

The Raven: Rome's Secret Weapon



The Battles of Mylae (260 BC) and Tyndaris (257 BC)

By Dan Fournie

Technological advances have revolutionized naval warfare time and again in modern history. Cannons, steam power, ironclads, submarines, powered flight, sonar, radar ... the list goes on. Generally, in the ancient world, naval technology evolved very slowly. The trireme emerged in the sixth century BC and was not supplanted by the quinquereme until the fourth century BC. Yet, the Raven was a device that overturned the naval balance of power in the Western Mediterranean overnight.

One of GMT's latest volumes in the GBOH series, *WAR GALLEY*, includes three First Punic War battles, Ecnomus, Drepanum and Aegates. Ecnomus was the greatest victory for the Raven. Before Ecnomus, the Raven was a little-known experiment. The first battles where it was employed were bold and risky endeavors. This is the story of the Raven, and its first use in combat. Here are two new *WAR GALLEY* scenarios which let you try it out yourself: Mylae (260 BC) and Tyndaris (257 BC).

Rome Builds a Navy

Rome entered the First Punic War practically without a navy, only a small squadron of 20 triremes. Carthage on the other hand, had a fleet of 200 first-line quinqueremes plying the seas. At first, Rome was able to campaign successfully in Sicily without a navy. Rome won a great land victory with four legions at Agrigentum in 262 BC, and expected to bring the war to a

quick end. However, Carthage, though defeated on land, was still supreme at sea. The Punic navy kept coastal Sicily in its grasp, and even raided Italy on a regular basis. Rome could never conquer Sicily under these circumstances. The Roman Senate decided in 260 that the time had come to build a fleet.

Polybius tells a quaint tale of this first fleet. With no ships of her own, Rome used a Carthaginian quinquereme that had washed ashore as a model. Without this ship, the whole program would have been impossible. One hundred copies were built. While the construction was ongoing, new crews of rowers were trained on specially-built benches on land. Pliny adds that the whole process took just 60 days.

However, the German historian Hans Delbruck debunked this story as a mere legend. Rome did not need a wrecked Punic ship, because the quinquereme had been invented by her ally Syracuse. Rome had plenty of experienced maritime personnel upon which to draw from the Greek cities of the Italian coast.

The First Moves at Sea

Once the fleet was outfitted, Consul Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio (and you thought only the Carthaginians used the same names over and over for their generals) was placed in command. Scipio sailed to Messina with an advance guard of 17 ships, ordering the remainder to join him when ready. While at Messina, Scipio learned there was an opportunity to seize Lipara, in the Aeolian

(Liparae) Islands. Scipio sailed to Lipara and anchored offshore, while negotiating the surrender.

The Carthaginian admiral Hannibal, son of Gisgo, was at Panormus when he received word of Scipio's activity. He dispatched Boodes, a Carthaginian senator and naval captain, with a squadron of 20 quinqueremes to attack the rash Romans. That he only sent 20 ships is a measure of the low esteem he felt for the new Roman navy. Boodes sailed by night, and appeared at the mouth of the harbor at dawn. The Roman squadron was trapped. The crews abandoned their vessels and fled inland, while Scipio surrendered. It was an inauspicious start for the new Roman navy, to be sure. Scipio, by the way, was named Asina ("she-ass"), perhaps for this incident.

Hannibal, even with Scipio's blunder fresh in his mind, made his own rash move. Hannibal heard the main Roman fleet was on the move along the Italian coast. He decided to scout it out with a squadron of 50 galleys. As Hannibal rounded Cape Vaticano (on the north side of the toe of Italy), he came face to face with the main Roman fleet in battle array. The Romans had over 100 ships, including 83 quinqueremes and 20 triremes. Hannibal's fleet was shattered, with many ships sunk or captured. Hannibal escaped with only a handful of ships.

The Raven at Mylae

When the Roman navy arrived at Messina, the other Roman consul, Gaius Duilius was recalled from

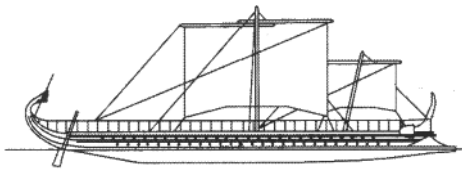
The Raven: WAR GALLEY Scenarios

command of the army in Sicily to take to the sea. The Roman captains commented that their ships and crews were markedly inferior to the Carthaginians. However, their legionary marines were both more numerous and far more capable. Reportedly, some unknown engineer came up with the idea of a movable boarding ramp, and the Raven, or *corvus*, was born. Polybius described the Raven in detail. First, a 24'10" pole was erected at the bow. At the top of the pole was a pulley, and at the bottom a movable gangway 36 feet long and four feet wide. The ramp had an oblong slot so that it could be raised by a rope through the pulley. A spike was fixed to the end of the gangway (having the appearance of a raven's beak, hence the name "*corvus*"). The Raven could pivot on the pole, and then be dropped in whichever direction an enemy approached. The spike would drive into the enemy's deck and hold the ship fast while the marines swarmed over the gangway to board and capture their prey.

