

The Scenario

My Spartans had not been on the battlefield since their refurbishment and I thought I ought to give my Commagene Army an outing before it started the refurbishment process, so they seemed a good prospect for a battle. However, the two Armies were not equal in size and strength and I needed to find a suitable ally for Commagene. I chose the Persian Satrapy of Longawayoff who also had not been active yet this year.

Whilst this meant the Spartans still had an apparent superiority in numbers and possible battle strength, their opposing alliance had a great advantage in both cavalry and missile fire which if used properly should give them a tactical advantage.

A straight forward encounter battle was planned.

The Pitch



Wooded with a few hills is the best description. An impassable forest was placed in far left top corner, a dense wood edged part of the high ground on the right and some scattered open woods lined the near right corner. A crag was on the near baseline with two low hills straggling across the battlefield. An area of rising ground formed a mound on the right. Some boggy ground, heath and scrub were scattered around the edge. The alliance would approach from the far side.

The Teams

The Spartans, under their king Leonidas, fielded just over 13,000 men. These were from Sparta and her close allies.

Leonidas' Spartans were formed around 3,000 good quality hoplites. They were supported by a similar number of lighter troops but these were mostly of a very poor quality.

Echemus commanded the Tegean Corps of 1,200 good quality hoplites plus a few supporting peltasts.

Aristomenes led the less willing Messene force. This came to 1,300 men including some hoplites but were mainly lighter types and generally of low quality.

Pausinas commanded the contingent from the Lower Laconian allies. They fielded 2,400 hoplites of mixed quality supported by 1,400 lighter types.

There were very few cavalry and just a handful of slingers spread across the Army.

Antiochos IV, King of Commagene, led the alliance which totalled 10,000 men.

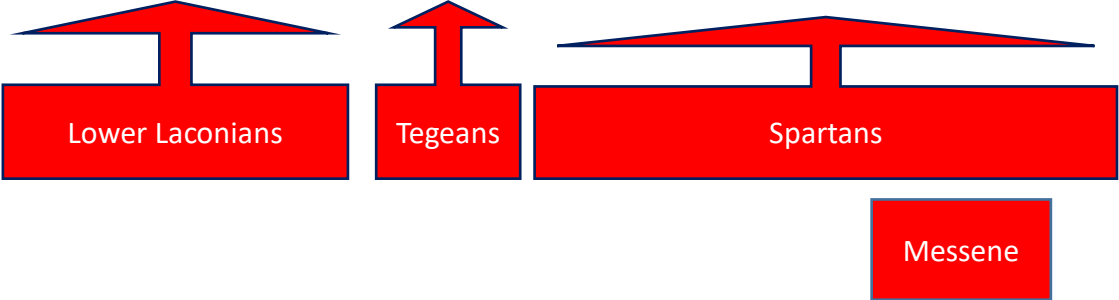
Antiochos' own Army formed just over the half that number. His Army was based on 3,200 phalangites – armoured but of low quality. They were supported by some foot archers and a few peltasts. Antiochos had a cavalry Division of just over 1,000 troopers – mostly javelin armed cavalry but with a few hundred cataphracts and archers.

Xavier, the Satrap, commanded the Persian contingent from Longawayoff. His force was classed as a reluctant allied army. Xavier had 2,500 cavalry and camelry. Some of which was reasonable but about half – the Arabs - were unarmoured and of low quality. He did have a good unit of 1,200 bow and spear armed infantry.

In addition, Xavier bought along 800 Ethiopian light foot archers. These were of reasonable quality and formed their own Corps under their chieftain, Kashta. They were classed as a forced ally to Xavier.

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

The Deployments



The Tactics

Leonidas knew that his infantry could beat the opposition but he was likely to be outshot and outflanked by the cavalry, so he had to close as quickly as possible but protect his flanks.

