

**BEST OF...**

# THE EVOLUTION OF A DWARF COMMANDO

By Mike Bolton

It was not difficult to decide that Dwarfs were the Warmaster army for me. As soon as the game was launched my friends immediately purchased Undead, High Elves and Empire armies. Dwarfs were the next army released so I went to Birmingham Games Workshop and spent £100 there and then! The other reason I picked Dwarfs was that as Dwarf units are expensive I would have fewer units to paint. I was wrong but I could not have known that at the time!

I had not thought about the army selection. I had simply bought some of everything. I had to have the cannons and the Flame cannons. Crikey! The Gyrocopters are great, I'll have two of them! Troll Slayers, Rangers, Handgunners and Warriors adorned my shelves in blister packs for weeks until I was motivated to get painting. This happened when my friends all announced that their armies were complete.

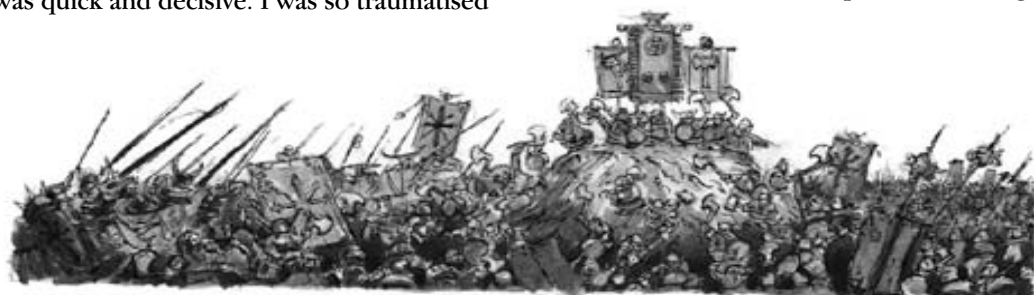
Two weeks later I was ready to take to the field of battle with about 1,200 points. I had noticed that there was to be a Warmaster campaign day at GW head office in a few weeks so I had to get ready for that. I had my first game as an allied contingent with an Empire army versus a High Elf. Turn 2 saw the High Elf Silver Helms charge en masse into the Empire infantry and vapourise them instantly. I held my flank until the Empire was forced to withdraw and waited for the fury of the Elves. I soon learned that cavalry is king in Warmaster! Terrain can help an infantry army but even in deep formations on a hill you are in deep trouble. Lesson one was quick and decisive. I was so traumatised

that I can't bring myself to write about it even now!

A few more 'practice' games reinforced my view that although the Dwarfs preferred a defensive stance, to do so would hand the initiative to the enemy who would attack where they wanted to and the end would be bad! I had to find a way of making the Dwarfs more 'punchy'.

More cannons! That was the answer. I arrived at the Campaign day with more cannons than you could shake a stick at. Flame cannons in support to deter a cavalry charge and a grand battery of huge bronze cannon. The start of the games went well. I was able to shoot at the enemy from a distance and do some serious damage. No saves meant Chaos Knights and High Elf Silver Helms were hiding from the roar of my guns. It was not long however until players started throwing out skirmish screens of cheaper troops as cannon fodder until their shock troops were in charge range. Then it was the same old problem, but worse. Cannons were so easily ridden down that they became a cavalry magnet, points on the hoof! Back to the drawing board.

The next time I would be fighting outside of my normal group was at the WPS Club Challenge. I had six months to prepare. More figures appeared on my shelves. More Warriors, more Rangers, more Slayers, more Handgunners. Before I knew it I had acquired 3,000 points already painted and another 500 points of castings.



I had to stop – it was an addiction. I tried one army combination, failed. I tried another, crushed. I tried all Warriors, destroyed. Was it me? I didn't think so. My regular opponents were Undead and High Elf, two armies that are arguably the best in the game. I simply couldn't beat them. Then two weeks before the Club Challenge I had an epiphany! Why not forget the Dwarf attributes of stalwart sturdiness. Forget the ability to use cannon, forget the Flame cannons (even though for 50 points it is the best value hit generator in the game). I had to take the fight to the enemy. Cavalry charging was dangerous but I hadn't thought about how scary a Dwarf infantry charge was. This was new! This was radical, and it might just work!

