

## The D.A.I.S. (Dark Age Infantry Slog) System

by Andy Callan (originally published in *Miniature Wargames*, No. 7, 1983)



I've always had a feeling that Dark Age wargames seem somehow to fail to capture the 'feel' of the period. The armies on the tabletop look far too NEAT for a start, in their regular ranks of uniformly armed troop types, and always seem to be capable of performing the sort of elaborate manoeuvres that would put most highly trained Roman legionary to shame. And yet most of the accounts of battles of the period that have come down to us, as well as the judgements and reconstructions of more recent military historians, describe a very different style of warfare: a clash of armed mobs rather than armies, with little discipline and less manoeuvre, held together only by the example of a few charismatic leaders.

But how on earth was I going to translate this into wargaming terms? All this frustration lay dormant until I agreed to run a workshop discussion on Dark Age/Medieval wargaming at the 1981 Wargame Development Conference. There, a dozen or so like minded souls sat down and just *talked* about what a game set in this period ought to be like, what factors were most important to the participants, and how this would affect their behaviour in action. I made more progress in three hours than I had in ten years and went away positively buzzing with new ideas!

Anyway, the following year I came back to the next conference with a demonstration game using the set of rules printed below. I'd be the first to admit that they are less than perfect, and still don't go all the way towards capturing the atmosphere I was after, but I like to think that some progress has been made away from the standard wargame set-up of equal points armies, units of identically armed figures and elaborate manoeuvring that I found so inappropriate to this period.

The first 'convention' to be rejected was the practice of grouping identically armed and armoured figures together in units. Instead it was assumed that warriors would bring along their favourite weapon, or whatever they could lay their hands on, and form up alongside each other, with the men with the best armour in front and the progressively worse-armed churls forming the rear ranks. Secondly, the very idea of 'units', in the traditional military sense, seemed anachronistic. The best that might be managed was to group the army into two or three 'divisions' or 'battles' with the contingents of individual leaders providing a focal point. Lastly, regular frontages and rectangular formations just didn't look right, so instead I went for a regular sized GROUP base with figures arranged on it irregularly in a density that looked appropriate.

As for the battle itself, I decided that the armies weren't going to be capable of much tactical manoeuvre, so this meant that I would have to find some other focus for the wargamers attention (since tactical manoeuvre is at the heart of most conventional games). I therefore decided that, in keeping with the spirit of the period, it would be LEADERSHIP rather than GENERALSHIP that would be the central factor. The player would have to LEAD his army to victory, rather than just issue orders. Accordingly he would need to be involved in forming up the army, and 'psyching up' the warriors for the fight, as well as getting stuck in and setting a good example for his men when it came to the crunch. All this was allowed for by giving each leader a number of 'Leadership Points' (LP's) which he can use, each turn, in various ways.

Each group of warriors carries three separate ratings:

1) AGGRESSION: a measure of their enthusiasm for the fight and blood lust! Ranging from 1 (craven) to 8 (psychopathic).

2) FORMATION: a measure of orderliness and density of the ranks. Ranging from 1 (chaotic mob) to 8 (shield wall).

These first two are capable of adjustment by use of Leadership Points, which is not true of:

3) STRENGTH: an amalgam of numerical strength, physical freshness (yes, I know Vikings didn't use underarm deodorants!) and military efficiency. The rating established at the start of the game can only decline as the battle progresses.

But the best way to describe these rules is actually to print them in full, together with some explanatory notes. The game mechanisms, which include elements of whist, poker and playground games, are unconventional, but the intention was not to be obscure for obscurity's sake. It's just that these simple mechanisms seemed to me the best way to create a game which (to quote Ian Greenwood, whose passion for Anglo-Saxon warfare is second to none) 'wouldn't offend the sensibilities of Viking or Anglo-Saxon devotees who like their games to look and feel like the real thing ... (and in which) ... the player himself, in the role of leader, could win or lose battles according to his ability to bluff, counter-bluff or pre-empt his opponent'.

Anyway, here they are:

## THE RULES



- A leader base consists of a leader figure and a (removable) standard bearer.

- Figures should be based in groups of about 10 on a rectangular base of a regular size. A UNIT is made up of one or more such bases.

- UNIT = either a leader's retinue or a leaderless Contingent.

- Each leader has so many LEADERSHIP POINTS (LP's). (As per scenario or each leader Av. dice +1)

- A leaderless contingent has one inherent LP for movement/manoeuvre only.