He set himself on the right with his hoplites spread either side of him with the intention to advance and swing into the enemy infantry, break them and so crack the enemy morale. His light troops would move into the wooded high ground on the right where they could intercept any potential cavalry outflanking moves. The Messene would follow him and support his lights in guarding that flank.

The Tegeans would advance on his left and the Lower Laconian allies to their left. The Lower Laconians were advised to keep their light Division back to stop any outflanking moves from that side.

Antiochos knew his phalangites could put up a reasonable showing against the hoplites but that there were not enough of them and he needed to spread the Spartan attack and weaken them by missiles.

His own foot archers would sneak through the forest gap to try to stretch the enemy left flank to provide an opportunity for his cavalry to cut in and support the phalangites. Xavier's infantry would move forward on the left side of the phalangites with the Ethiopians skirmishing beyond them. This would give a bit of bow power on that side.

Xavier would take both his cavalry Divisions and sweep round the enemy right and take out his flank units and then either hit his rear or distract sufficient units to prevent them from carrying out a frontal attack.

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.

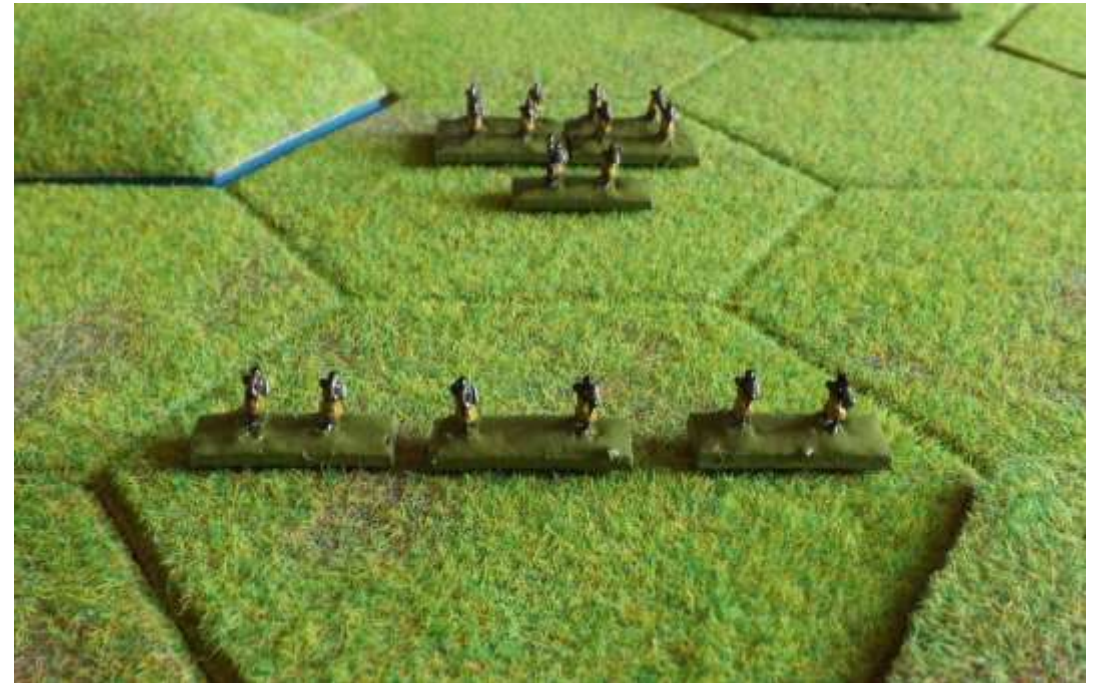
- C1 – Ethiopians (Persian allies) (1 Division)
- C2 – Spartans (5 Divisions)
- C3 – Xavier's Troops (Persian Longawayoff) (3 Divisions)
- C4 – Messene (Spartan allies) (1 Division)
- C5 – Tegeans (Spartan allies) (1 Division)
- C6 – Lower Laconians (Spartan allies) (3 Divisions)
- C7 – Commagene (4 Divisions)

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

P1/C1



The Ethiopian archers moved forward.



