

The Scenario

The Persian satrapy of Longawayoff was the only army that did not take to the battlefield in 2022, so it was right for them to be the first up for 2023. My latest army to be completed – the Deceangli – was still waiting for its first outing. As both armies were of similar size in terms of manpower and theoretical fighting ability, they seemed ideal opponents for the first battle of 2023.

The Celtic Deceangli had quite a few warbands, but they were smaller and of generally lower quality than my other Celtic army – the Trinovantes – so I was unsure as to how they would stand up to sustained pressure. The Persian satrap also had a large number of poor quality infantry in his army, but he did have a lot of bows and a much stronger cavalry contingent. However, his allies may not have been as reliable as he would have liked.

I created a battlefield based on that for Aqua Sextae (105BCE), in the hope this might give some room for both armies to make the best use of their troops.

A straight forward encounter battle was planned.

The Pitch



The pitch was based on the terrain for that of the battle of Aqua Sextae (105BCE) of which the main feature was a river running across it. A road crossed the river with a shallow ford and there were three other fords – all deep – spread along its length. The river was in a valley which widened close to the fords. The ground rose away from the river, steeply in the near two corners, and more gently in the far corners. Part of one flank was of heath and there were some patches of scrub by the woods on the far side. The nearer side of the battlefield was generally open. The Deceangli would deploy on the far side.

The Teams

Allwed was king of the Deceangli and had 8,700 men in his army. All were from the same tribe, which included several sub-clans that were treated as allied Divisions with no defined leader or hierarchy.

Allwed led the tribe's main cavalry force of 900 men. The main clan's infantry comprised of three warbands. With supporting skirmishers these totalled 4,500 men but only about one-third were of warrior quality.

The three sub-clans (from the bays, the valleys, and the far hills) added a further 3,300 men. However, the quality was not generally high and most of them were skirmishers rather than warband warriors.

Apart from a few slingers scattered across the tribe, there were no missile troops and no armour.

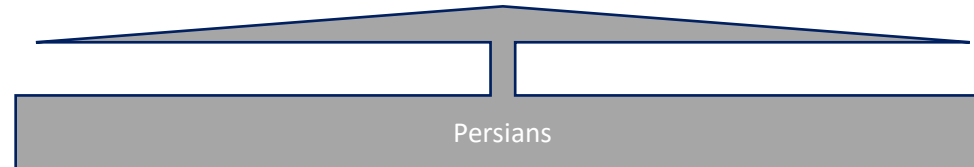
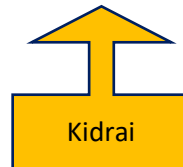
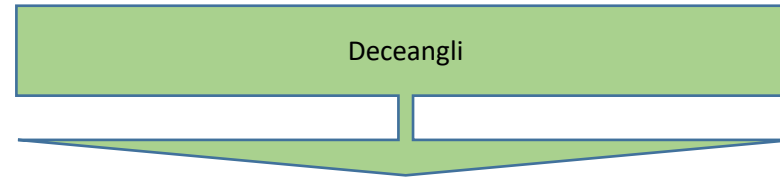
Xavier, the satrap of Longawayoff, had just over 7,600 men in his field army. Most were under his direct control but some were subject allies led by local chieftains.

Xavier personally led his cavalry force of about 1,200 reasonably competent and partly armoured troopers. His regular infantry totalled just under 2,500 men armed with bow and spear. And he added 2,300 mercenary Arabs – a mixture of cavalry, camelry and infantry.

Both of Xavier's subject allies were classed as reluctant. Kashta of Ethiopia fielded 800 good quality light foot archers. And Yaute, chieftain of the Kidrai Arab tribe, had about 900 mixed quality cavalry.

For more details on the compositions of both forces visit the armies page on this site.

The Deployments



The Tactics

Allwed was not too sure how his men would perform and wanted to avoid the obvious ploy of a main thrust for the road ford, but knew success depended on getting lots of men across the river.

So, he decided to deploy as if he was heading for the road ford, but instead go for the deeper ford off to his right and hope to wrong foot his opponent. He also tried to hide some of his men behind the woods.

He would lead, with the cavalry, the main clan warbands towards the first ford to the right of the road, cross that and attack. One of the sub-clans – the Bay Clan – were hiding behind the woods on his far right. They would move forward, through the woods, cross by the further ford, and support his attack.

The other two sub-clans were hidden in the woods to the left of the road. The Far Hills Clan would advance towards the road ford, as if to cross but halt this side. And the Valley Clan would head for the ford on the left and threaten a flank attack from there. Allwed planned that these would divert sufficient of the enemy to enable his own crossings to proceed fairly easily.

Xavier assumed the main attack would come via the road ford and assigned his own infantry to advance and contain any attempted crossing. Given the number of bows they had, it should be possible to create a kill zone if any enemy emerged from the ford. His Arab cavalry / camelry would provide cover on the right flank, with his own cavalry covering the left flank of his infantry.