Duilius had the Ravens installed on all his quinqueremes. The crews and marines hastily trained in its use. He learned the Punic fleet was near Mylae, 25 miles to the west. He led the new Roman fleet towards its first general action. This time Hannibal had 130 galleys; probably less than a hundred were quinqueremes, the remainder smaller galleys. His flagship was a heptares, captured earlier from King Pyrrhus himself. The Roman fleet was about 100 quinqueremes and 20 triremes, as Scipio's losses were made up with the ships captured off Cape Vaticano.

Hannibal, Boodes and their captains were delighted that the Romans had come out on the water. They believed an easy victory was in their grasp, and rowed towards the Roman fleet without bothering to deploy in good order. The Romans advanced to meet them. When the

Punic captains first spied the Ravens, they were perplexed. Yet, they chose to ignore the implications of the strange structures and pressed forward with a spirited, if disjoined, attack. When the Ravens swung into action, Carthaginian ships were pinned, and the marines swarmed over the ramps. Again and again, the lightly-armed, outnumbered Carthaginian marines were slaughtered. The Romans captured 30 galleys in the initial assault. Hannibal's flagship was even captured, though the admiral made a daring escape in a pinnace to continue the fight.



The Carthaginians pulled back to reassess the situation. When they attacked once more, it was in a very circumspect and cautious manner. Their ships maneuvered agilely, seeking to ram the Roman quinqueremes broadside or astern. They relied on their speed and circled their prey. The Ravens were swung to either side, and continued to pin the enemy ships. Twenty more Carthaginian galleys were captured before Hannibal accepted defeat and fled the scene. Roman losses are not recorded, but were apparently light. Three centuries of naval tradition had been overthrown in a day.

The Battle of Tyndaris

Rome took advantage of her new sea power to seize a number of Sicilian ports that had long defied her army. The Roman navy was also sent to Sardinia in 259 BC under Consul Lucius Cornelius Scipio. He ravaged the coasts of Sardinia and Corsica until Hannibal, son of Gisgo, arrived with a new fleet. In 258 BC, Consul Gaius Sulpicius

Paterculus arrived with another Roman fleet and shattered Hannibal's squadron. Hannibal was seized by his own officers and crucified, for his repeated failures. Carthage sent out yet another fleet, under Hanno (later at Ecnomus) to chase off Sulpicius. Once the Carthaginian raids on Italy had ceased, Rome appears to have lost interest in Sardinia. A major Roman force would not return to Sardinia until a full two decades had passed and the First Punic War had ended.

The Roman consul for 257 charged with command of the fleet was Gaius Atilius Regulus (the man depicted in Ecnomus in *WAR GALLEY* and in Bagradas in *SPQR*). His first action was a chance encounter off Tyndaris (about 15 miles west of Mylae). His fleet was anchored when the Punic fleet suddenly appeared in view. Neither fleet expected an action at this time or place. The size of Regulus' fleet is estimated at 150 galleys. His flagship may have been King Pyrrhus' heptares, captured at Mylae from Hannibal. The Carthaginian admiral was Hamilcar, who had won a rare victory on land over a Roman force at Himera in 259 and would later command at Ecnomus. His fleet is believed to have been about the same size as the Roman one.

Regulus saw that the Carthaginians were in loose order, under sail and unprepared for action. Accordingly he set off with an advance guard of ten galleys to strike the first blow. This squadron was reportedly composed of "fast ships" with crack crews, undoubtedly without Ravens. Hamilcar quickly got part of his fleet in hand and converged on the small Roman squadron with overwhelming numbers. The Carthaginians were in the best possible position-with plenty of room to maneuver. They circled the small Roman squadron. When the opportunity to ram arose, Hamilcar's ships would dart in and dispatch a Roman galley. In short order, nine Roman galleys

were holed and sunk, and Regulus' flagship only barely survived through constant evasive maneuvering.