P1/C2



The Spartans advanced with Leonidas in the centre and at the head of his hoplites, whilst his light troops were on the right.



P1/C3



On the alliance left, Xavier advanced with his cavalry, sending his Arab light cavalry and camels wide on the left. In the centre, his infantry moved on to the hill to link up with the flank of the phalangites.



P1/C4



The Messene marched on to the battlefield behind the right hand side Division of Spartan hoplites.



P1/C5



The Tegeans advanced in the centre of the Spartan line.



P1/C6



On the Spartan left, the Lower Laconian allies advanced.



P1/C7



On the alliance right, Antiochos held his cavalry and phalangites in position to give his archers time to advance through the gap in the forest.



P2/C1



Kashta, the Ethiopian chieftain, moved his men forward in readiness to open fire.



P2/C2



The Spartan hoplites moved forward across the open ground, whilst their light Divisions moved into the dense wood on the edge of the rise.



P2/C3



Xavier's cavalry rode up the ridge with his Arabs starting to lead the way around the wood. Xavier paused to see what was happening on the plain. Xavier's infantry held their position on the hill as they waited for the phalangites to advance.



P2/C4



The Messene continued to advance behind the Spartan hoplites.



P2/C5



The Tegeans also continued to advance.



P2/C6



The Lower Laconian hoplite Divisions moved forward towards the hill and some of their advanced skirmishers were able to see the enemy approaching from the other side. However, the Lower Laconian light Division were unable to make much progress in descending the crag and were losing touch with their hoplites.



P2/C7



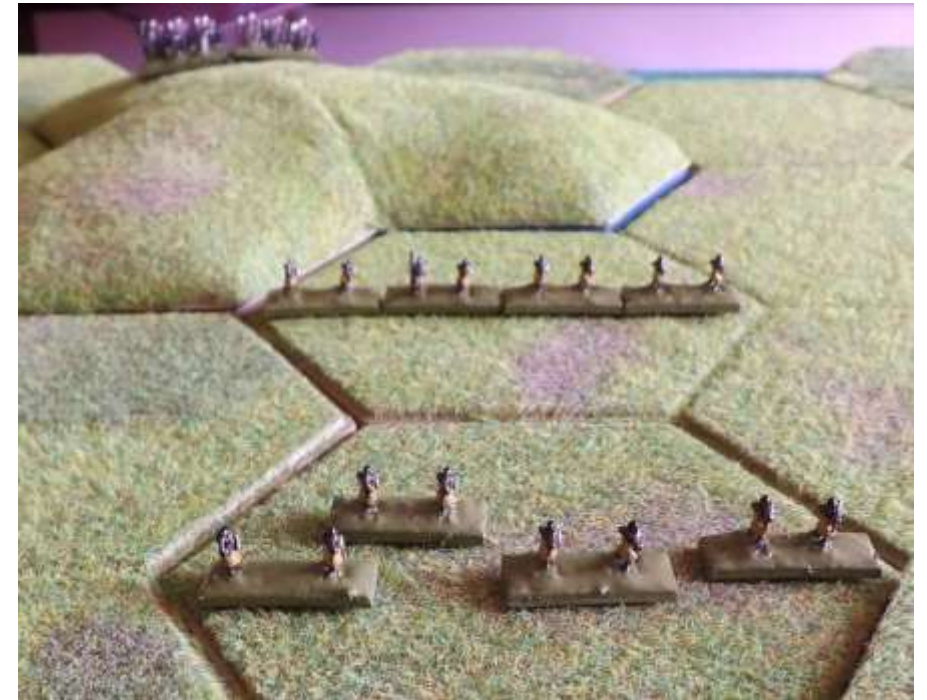
As his foot archers disappeared into the gap in the forest, Antiochos advanced his cavalry and phalangites. They drifted to the right to use the forest edge as protection against any outflanking moves.