In case the enemy decided to cross by any of the fords to the left of the road, Xavier had his allies move towards them, with instructions to delay any enemy attacks until he could reinforce them.

The Order of Battle

In my rules, each Corps takes its turn in being active and doing something. The order in which they become active is determined by a dice roll at the start of the battle. This sequence is set out below and may help to explain the battle report slides, each of which shows the actions for an individual Corps during a period when it is their turn to be active. Each Division normally occupies a single hex on the battlefield.

C1 – Ethiopians (Persian ally) (1 Division)

C2 – Persian Troops (5 Divisions)

C3 – Kidrai (Persian ally) (1 Division)

C4 – Deceangli (7 Divisions)

Each Corps commander is in the first Division in their Corps. All photographs are taken from the Persian edge.

P1/C1



The Persians' Ethiopian allies advanced towards the ford in front of them.



P1/C2



All of Xavier's own troops advanced towards the road ford.



P1/C3



On the left of the Persian line, their Kidrai Arab allies rode forwards on to the slope of the valley.



P1/C4



The Deceangli started to advance, with Allwed and the cavalry leading the way, and followed by the main clan's warbands, towards the central ford. The allied sub-clans advanced towards the other fords.



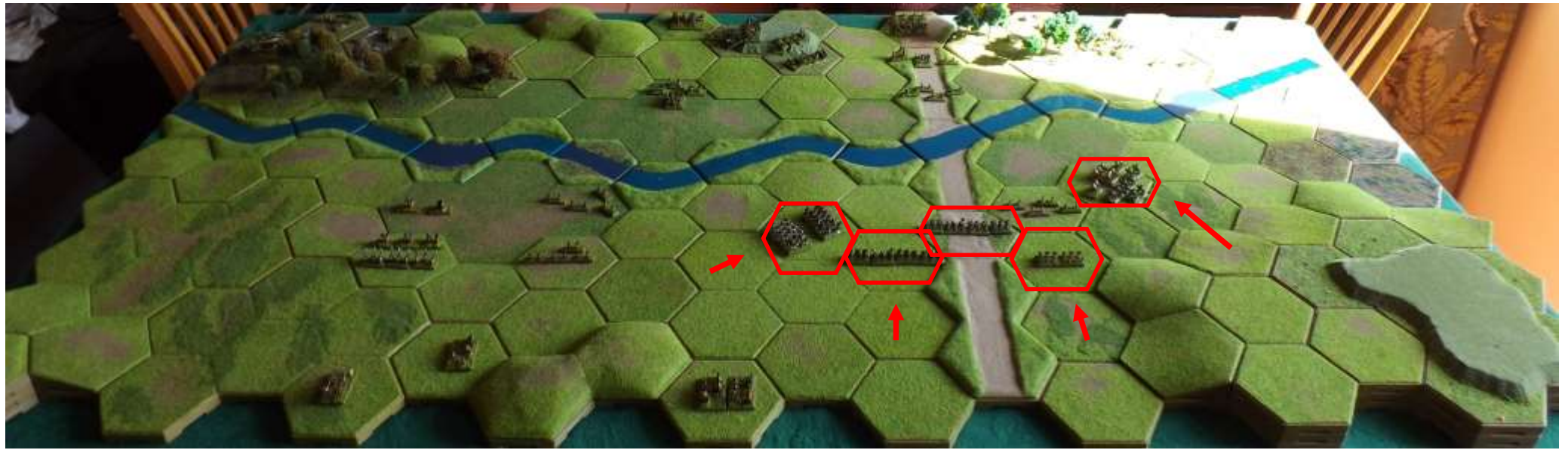
P2/C1



Kashta, the Ethiopian chieftain, advanced his men on to the slope above the river valley. Some of his men went forward to shoot across the river at the approaching enemy cavalry.



P2/C2



Xavier's lead infantry unit, having marched in column along the road now deployed, effectively covering the ford in front of them. To their right the Arab mercenaries moved forward to support, and to their left the second infantry unit and Xavier, with the cavalry, continued advancing.



P2/C3



On the Persian left, Yaute, the chieftain of the Kidrai tribe, held most of his men in position on the valley slope but had some scout ahead nearer the ford.



P2/C4



Despite taking casualties, Allwed pressed on with his cavalry and reached the ford. Some of his men were now able to return fire on the enemy archers. However, his warbands were being left behind. On his left flank, two of the sub-clans had secured their side of the fords.



P3/C1



Having lost nearly half of his men due to the enemy cavalry, Kashta, the Ethiopian chieftain, held his remaining men on the slope and had them shoot at long range.



P3/C2



Seeing that the enemy had just a small force guarding the road ford, Xavier ordered a general advance and his infantry started to move forward, shooting as they did so. He also spotted that there was an enemy force trying to cross the ford to his right and he sent his Arab cavalry and camelry to hold them up.