- Each unit has three different ratings. i) Aggression: (1-8, starts at 1. ii) Formation: (1-8, starts at 1). iii) Strength: (as per scenario or  $2 * \text{Av. dice}$ . Retinue, Av. dice + 5).

- A unit flees the field if any of its ratings drop to zero.

## Turn Sequence

1. Allocate leader points
2. Movement
3. Adjust ratings
4. Determine 'combat trumps'
5. Resolve combat
6. Adjust ratings after combat
7. Make enforced retreats, pursuits, etc.
8. Adjust ratings as reactions to 7.

## Reaction

- Units are influenced by the fortunes of adjacent friendly units. Start at one end of the line.

- If an adjacent friendly unit:

1. Falls back: lose 1 formation point.
2. Routs: lose 2 agg., 1 form., 1 stg.
3. Advances/follows up: add 1 agg.
4. Pursues: add 1 agg., lose 1 form.

## Leadership Tactics

In any turn a leader may use his leadership points to do any combination of:

1. Raise/lower aggression (not during advance).
2. Raise formation (not more than 1 per turn in advance).
3. Move himself or the unit he is with 6" (18" max.).
4. Choose combat trumps for his retinue (costs 1LP)

- A leader normally operates with his own retinue but may allot LP's to any unit in his division (while forming up) or to his own unit and one to either side of him only (in combat).

- A retinue whose leader leaves it while any part of the army is still fighting stays at its current agg. or 3 (whichever is the lower) and loses one formation point.

- A retinue whose leader is killed throws two Av. dice (+ and -). Gain/lose that number of points on agg. and form.

## Combat

- On each turn of combat one of the three ratings is going to be the most important. This is called the COMBAT TRUMPS for the turn. At the start of fighting aggression is always paramount, then formation will gradually take over and finally sheer strength will be decisive. This is randomised using the following table.

| Turn      | 1 | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6+   |
|-----------|---|------|------|------|------|------|
| Dice roll | 1 | agg. | for. | stg. | stg. | stg. |
|           | 2 | agg. | For  | For  | For  | stg. |
|           | 3 | agg. | agg. | For  | For  | For  |
|           | 4 | agg. | agg. | For  | For  | For  |
|           | 5 | agg. | agg. | agg. | For  | For  |
|           | 6 | agg. | agg. | agg. | agg. | agg. |

- Units need an aggression of at least 4 to close. If neither of two units facing each other has enough then assume resting/stand off.

- Compare trumps. Highest wins that round of combat.

- Both lose one off trumps and strength. Loser then also loses points difference off other ratings in sequence agg./form./stg.

- Both sides separate 2". If difference 3+ loser retreats 4", winner has option of following up (see manoeuvre).

## Leaders in combat

- If not facing opposition leaders: wounded (lose one LP) for dice of 1 if on winning side, 1/2 if draw, 1/2/3 if loser.
- Personal combat with opposing Leader: May refuse challenge but retinue loses one agg. If accepted fight 3 rounds (stones/scissors/paper). Lose 1LP if 2 rounds lost, 2 LP's if 3 lost.
- If standard falls (risk as for leader, see above) lose 1 form. Take up standard again automatically on first fall, for 4+ on 2nd, and 5/6 only on subsequent. If not taken up again assume captured: lose one off all ratings (retinue + adj. units that turn, others next turn)
- If he is present, a leader can choose the combat trumps for his retinue. Costs 1LP. Where two leaders are facing each other and choose different trumps the standard combat trumps (as used by other units that turn) applies.
- Leaders must lead from the front unless they have suffered more than 1 wound or have only one LP left.

## Forming up

The start lines of the two sides = either:

- A) Average dice roll \* six inches apart, or
- B) Both sides state preferred forming up distance. Take the mean of the two.

- Leaders may not take initial stand with a flank unit or adjacent to another leader.
- All units start with a basic Aggression of 1 and Formation of 1. Leaders allot LP's in each 'forming-up' turn to build up these ratings to a level sufficient for them to feel confident to order the advance.
- Units need an aggression of at least 5 in order to advance.
- Both sides display card at the end of each turn to show if they wish to advance. If both show an advance card on the same turn assume simultaneous advance.
- Otherwise the side on defence immediately rolls 1 Average dice +1 for each of his units. The units lose that number of points off their ratings, in the sequence aggression/formation/strength. So, if you roll a three, adding 1 to give a total of four, you will lose 1 point each off aggression, formation and strength, with an extra point off aggression.