P3/C1



With Xavier's infantry still perched on the hill behind him, Kashta, the Ethiopian chieftain, held his eager men in check but sent some forward to shoot at the approaching enemy.



P3/C2



Despite losing his skirmishers to enemy archery, Leonidas' hoplites continued to lead the advance. The skirmishers from his other two Divisions closed on the enemy archers and returned fire. In the wood, the Spartan first light Division remained hidden but the second Division were unable to make any further progress.



P3/C3



Xavier's original plan had been to ride round the wood and attack the enemy rear, but seeing what looked like the open flank of the hoplite line passing he changed his mind and re-grouped for a flank attack. Unaware of the enemy in the wood, he sent his camel mounted archers forward to shoot from close range. Meanwhile in the centre, his infantry moved off the hill on to the flank of the phalangites.



P3/C4



The Messene continued to advance.



P3/C5



The Tegeans also continued to advance and with the enemy in sight were now eager. And their commander, Echemus, decided to order a general advance.



P3/C6



The Lower Laconian hoplites started to advance across the hill, but their light troops still struggled to leave the crag.



P3/C7



Antiochos' cavalry and phalangites advanced with his horse archers now able to target some of the advanced skirmishers on the hill. On the extreme right flank, the archers emerged from the forest gap.



P4/C1



Kashta, the Ethiopian chieftain, pulled his outlying skirmishers back to reduce casualties from the enemy skirmishers and concentrated his fire on the approaching enemy heavy infantry.



P4/C2



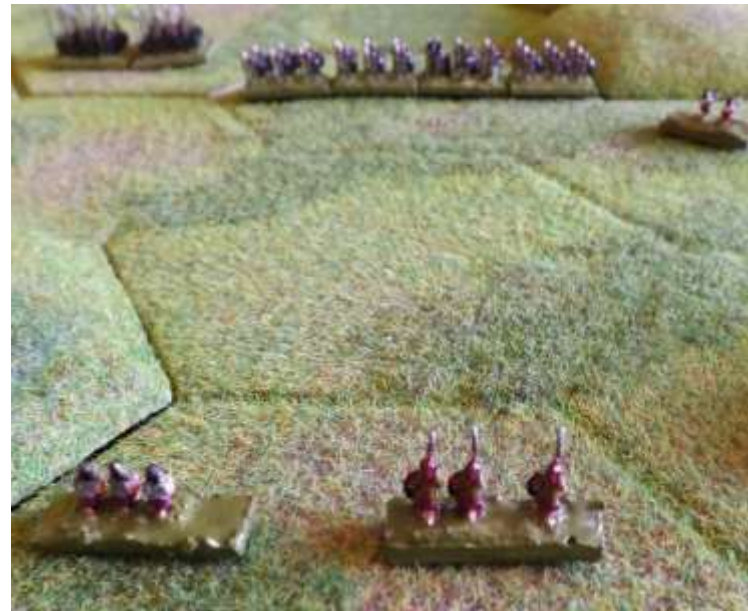
Leonidas kept his Spartan hoplites advancing, pulling in his weakest Division who had suffered some casualties, and started to turn to face the enemy infantry. Behind him, his first light Division emerged from the wood and chased the enemy camels off with some slingshot. Unfortunately, the second light Division failed to make any progress.



P4/C3



Unable to resist the temptation, Xavier charged his own cavalry Division into the enemy that had just emerged from the wood whilst his Arab cavalry looped behind him to continue firing on the hoplites. In the centre, Xavier's infantry advanced in line with the phalangites to their right. This brought them within missile range of the enemy to their front.



P4/C4



The Messene advanced around the edge of the wood and were now able to see the Spartan lights struggling against the enemy cavalry.



P4/C5



Despite the enemy archery, the Tegeans remained eager and continued to advance on the enemy. Their peltasts were now able to throw some javelins.



