900 wounded. At the follow-up Battle of Gabene, Antigonos' phalanx was pretty much destroyed by the Silver Shields; but once again, he was able to launch a devastating cavalry charge, which captured Eumenes' baggage. Despite another inconclusive battle, the Silver Shields were distraught at the loss of their families and personal possessions, and mutinied. Eumenes was seized and handed over to Antigonos, who had him put to death. **WS&S**

Mark's recent interest in 6mm gaming (as seen in the photos of his armies above) may baffle some of the other staff, but it's a boon to the magazine!