P3/C3



Yaute, the Kidrai chieftain, held his men in position on the valley slope but directed his advanced men to skirmish with the enemy cavalry that were crossing the ford.



P3/C4



Allwed, the Deceangli king, had some concerns about the situation but knew that his best chance of success was to get as many warbands as possible over the river. Fortunately, the sub-clan to his right had emerged from the wood and were now skirmishing with the enemy cavalry, so he rode forward with his own cavalry to deal with the annoying enemy archers.



P4/C1



Kashta and most of his archers had fallen as a result of the skirmishing by the enemy cavalry. The few remaining Ethiopian archers decided to withdraw to a safer position.



P4/C2



Despite being vaguely aware that some enemy had crossed a ford to his left, Xavier, the Persian satrap, was confident enough to continue with his advance and his infantry units started to cross the ford, firing on the enemy as they did so. On the right flank, his Arab camelry continued to fire on the enemy trying to cross that ford.



P4/C3



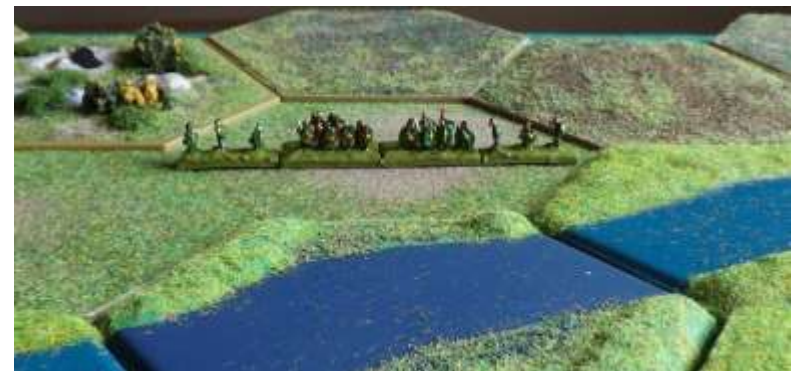
The withdrawal by the Ethiopian archers did not drop the morale of the Kidrai substantially and their chieftain, Yaute, was able to get them to charge the enemy cavalry. Being eager, the enemy cavalry held their ground and a melee started.



P4/C4



The melee had not gone well with Allwed as he and all his cavalry had fallen. Additionally, the Far Hills sub-clan guarding the road ford had been destroyed and the Valley sub-clan on the left had fallen back. Faced with enemy infantry threatening his rear, the new leader of the Deceangli moved his main warbands to face this threat, whilst the Bay sub-clan advanced on the right flank.



P5/C1



The last of the Ethiopian archers continued retiring.



P5/C2



The first of Xavier's infantry units had crossed the ford, formed up, and started to shoot at the enemy. The second infantry unit were now crossing the ford. On the right flank the Arab camelry continued to shoot at the enemy on the other side of the river.



P5/C3



Yaute's Kidrai cavalry were severely weakened, but still steady. So, he turned them to face the next wave of enemy skirmishers and had them return fire.



P5/C4



For the Decenagli commander the situation was becoming bad. One of his warbands had broken, as had the sub-clan on the far left. He had little option but to issue a withdraw order for his remaining men.



P6/C1



The Ethiopian archers remained on the hill next to their baggage.



P6/C2



Xavier formed up his cavalry ready to cross the ford after his infantry, who were now deployed and shooting on the far side. He sent orders for his Arab cavalry and camelry to advance and attack as well.



P6/C3



With no threatening enemy nearby, Yaute returned to his original starting position on the valley slope.



P6/C4



The Decenagli withdrawal had turned into a retreat as numbers and morale continued to fall.



The End

With all the Deceangli now retreating off of the battlefield and Xavier's men still strong in numbers, morale and advancing, he was awarded a fairly clear and easy victory.



The Conclusions

Indeed it was fairly easy for Xavier. Casualties amongst his own troops were negligible, and although his subject allies had been heavily thumped and were all but extinct this had not affected his morale or gumption to stick to his plan when he saw the opportunity to advance over the main ford.

Allwed's plan was in trouble early on when the enemy gained control of most of the ford exits before his men were in position to attempt crossings. Those that did make it across were isolated and easy targets for the enemy archers, particularly his own cavalry. His demise had a serious affect on his tribe's morale and with so few warrior quality troops across the tribe which when combined with the constant trickle of missile casualties soon led to many troops breaking or dispersing in rout before any serious melees had occurred. Had he kept his plan simpler or deployed his men nearer the crossings, he might have had some success.

The most valuable Unit? Potentially, both of Xavier's subject allies had claim to this as it was their action that took out the enemy commander and prevented his main assault on the right from ever getting anywhere close to success. As most of Xavier's own troops did very little – apart from some shooting – they are probably right.