P4/C6



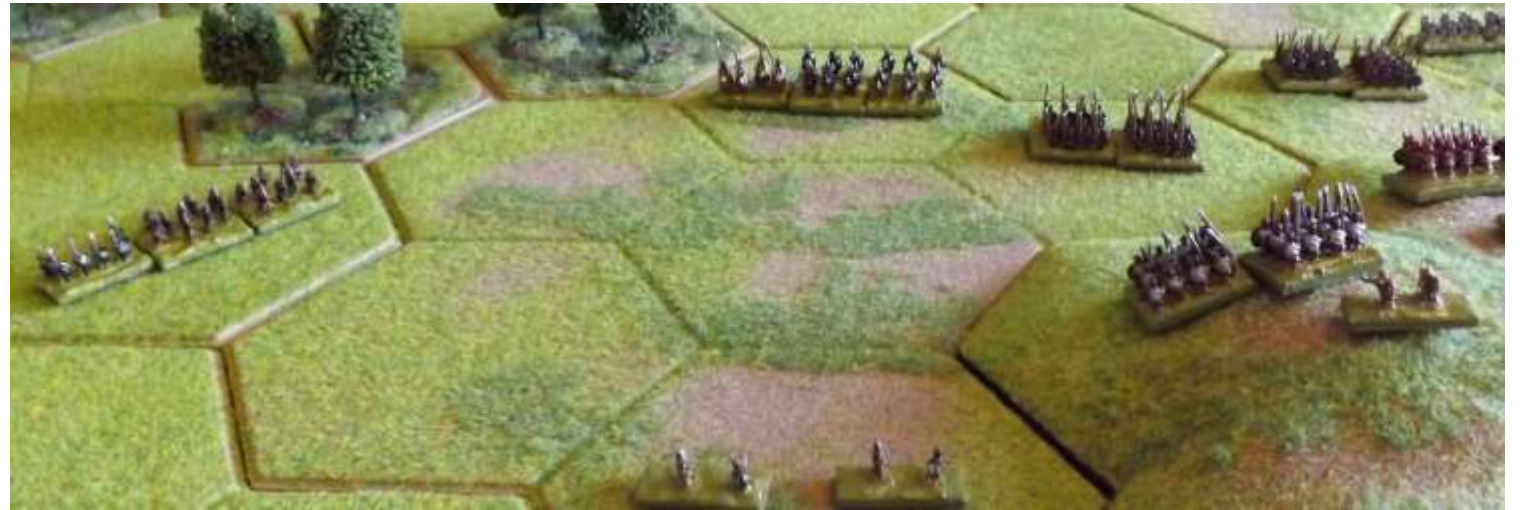
The Lower Laconian light Division finally managed to descend the crag and set off after their hoplites. These had now crossed the crest of the hill and could see the approaching enemy heavy infantry.



P4/C7



Antiochos had lost all his horse archers as they had advanced into missile range of the enemy skirmishers, but now his foot archers were coming within range so they were able to start returning fire.



P5/C1



The persistence of the enemy skirmishers paid off as more of the Ethiopian archers, including their chieftain Kashta, fell to their javelins. The remaining archers became wary and pulled back.



P5/C2



Learning that his first light Division had almost been wiped out and had fallen back into the wood, Leonidas was concerned that the Messene by themselves were insufficient to hold up the cavalry. So he turned his hoplites around and started to form up to face the cavalry.



P5/C3



Despite having defeated one enemy, Xavier was not too eager to charge fresh enemy containing hoplites and other long spear armed infantry, so he held his position with both his cavalry Divisions and used their missile advantage to weaken the various enemy bodies. In the centre, his infantry held their position and used their bows to soften up the approaching hoplites.



P5/C4



Although they lost a substantial part of their force to the enemy missile fire, the Messene morale was just sufficient to hold and they turned to face the enemy cavalry with their remaining peltasts returning fire.



P5/C5



By contrast, the enemy missile fire did not reduce the morale of the Tegeans and they charged eagerly into the enemy infantry to their front.