My 'New Model' army was based on speed. I aimed to 'mix it' with the opposition on Turn 2 wherever they were. I needed the Orb of Majesty, as it was imperative to keep moving forward. I had no need for cannon; they would slow me down to 10cms per turn. I needed Rangers to pursue enemy cavalry and I needed mobile firepower.

The requirement for mobile firepower came not from the desire to destroy enemy units. It was vital that I prevented the enemy from charging me. I therefore needed Gyrocopters and Thunderers to shoot at every thing that I wasn't engaging, in the hope of confusing them and leaving them ready for annihilation on my next turn. (The 'unconfusable' Undead was going to prove a problem on this count). Finally, I had discovered that mobile armies tended to

sweep to the flanks and 'stretch' my smaller infantry army into a very thin line before attacking it. I had to keep my army together, fight on my terms and deliver a single devastating hammer blow in one place. I therefore decided to use just two commanders, the General himself and a Runesmith. The Runesmith was there to dispel incoming magic. The General with his Leadership of 10 would move anything and everything would stay as close to him as possible. I hoped this would remove any temptation to split my forces. The army looked like this:

**General** with *Orb of Majesty*

**Runesmith** with *Dispel scroll*

**Warriors** – six units

**Rangers** – three units (One with *Banner of Shielding*, one with *Sword of Fate*)

**Handgunners** – four units

**Troll slayers** – two units

**Gyrocopters** – two craft

This gave me a nice odd 17 units so I would have to lose nine units before withdrawing. I anticipated losing the Gyrocopters and the Trollslayers anyway so that only gave me five units before everything went pear shaped!

### Tactics

The plan was amazingly simple. I had to assume that terrain would be non-existent at the Club Challenge (I was right). I therefore decided that I would use my Troll Slayers as a screen for two units of Warriors forming a



*Mike's Dwarf army arrayed in a 'Castle' formation.*

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forlorn hope at the front of the army. Behind them were two more brigades consisting of four units of Handgunners supported by four units of Warriors. The three units of Rangers lurked behind these massed ranks or on the flanks. Their role was pivotal. They had to engage the flanks of enemy cavalry that were foolish enough to charge my front line and survive.

My vision went something like this. The forlorn hope moves once or twice on turn one but remains 60cms from enemy cavalry. Brigades two and three move behind it either in line or in two lines but about 15cms back. The Rangers stay on the flanks and Gyrocopters hide behind a hill or wood or anywhere that enemy flyers cannot charge them!

Turn two. If the enemy has charged me he has probably destroyed the forlorn hope BUT is now not only within charge distance for brigades two and three and the Rangers, but is also under the sights of the Thunderers. In addition after homing back the Gyrocopters add their not inconsiderable firepower to the fusillade and can land directly behind engaged enemy units so that they will be destroyed if pushed back. The enemy will also have taken some casualties from the 'Troll Slayers' 5 attacks

