

Variant brigades

Warmaster Tactica by Gert Hansen

So you've read through the rulebook and you have learned how to move your regiments around on the field of battle. Nice and tidy lines and columns of beautifully painted models cover your tabletop. Lines and columns they are – because the rulebook states that these formations are regular, leaving all other combinations as irregular. So do people use irregular formations or non-standard brigades? – for the most part: no. That is a sad fact, in my opinion, as there are many tactical advantages to be gained from a little creativity.

Before we go into the more creative stuff, let us first take a look at the common formations and see what they have to offer.

The Line (Diagram 1)

The basic formation – the wide frontage lets all the stands in a unit shoot and it gives all stands an opportunity to fight. It does not normally allow support unless it is backed by another unit. As you count support after casualties are removed, each stand destroyed is also one point of support lost.

The line is the most common fighting formation as charging units must form a line whenever possible. Note that when units in line pursue they lose support, as the backing unit stays in place.

Diagram 1: The Line

▲ 1	▲ 1	▲ 1
▲ 2	▲ 2	▲ 2

The Column (Diagram 2)

A unit in column is not an effective shooter unless capable of shooting to its side. This, however, is limited to a few units of cavalry. The column's role is in close combat, where it is able to support itself. If stands fall casualty you can take them from the back and thus not necessarily lose support. Where the line loses support with every stand, a column loses support with the *second* casualty from the *same* unit. If you have several columns together you have a very effective defensive brigade.

Diagram 2: The Column

▲ 1	▲ 2	▲ 3
▲ 1	▲ 2	▲ 3
▲ 1	▲ 2	▲ 3

The Column is hard to use on the offensive, as mentioned above units must try to form a line when they charge. Therefore to charge in column you need to be more than 18cms away from your target

– the distance makes it impossible to form a line. Another fine thing is the column's ability to sustain support even when pursuing.

Often the column is joined by unit in line (usually archers) to form:

The Combined Line & Column (Diagram 3)

This combines many benefits of the column brigade with the capability to shoot. The front unit can also be used as cannon fodder to some degree.

If the brigade is shot at, the archers in front are driven back. The backing units can then choose not to give, whereby the archers are confused. This hinders movement of the brigade but if you are playing defensively it does not matter that much, since the archers will not be confused when it comes time to shoot anyway.

If the brigade receives a charge the archers will be able to soften up the chargers with bows before they get to grips with the rock hard formation behind.

Diagram 3: Combined Line & Column

▲ 4	▲ 4	▲ 4
▲ 1	▲ 2	▲ 3
▲ 1	▲ 2	▲ 3
▲ 1	▲ 2	▲ 3

Now that we've seen the most common formation let us try to be more creative.

The Combined Line & Column mark 2 (Diagram 4)

This is an enhancement of the above Line & Column formation. When you get charged by several units your regular 3 stand frontage will easily suffer from being outwidthed. A 5 stand wide brigade is a better idea then, and it can be accomplished rather easily.

Diagram 4: Combined Line & Column mark 2

▲ 1	▲ 2	▲ 2	▲ 2	▲ 4
▲ 1	▲ 3	▲ 3	▲ 3	▲ 4
▲ 1				▲ 4

The Combined Line & Column mark 2 has 2 lines and 2 columns so it's pretty solid and gives good support.

Empire players are able to enhance this concept even further, with a brigade of my own devise:

The Hansen formation (Diagram 5)

By adding Skirmishers to 3 of the four units you are able to get a full 3 x 5 stand brigade. This about as solid a brigade can be. If you do not mind a 10cm full pace move you can add a little more punch by putting two of the Skirmishers in the first line – more attacks tip the favour to you.