P5/C6



Similarly, the Lower Laconian allies were also in good spirits and both hoplite Divisions charged their opposing phalangite blocks. On their flank, their light Division moved forward, sending its skirmishers to harass the enemy cavalry.



P5/C7



Despite taking a battering from the hoplite charge, the Commagene phalangites fought back strongly and continued in melee. On their flank, Antiochos rode forward with his cavalry, forcing the enemy skirmishers back, and his foot archers closed on the enemy. Both Divisions opened fire on the now isolated enemy flank guard.



P6/C1



With the enemy skirmishers still pestering them with javelins, the final few Ethiopians decided to retreat.



P6/C2



Leonidas' hoplites charged the cavalry who were uphill of them and the cavalry sensibly evaded. In the wood the remnants of the Spartan first light Division were grimly hanging and luckily, the second light Division were now able to finally cross through the wood and they were able to add some javelin fire to their colleagues slingshot on the enemy cavalry.



P6/C3



Suddenly finding himself nearly surrounded and with enemy closing in and causing serious casualties. Xavier determined the situation was bad and ordered a withdrawal. He pulled both his cavalry Divisions back but kept them within long bow range of the enemy. In the centre, despite putting up a robust fight, his infantry were substantially weakened and they too fell back but also continued to shoot.



P6/C4



Heartened by the sight of the enemy retiring and lots of friends advancing, the morale of the Messene revived and they moved forward to pursue the retreating cavalry.



P6/C5



Also still in good spirits, the Tegeans again charged the remaining infantry to their front. This time, however, the enemy evaded.



P6/C6



There were mixed fortunes for the Lower Laconian allies. Pausinas' hoplites had destroyed their opponents, but his other hoplite Division had been destroyed by their opponents. Also the heavy enemy missile attack had destroyed the light Division. So, Pausinas moved his Division closer to the Tegeans and despatched an update to Leonidas requesting support.



P6/C7



With one phalanx Division gone and the other weakened, Antiochos re-grouped his troops and started to re-form a line to attack the remaining enemy infantry this side of the hills. He hoped that Xavier was having success in delaying and reducing the enemy on the other flank.



P7/C1



The few remaining Ethiopians continued to assess the situation as dire and so retreated off the battlefield.



P7/C2



Leonidas continued to press forward with his hoplites to keep the pressure up on the enemy cavalry. His few remaining skirmishers annoyed the camels and the second light Division managed to make its way through the wood so they could fire on the enemy cavalry. The message from Pausinas arrived outlining the situation on the other flank. Leonidas replied but wanted to finish off the cavalry threat before reacting.



P7/C3



Xavier's cavalry continued with their withdrawal, shooting as they fell back. In the centre, his isolated infantry turned to face and shot again.



P7/C4



The morale of the Messene was still holding, so Aristomenes, their commander, moved them forward along the wood edge to link up with the Spartan light troops.