## The Advance

- Once the signal is given all units capable of advancing do so (i.e. those with agg. of 5+).
- Units with agg. of 4 will also advance (but 3" behind) as they get +1 agg. as reaction to seeing advance. Others may follow once their agg. reaches 5.
- Contingents conform to the movement of an adjacent retinue (players choice as advance starts)
- Each 6" move forward entails loss of 1 formation point. Only one LP can be allotted to formation each turn during the advance.
- Obstacles: effect on formation is umpire-assessed or dice. (1= -3, 2-5= -2, 6= -1).
- Re-forming: Leaders may halt their retinues (costs 1LP) to rebuild formation. A halt automatically entails the loss of one aggression point and one formation.

## Closing with the enemy

- Lay down 'fighting lines' to determine opponents when first within 6" of enemy line. Make any necessary adjustments to 'orbat' (i.e. breaking down and creating contingents).

- Compare aggression levels. An advancing unit with higher aggression, or if both at 8, charges the enemy. Defender loses 1 form. If attacker agg. is lower he halts (lose 1 form). In the next turn the defender, if he is a retinue, may counter attack. If one or both sides have an agg. of 4+ they close with each other with no gain or losses to ratings.

## Manoeuvre

- Before the lines close there is no manoeuvre: units march straight ahead. Once the lines have clashed, however, various eventualities are possible:

a) Outflanking: A unit outflanking/overlapping another may attack its flank if its agg. is at least 4 and (if no leader present) it throws an initiative dice LOWER than its agg. (Plus one on dice for each previous refusal to attack (i.e. it gets more difficult)).

b) Follow-up and retreat: A unit must retreat 4" if the difference on combat trumps was 3 or more. Victor can follow-up if agg. 4+. Adjacent units react to this advance/retreat.

c) Pursuit and Rout: A unit routs if any of its ratings drop to zero. Victor pursues if aggression 4 or more. Chase fugitives one turn and 12". Lose Av. dice off formation and strength. Formation should not drop below one but if strength goes down to zero assume whole unit pursues enemy off field. If leader present never drop to zero strength.

d) Envelopment: A unit attacked in flank or rear and not engaged on another facing (or one wishing to attack to its own flank/rear) counts 1/2 effect in combat. May turn to face (see below) in next turn. Two or more units attacking one unit combine their ratings in combat to give a trumps score.

e) Wheeling: A wheel up to 90 degrees costs 1LP and loss of 1 form. Over 90 = 2 LP's and 2 form.

f) rallying: A stationary leader with a standard, not involved in combat, can rally one strength point per turn (from stragglers, etc) to a total not exceeding the original strength of the unit.

## Explanatory Notes

These rules use a number of quite unconventional mechanisms so readers who haven't seen them demonstrated may find the following useful:



### 1) BASES

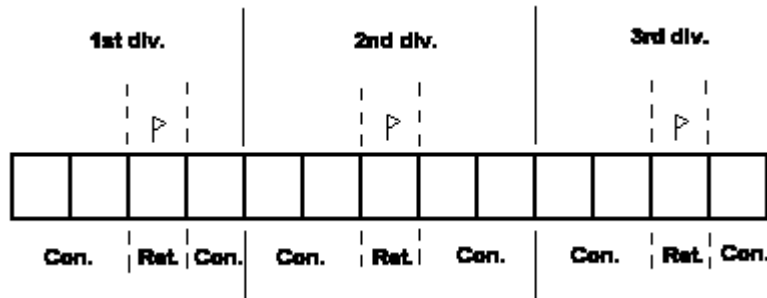
Base size doesn't matter as long as its consistent for all groups. Beer mats make ideal group bases. The number of figures on a group base is irrelevant. Use whatever you think looks right or whatever you can afford.

### 2) FORMING UP

i) The army forms up as a single line of group bases. No reserves allowed!



ii) The leaders take up their positions (2-5 leaders per side). One player per leader is ideal. They stand in front of their personal retinue (one group base). Each leader commands a 'Division' or 'Battle', which is made up of one retinue and a contingent to either side.