Diagram 5: Hansen formation

▲ H	▲ X	▲ X	▲ X	▲ H
▲ H	▲ S	▲ S	▲ S	▲ H
▲ H	▲ H	▲ H	▲ H	▲ H

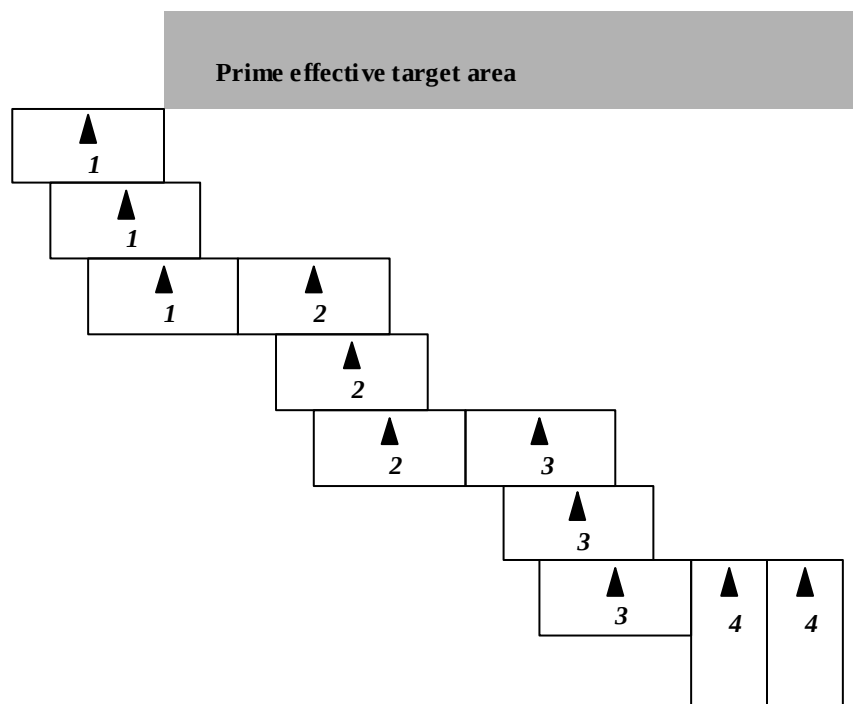
So far we've looked at infantry formations in hand-to-hand, so let's move on to archer formations.

Usually long lines are quite effective but with each unit 12cms wide you will soon have your units out of range of their prime target. One solution might be:

The Shooting Wing (Diagram 6)

The units in the Wing formation are basically columns with each stand pushed a bit to its side. My usual Wing brigade consists of 3 archer units and 1 artillery unit. It is an irregular formation for the infantry but the artillery can only move 10cms anyway, so that doesn't matter.

Diagram 6: The Shooting Wing



The Wing formation allows you to cram 4 units of firepower into very little space. You lose a bit of range but you could just deploy the Wing at an angle so the formation as a whole is a line.

Because the stands block each other to one side the formation only offers a 90 degree fire arc as opposed to the usual 180. This can be a blessing at times as it makes it easier for you to pinpoint the target unit.

As effective as the Wing formation is in shooting it is vulnerable in close combat. At most times you will only have one stand fighting and no support and the whole line will crumble to a careful charge. This is one reason why I always place the Wing on the extreme flank and use terrain and the table edge to shield it from being outmanoeuvred - hence the name.

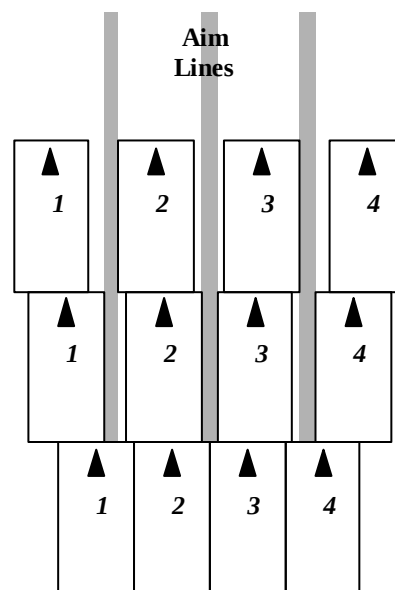
Shooting from cavalry units can also be highly effective, as in:

The Fan (Diagram 7)

I also call this the Husfeldt formation as I suffered its consequences in a game against Thore Husfeldt.

Cavalry units are rarely seen in column but in this particular case it is very handy. The fan consists of up to 4 units in column with the frontmost stands pushed a little to the side, so the brigade is spread out in a fan. This formation has a very narrow field of fire – look at the diagram – use the three gray stripes to aim at a target, as you can only fire effectively dead straight. Depending on how wide your target is, you should be able to get off 10-12 shots.

Diagram 7: The Fan



The formation is weak if charged in the flank as only one stand will be fighting. It stands well against a frontal assault because of its deadly stand & shoot, and if the units can fire all around a rear charge will be met with up to 8 shots.