P7/C5



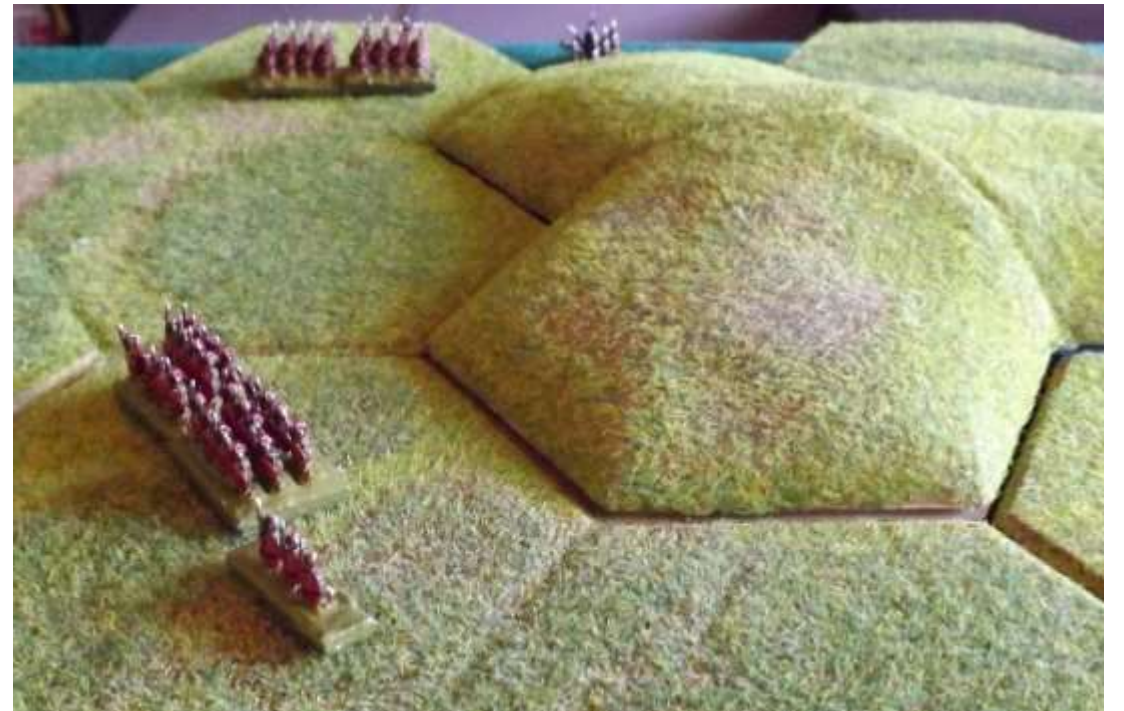
Although their morale had started to fall, the Tegeans still felt strong enough for a third charge on the few infantry facing them. This time they chased them off the battlefield.



P7/C6



Receiving new orders from Leonidas to fall back so they could link up with him, the Lower Laconians started to move back and passed the instruction on to the Tegeans.



P7/C7



Antiochos moved his cavalry across the hill so they were on the right flank of his remaining phalangites and his archers marched forward on to the phalangites left flank. He was now ready to advance on the enemy infantry.



P8/C2



Not convinced that the enemy cavalry were fully beaten, Leonidas continued to pursue them with his hoplites. In the wood, both of his light Divisions failed to achieve any substantial movement.



P8/C3



However, Leonidas' concerns were not justified. Further javelins from the skirmishers sufficiently weakened the Arab cavalry and they broke. Xavier considered the situation was now dire and continued withdrawing.



P8/C4



Heartened by the sight of routing enemy, the Messene continued following them up.



P8/C5



With his men now wary, Echemus received the message from Pausinas about pulling back to link up with Leonidas. So, the Tegeans climbed to the security of the hill and away from the nearest enemy.



P8/C6



Pausinas too moved his men on to the hill.



P8/C7



From the hill Antiochos could see the rest of the Spartan army moving away in pursuit of Xavier's cavalry. He felt this gave him the opportunity to deal with the enemy infantry now on the other hill and advanced his remaining troops towards them.