Finally, the lead squadrons of the main Roman fleet appeared. They formed a close formation and charged the Carthaginian fleet. The Romans boarded and captured ten ships, while sinking another eight. Hamilcar withdrew, and the Regulus had won a slight tactical victory. Though, both fleets were intact, and both sides would approach the coming battle at Ecnomus with high morale.

Ecnomus, Hermaeum and the End of the Raven

In 256 BC, at the Battle of Ecnomus (featured in *WAR GALLEY*), considered by some as the largest naval battle of all time, the Raven played a key role in the Roman victory. Rome captured 64 galleys and sank 30, but lost only 24 ships sunk. At Hermaeum in 254, Rome won an even more lopsided victory, capturing 114 vessels. So why was the Raven ultimately abandoned?

The Raven fell by the wayside for two reasons. First, as Roman crews became more proficient, they had less need for "gadgets." But more importantly, Rome found a foe far more powerful than Carthage—the sea itself. A series of Roman fleets were shattered by storms, with tremendous loss of ships and lives. In 255 a storm destroyed 284 galleys, and the following year another 150 ships were lost in a tempest. Two more Roman fleets were destroyed by a storm in 249, after being maneuvered into a dangerous area by the Carthaginian admiral Carthalo. According to Polybius, 500 Roman galleys in total were lost to storms, along with over 200,000 lives. Even if these figures are slightly overinflated, such massive losses were not sustainable. Upon analysis of these disasters, the Romans concluded that the Raven had

rendered their quinqueremes top heavy and unwieldy, contributing greatly to the losses in the storms. After either the disaster of 254 or 249, the Romans discontinued widespread use of this device.

Despite this short-lived utility, the Raven had earned Rome her first victories at sea, as well as its own place in history.

Leader Counters

The counters for Duilius, Hannibal and Boodes for the Mylae battle will be in a future issue of C3i. Until then, use the following substitutes: Manlius for Duilius, Mago for Hannibal, Barbax for Boodes. Asterisks indicate non-historical

Mylae — 260 BC Rome vs. Carthage (First Punic War)



Map

The game uses the "sea" map. Mylae is modern Milazzo, 25 miles west of the northeastern tip of Sicily. Carthaginian side is hexrow xxOO (north). Roman side is hexrow xx28 (south).

Balance

This is the first classic match-up of Punic seamanship versus the Roman Raven and marines. The Romans are slightly favored here.

Playing Time and Difficulty

This battle should take about 2 hours to finish. The Difficulty Rating is 2.0.

Ship Scale

1 counter = 5 galleys

Initial Deployment:

Romans

The Roman player receives the following *Red ships*:

- 20 Quinqueremes (ID 30-49, corvus capability)
- 4 Cataphracted Triremes (ID 31-34)

The Roman receives the following **Squadron Commanders**: Duilius (Admiral), *Agricola, *Metellus.

The Roman fleet is deployed as follows:

Right Wing: Agricola with 6 quinqueremes from 4126-4127 to 4427-4428 and 2 triremes at 4526-4527 and 4627-4628.

Center: Duilius with 8 quinqueremes from 3227-3228 to 3926-3927.

Left Wing: Metellus with 6 quinqueremes from 2726-2727 to 3027-3028 and 2 triremes at 2526-2527 and 2427-2428.

Initial Deployment:

Carthaginians

The Carthaginian player receives the following *Green ships*:

- 1 Heptares (ID 1)
- 17 Quinqueremes (ID 11-27)
- 8 Cataphracted Triremes (ID 18)

The Carthaginian receives the following **Squadron**

Commanders: Hannibal (Admiral), Boodes, *Hanno.

The Carthaginian fleet is deployed in line astern as follows:

Left Wing: Boodes with 4 quinqueremes and 4 triremes trailing from 4509 off the map.

Center: Hannibal with 1 heptares at 3509-3508 and 9 quinqueremes trailing from 3507 off the map.

Right Wing: Hanno with 4 quinqueremes and 4 triremes trailing from 2509 off the map.

Special Rules

Corvus

Use "Grappling Effects: Corvus" rule from Ecnomus.

Victory

Either player wins when he has at least 65 VP, and that number is at least twice that of the enemy. If neither of the above happens, and/or the players halt play by mutual agreement, a minor, indecisive victory goes to he who has the most VP.

The Raven: WAR GALLEY Scenarios

Tyndaris — 257 BC

Rome vs. Carthage
(First Punic War)



Map

The game uses the "sea" map. Tyndaris is about 15 miles west of Mylae, on the northeast coast of Sicily. Carthaginian side is hexrow xx00 (west). Roman side is hexrow xx28 (east).