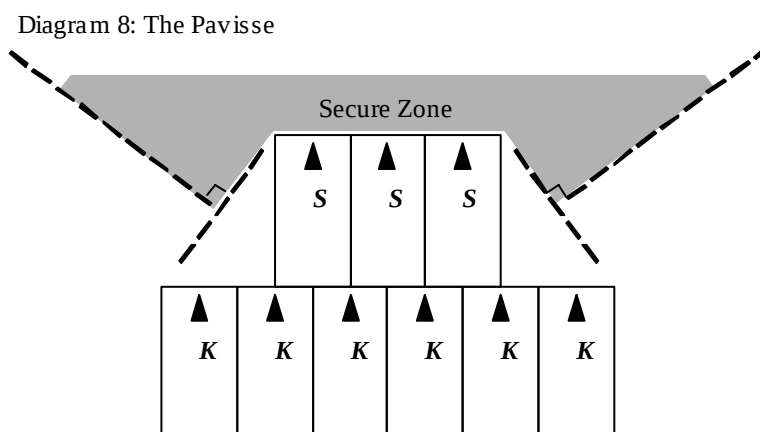
Of course this article wouldn't be complete if we did not discuss formations for the proud knights. The biggest problem for a knight is usually getting to the combat intact. There are many things that shoot and thus many things that will kill the knight prematurely. That's why knights should be given:

The Pavisse (Diagram 8)

When the Bretonnian army came out people started talking about adopting the Wedge formation from Warhammer but without special rules there are no benefits whatsoever from having knights in Wedges. However the Pavisse is variation on the topic using 3 units: 2 knights and 1 bait (probably squires). They Knights are placed in line with the Squires in front.

The basic idea is this: You move within 30cms of your intended target and give the order to charge. If you succeed hooray, but if you fail your expensive troops are stranded within shooting range.

As long as you have your enemy in the “secure zone” as described on the diagram the unit in front (the Squires) will be the closest target. They get shot and in turn confused. This means that the Squires cannot move in your turn but your Knights can. And as only one stand need have line of sight to the target you can easily charge out from behind The Pavisse.



Note that the “secure zone” widens if the front unit is in column and narrows whenever a stand is removed.

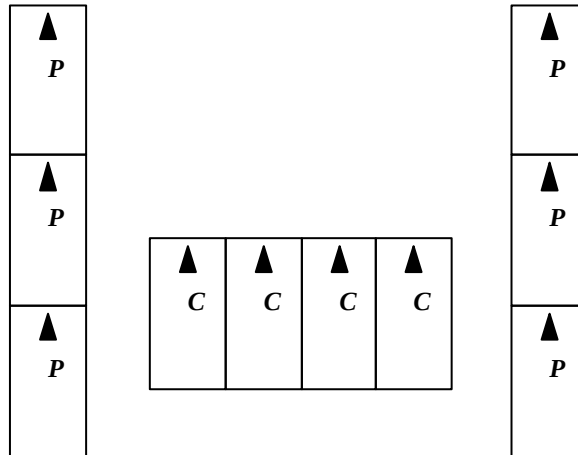
So far in this article I haven’t talked about artillery formation, and the reason for this is strikingly simple. There is only one way to make the most of your arty pieces: Pile them together! If you concentrate them you get maximum effect and less brigades to protect.

Many people try to protect their arty pieces by brigade with other units so they have more stand & shoot and more attacks in hand-to-hand combat. This seems to work for a few people but here is why I won’t recommend doing so. Even if you lose the combat with as little as one point your artillery is gone for good, and even if you win it doesn’t take much of an effort to put 2 hits into a artillery stand. Therefore avoid close combat *at all costs*. That’s why I suggest you use:

The Blinkers formation (Diagram 9)

The basis of the Blinkers formation is to shield the artillery from the enemy with cavalry units. In just about any case the cavalry will be the closest target and these must be charged through to get to the artillery. Tough units preferably with shooting capabilities are good for this (Pistoliers are excellent). Because the formation effective consists of three brigades it is hard to move, and thus best used for defense.

Diagram 9: Blinkers formation



The two cavalry units can also be used as blinkers to “shadow” certain enemy units out of sight – that way by moving the artillery around between the cavalry units you get to pick which targets you wish to shoot.

History has proven that victory most often goes to the innovative general, so I hope these ramblings have made you think more creatively. See you on field of honour!