P9/C2



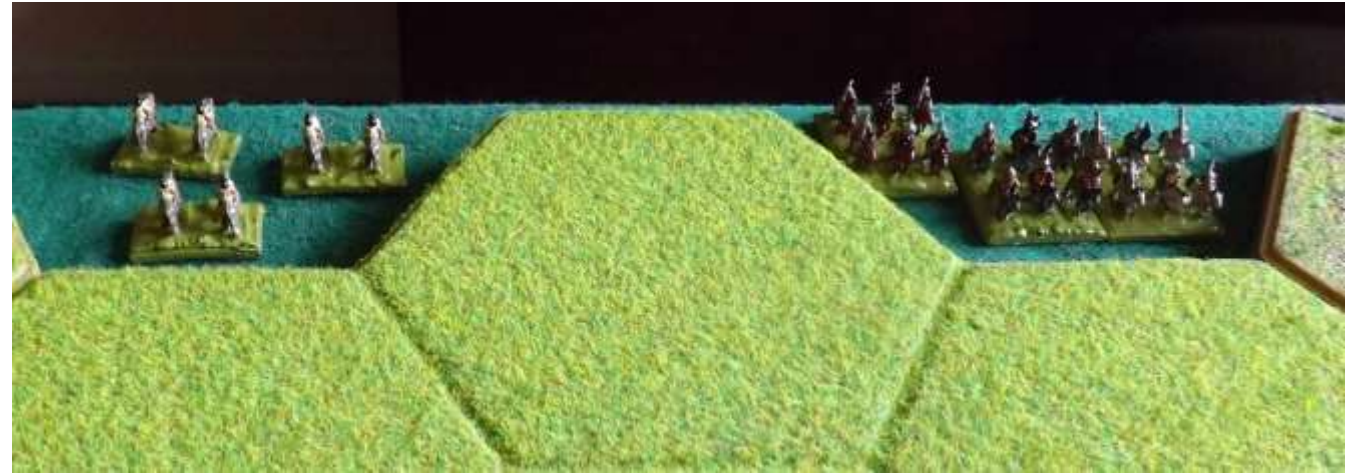
Realising that the enemy cavalry were no longer a threat, Leonidas turned his hoplites round and started marching towards the other flank. He issued fresh orders to Aristomenes for the Messene to keep an initial eye on the enemy cavalry and then follow him.



P9/C3



Xavier and the last of his troops left the battlefield.



P9/C4



In line with their new orders, the Messene watched the enemy move into the distance and out of sight.



P9/C5 & 6



Both the Tegeans and the Lower Laconians held their positions on the hill.



P9/C7



Seeing that the Spartans had now turned and were heading towards him, Antiochos ordered his troops to face this new threat.



P10/C2



Sending orders ahead for Echemus and the Tegeans to hold their position on the hill, Leonidas and his troops marched towards them.



P10/Late



The Messene turned and started to follow the Spartans, whilst the Tegeans and Lower Laconians held their positions on the hill. Antiochos drew up his line so that his archers could at least fire on the enemy covering on the hill in the hope this might break them and give him some hope.



P11



With the hoplites on the hill hunkering down behind their shields, the shooting was not too effective and their morale held. Leonidas and his Spartans continued to advance and Antiochos started to fall back.

The End

The sight of the Spartans arriving between the hills raised the morale of the Tegeans and the Lower Laconians so that they both were willing to advance.

Faced with such determination and numbers, Antiochos accepted the inevitable and ordered a withdrawal.

So a conclusive victory for the Spartans.



The Conclusions

An unusual battle for the Spartans, not because missile casualties were higher than melee casualties but more in that they won and Leonidas survived a battle with a lot of his Spartiates alive and well.

Potentially the Spartans were too strong for the alliance or perhaps I should have chosen a more reliable ally for Commagene. The alliance did lack sufficient infantry to keep the Spartans at least distracted from chasing Xavier off the battlefield and they probably did not make sufficient use of their missile and mobility advantage in the early stages to wear the opposition down and lower their morale. Crucially, if Antiochos had held his phalangites back for a bit longer his cavalry and archers might well have weakened the Lower Laconians sufficiently for them to be beaten and leave his troops in a stronger state.

The most valuable Unit? Possible contenders include: the second Spartan light Division who turned up just in time to help force Xavier to flinch, although spending most of the battle stuck in the wood will count against them; the Ethiopians who did well until their chieftain fell and then they collapsed; but my favourite has to be the Spartan skirmishers supporting the hoplites. They managed to avoid going the way of most Star Trek security guards, as they usually do, but played a key role in deposing of both the Ethiopians and the Arab cavalry.