Balance

This is another contest up of Punic seamanship versus the Roman Raven and marines. However, the Roman fleet enters piecemeal, with a crack squadron of fast ships going in first, and alone. The Carthaginians are favored here.

Playing Time and Difficulty

This battle should take about 3-4 hours to finish. The Difficulty Rating is 3.0.

Ship Scale

1 counter = 1 galley. This scale is used to present the interesting battle between the advance guards. The entire fleet of either side did not come into action before the battle was decided.

Initial Deployment:

Romans

The Roman player receives the following *Red ships*:

- 1 Heptares (ID 4)
- 7 Quinqueremes (ID 1-7, ignore engines)
- 16 quinqueremes (ID 50-65, corvus capability)
- 2 Cataphracted Triremes (ID 12)
- 8 Cataphracted Triremes (ID 31-38)

The Roman receives the following **Squadron Commanders**: Regulus (Admiral), *Agricola, *Drusus, *Octavian.

The Roman fleet is deployed as follows:

Advance Guard: Regulus with

the heptares at 3513-3514, quinqueremes (1-7) from 3214 3215 to 3414-3415 and 3614-3615 to 3913-3914 and triremes (1-2) at 4013-4014 and 3113-3114.

Reinforcements

The following galleys arrive as reinforcements:

- **Agricola's Squadron**: 4 quinqueremes and 4 triremes arrive at 2227-2228 in line astern.
- **Drusus' Squadron**: 8 quinqueremes arrive at 3627 3628 in line astern.
- **Octavian's Squadron**: 4 quinqueremes and 4 triremes arrive at 4827-4828 in line astern.

The Roman player rolls a die every turn to determine arrival for **each** squadron. On turn 1, the squadron arrives on a roll of 1, on turn 2 the squadron arrives on a roll of 1-2, and so on.

Initial Deployment: Carthaginians

The Carthaginian player receives the following *Green ships*:

- 18 Quinqueremes (ID 11-28)
- 8 Cataphracted Triremes (ID 18)

The Carthaginian receives the following **Squadron**

Commanders: Hamilcar (Admiral), Hanno, *Gisgo.

The Carthaginians are deployed as follows:

Hamilcar's Squadron: Under sail, 10 quinqueremes trailing from 3601-3600.

Hanno's Squadron: Under sail, 8 quinqueremes trailing from 1601-1600.

Gisgo's Squadron: Under sail, 8 triremes trailing from 5401 5400.

Special Rules

Wind

The wind is blowing directly towards the east, (at the back of

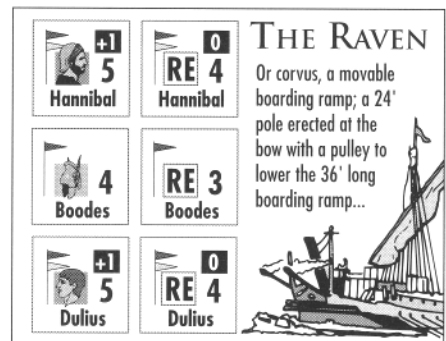
the Carthaginian fleet). Place the wind direction marker in hex 5900, pointing at 5901. The wind is steady, players **do not** roll for changes in wind speed and direction.

Corvus

The "Grappling Effects: Corvus" rule from *Ecnomus* is in effect for quinqueremes 50-65, but **not** for quinqueremes 1-7.

Victory

The Roman player wins when he has at least 70 VP, and that number is at least twice that of the enemy. The Carthaginian player wins when he has at least 90 VP, and that number is at least twice that of the enemy. If neither of the above happens, and/or the players halt play by mutual agreement, a minor, indecisive victory goes to he who has the most VP.



Nightstand continued from pg. 15

He further faults Hannibal for abandoning Spain before it was secure (again ignoring the responsibilities of other Carthaginian officers during the war). He maintains that elephants aren't worth what they eat and shouldn't have been marched over the alps.

OTHER RESOURCES

From Gene Billingsley

- John Antal's *Proud Legions: A Novel of America's Next War*

From Bill Ramsay

- Joseph Balkoski's *Beyond the Beachhead*
- Carlo d'Este's *Decision in Normandy*

From Mike Welker

- Alan Clarke's *Barbarossa*
- Chandler's *Campaigns of Napoleon*
- Schom's *Bio of Napoleon*
- Keegan's *First World War*