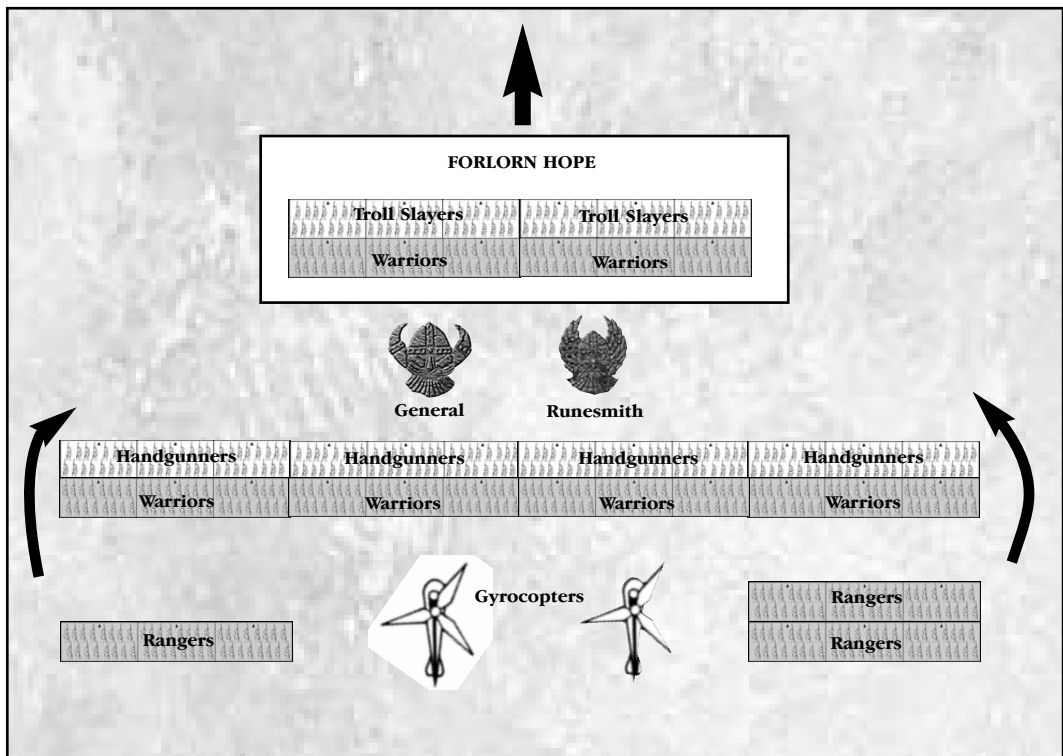
and could easily have been bounced because of the Warriors supporting. Turn two is fun. Everything that can charge does so. Rangers against the flanks of cavalry if possible. Any Thunderer unit not engaged would shoot at enemy supporting stands or at enemy reserves that could threaten next turn.

Now I must say that with the possible exception of Chaos Warriors there is no better infantry in the game than Dwarfs Warriors. Fighting enemy infantry brigades, where pursuit is possible, the Dwarf's 4 hits will allow them to 'meat grind' the enemy out of existence. Cavalry, especially armoured cavalry, is tougher but contacted in the flank by Rangers with 12 attacks against their own two they also return to their gods in short order.

This was the plan and as I left for Nottingham I was confident that I could hold my own. Oh dear!

**TO ARMS!**

The first game was against an Undead army. All went according to plan when my Troll Slayers tore into his infantry and one of his Sphinx on Turn two. Those Sphinx are really tough! Meanwhile the rest of the army was hurrying to catch up. As planned the



*Mike's army deployment.*

## Anti-Dwarf Tactics

As I have faced every army with my Dwarfs, except Kislev, and Bretonnian I can tell you how to beat a Dwarf. It's easy.

Dwarfs have no punch. They can soak it up but they have nothing with more than three attacks. As combat depends on the difference in combat results then even if you cannot score many hits, if you can reduce the number of hits the Dwarfs can make you will probably win. Therefore always charge the Dwarfs! Cavalry are better but deep infantry formations will do because even if you lose, you will have hurt expensive units for the loss of your much cheaper units (exceptionally pathetic units like Goblins and Skeletons may be an exception but if you are using an Undead or O&G army you will have lots of cheap cavalry or chariots to use anyway). What ever you are facing simply 'suck it in' and charge! Even if they are on a hill and three deep - you must charge! The key is to add something that terrifies the Dwarfs. The Dwarfs will be down to 2 attacks per stand. You will be on more and with cavalry, possible much more, as the stand frontages are half as much. Once the Dwarfs are pushed back, they are done for!