### 3) RECORD KEEPING

For each unit you need to keep a record of the current state of its various ratings (aggression, strength, formation). I use a piece of cork tile with mapping pins to move up and down the score tracks (this saves the constant crossing out of a paper ad pencil record).

|            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| Aggression |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | ■ | ■  |
| Formation  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | ■ | ■  |
| Strength   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |

Place these behind the unit concerned, standing upright, so you can read off ratings at a glance while they are hidden from your opponent. I paint the reverse side to match the table colour and stick on a few of the 25mm cardboard cut-out Saxon figures now sold by Standard Games and Publications to help the visual aspect from the enemy's side of the table.

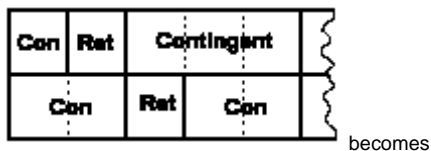
Alternatively, you can simply represent Strength by the number of figures on the base.

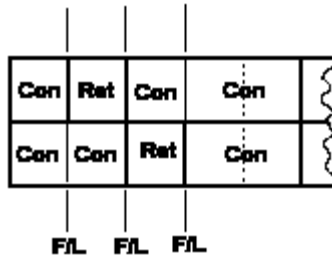
### 4) THE ADVANCE

Each Commander in Chief has two cards, one blank and the other saying 'CHARGE'. He displays one of these after phase one of each forming up turn.

### 5) CLOSING WITH THE ENEMY

When the two lines close you will find that the unit divisions rarely coincide. This doesn't matter as long as the actual bases are aligned. Simply break down the units into smaller versions of themselves (cloning), maintaining the same Aggression/Strength?Formation ratings. Since the original contingents represented no coherent unit structure in the first place, being simply used for administrative convenience, this breaking down makes no difference. Boundaries between the Divisions of the army MUST be maintained though, for leadership purposes.





'Fighting Lines' are lengths of string or florists wire used to mark off boundaries of engagements.

## 6) COMBAT

The Stone/Scissors/Paper game: A playground game, but for those of you unfamiliar with it here it is...

Each player forms one hand into a fist, knocks three times on the table and then simultaneously displays one of the following:

Stone (=fist). Beats scissors (smashes them) but is beaten by paper (is wrapped up by it).

Scissors (=two fingers). Beats paper (cuts it) but is beaten by stone (smashed).

Paper (=open palm). Beats stone wraps it up) but is beaten by scissors (cut).

Genuine hand to hand combat!!

## 7) GENERAL APPEARANCE

As one wing of the army moves off to the advance first, or after a few turns of fighting and groups begin to rout off, you'll find gaps appearing in the line. To prevent these gaps making the battlefield look too 'regular' scatter a few loose figures around to represent stragglers. These have no influence on the game other than to make it look better (and if you don't want it to look good why on earth are you using figures in the first place?). The cardboard figures mentioned above also look very good scattered as dead.



## CONCLUSION

Overall you'll find that the game gives very little scope for any tactical decision making on the part of the player. Basically, all he had to do is line his army up, make his influence felt where it is most needed and lead from the front. Players who prefer equal points armies and competition-type games needn't bother with these rules.

Perceptive readers will have noticed the absence of any rules for cavalry or missile weapons. This is simply because I was aiming to create a specifically pre-Conquest battle, in which rules to cater for William the Bastard's continental tactical innovations would be irrelevant. To tie in with the system as it stands, archers might be used as groups with no melee capacity, with not much need for aggression and an effect mostly on enemy formation (rather than strength or aggression). Cavalry would need to be easy to raise in aggression but liable to loose formation in the twinkling of an eye, and thus require a lot of attention on the part of the leader. Those who want to write rules for berserkers are welcome to do so, as long as you don't organise them into units and expect them to froth at the mouth on the word of command. I would suggest that individual figures be allowed to hurl themselves, kamikaze-like, at the enemy lines during the forming up stage, in an attempt to have a depressing effect on enemy aggression and formation. Those who choose to use them ought to run the risk that they might carry the rest of the army with them in a premature rush.

I think that the basic mechanisms are quite capable of expansion in this way, just so long as you avoid over-complicating things and thus losing the playability of the whole system. The more far sighted amongst you might see uses for the leader points system

in other periods. Peter Stallabrass showed at the 1983 WD conference how he has incorporated the idea into the chain of command for Horse and Musket period rules, for example.

But then that's part of the enduring appeal of this hobby. Once you've had an idea you never know where it's going to take you...

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