Second. A good Dwarf player like me will keep a brigade 15cms back from the first. This will counter charge. You might not be able to stop him but you will be able to keep a unit of cavalry or chariots back to counter charge his counter charge. Do it!

Third. If he has Cannons, charge them. If he has gyrocopters and you can charge them with flyers, charge them! All these small units contribute towards the withdrawal point of his army. If you see a unit that is begging to be crushed, do it! Dwarfs cannot afford to lose units.

Finally, if you have a big army, especially a big cavalry army, you can tempt the Dwarf force to stretch itself too thin. Move units to the flanks. Stay back with the centre and draw him in. If he falls for it he WILL leave flanks exposed and units on their own. Your more mobile troops should be able to get into him with tremendous advantages and punish him for his recklessness.

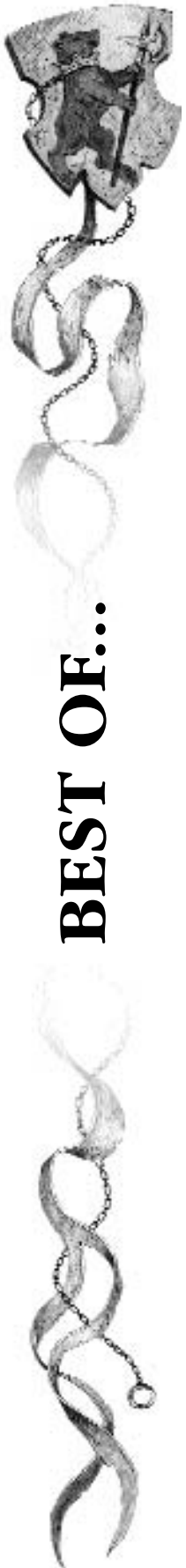
Undead spent the next two turns mopping up my advance units whilst I moved everything else into range. I was braced to charge but... on the crucial move the General failed his command. The Orb had already been used and I was left standing in the open waiting to be charged down by Undead chariots on the following turn. Ouch!

The second game was against a beautifully painted Orc & Goblin army. He moved first and on Turn one I managed to throw my Troll Slayers at his centre where I vapourised two units of Wolf chariots and got seriously stuck into some infantry. He charged my rear units with Boar chariots and the game was in the balance. I was confident that the longer it went on the more chance I stood as I had better infantry and he was losing the ability

to issue commands as his units suffered casualties. It was then that his Giant failed a Command test. It was at nearly 40cms away from any of my units. It rolled a 6 on the Giant Goes Mad table and was able to move twice its normal distance straight into a unit of Handgunners. It also doubled its attacks to 16 plus monster charging and in the open, totalling 18 dice! My Handgunners were so amazed that they didn't get a shot off before being crushed in one round of combat. The Giant continued into some warriors and the tide of the game had turned. Damn Giant!

Game three went according to plan. The Undead player was astonished at the speed of the Dwarfs and I had managed to destroy both his Skull Chuckers and several units of infantry at the end of turn two. He was so

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stunned he went on the defensive and the Dwarfs were able to continue into his second line. At the end of turn three I was one unit away from breaking his army BUT that would mean it would be a draw as his units cost little and the casualties I had taken cost a lot. I also had my Slayers still alive so I had to get them killed. I threw them frontally against the Sphinx, lost and he refused to follow up knowing that he would get more points if they stayed alive. Clever eh!

I had to score some big points so I concentrated everything on destroying a unit of Chariots accompanied by a Liche Priest on a Zombie Dragon. I killed it, scored a lot of points! Game over.



Games four and five were classic. They went according to plan with the Slayers rampaging across the field and attacking whatever was in their way. Rangers accompanied them and whilst the Slayers hit the fronts of units, the Rangers crashed into the flanks. The Runesmith was able to dispel almost everything that was cast and if nothing else this aspect causes so much frustration for opposing players that it is well worth employing it just to see the expressions on their faces. Scratch one Empire and one High Elf army.



It is always close and never easy with a Dwarf force. In very dense terrain they are almost unbeatable but it makes for a dull game. Tournament games will have little terrain so if you own a Dwarf army be prepared to learn how to fight in the open.

The result of all this is that I own about 3,000 points of Dwarfs and I see myself only using about 2,000 points. The Cannons and Flame cannon are great for scenarios and sieges but for winning battles when you are not sure what you are fighting and when the terrain is sparse I like my 'cannonless commando'.

It had taken a year and I had gone from not winning against my friends for 19 consecutive games to getting third place at the WPS Club Challenge. This was reward enough for me and redemption for the Grimsmites Foot Cavalry.

**PAINTING MY ARMY**

I had already decided to paint my army as a gaming army and not as a prize-winning work of art. I therefore decided to cut as many corners as I could. The good news was that as the Dwarfs are so small I would probably get away with a lot of, err, artistic license.

My procedure for all the units was as follows:

1. Trim the flash from the castings and prepare to glue to the bases. I thought long and hard about the basing and I decided that Dwarfs lived in the mountains and they would therefore be based on a rocky terrain. No grass, nothing complicated. I purchased

some fine gravel from Games Workshop and used PVA glue to attach the castings to the base and then sprinkled the gravel over the base as well. When dry I ensured there was no gravel sticking to the sides of the base and simply sprayed the entire lot white.

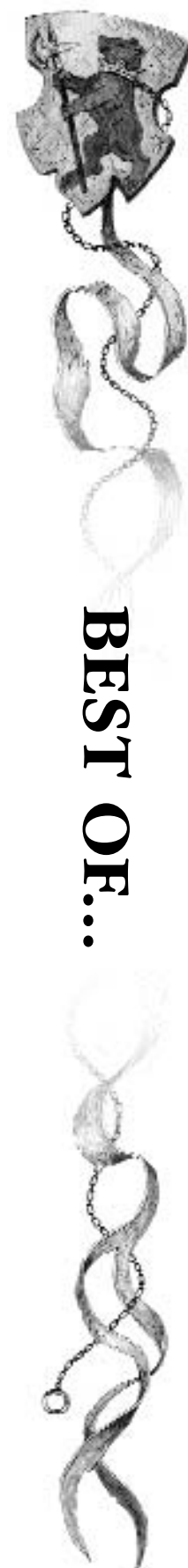
2. The clever bit comes next. I then undercoated everything (except the machines and cannons) with Flesh Wash straight out of the bottle. This was great. It meant that all the creases and crannies filled with a nice dark brown colour, but the more accessible and flatter surfaces remained light enough to take bright colours without a coat of white. Oh joy! I found I did not have to paint leather, wooden weapon handles, hands or faces. I left them as they were or simply highlighted them a little with Skull White, or Bleached Bone.

3. With everything washed with Flesh Wash I painted the block colours, but not too exactly. At this scale a dab here and there gives the impression of a tunic. Don't be too exact. I painted hats and shields with a dab of a darker colour before highlighting with a smaller dab of a lighter shade. Easy!

4. Finally, I painted the weapons (crossbows were fine in Flesh Wash)! With Chainmail and highlighted sparingly with Mithril Silver. The bases were washed with Brown Ink and left to dry before being dry brushed with Bleached Bone. Job done!



Remember that at 10mm scale unless you hold the stands up to the eye they are usually viewed from three feet away. If they look right like this then an army on the march looks fantastic, and you get to play with it quicker! The last thing to remind you about is that at the beginning of this ramble I suggested you glue the castings on their bases. This is intentional, as I tend to paint the parts you can see and not every cranny of clothing. My rule of thumb is that if you can get a brush to it you should paint it. If there is too small a gap for a brush, then leave it in the dark undercoat colour. No one will ever see it! That is why, in most cases, you need not spend much time at all painting the backs of the front ranks and the fronts of the back rank. A dab of colour here and there will trick the eye quite nicely as long as the eye is drawn to the better-painted fronts and rears of the stands.



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