

Using Skirmishers in Crusader

This article will hopefully go some way towards explaining how you can get the most from your skirmish troops or at least give you some ideas how these under-rated troops can be useful for something other than lurking in bad terrain hoping to get a few long range pot shots off at the enemy.

With the Crusader rules skirmish units are organised into stands in the same way that formed troops are. The stat line for skirmishers represents their more open formation and the fact that each stand has fewer troops than its corresponding formed unit would have.

A typical stat line for Ancient Spanish Caetrati would be as follows

Troop type (Notes)	Morale	CS	BS	WND	ATT	T&L	MOVE	Armour	Points
Caetrati	Trained	Poor	Poor	2	1	5	6	None	40/2
Hand Weapons, Javelins, Skirmishers									
Upgrades Morale to Regular (+10 pts), T&L to 6 (+2 pts), CS to Av (+5pts), BS to Av (+5pts), armour to light (+5pts)									

The basic cost per stand is 20 points (40 points divided by 2 for skirmishers) which can be upgraded by increasing Training and Leadership (T&L), combat and missile skill as well as the morale grade and armour. Whether you decide to upgrade any of these stats depends on how you are going to use your skirmishers. Upgrading to Average CS and Light armour may only cost 5 more points a stand (10/2) but if you never intend to get your skirmishers into combat then those points are a bit of a waste.



Its important to decide what you want your skirmishers to achieve before you go spending any points on them.

With Crusader skirmish stands can be arranged in any formation they like so long as the bases touch but bear in mind they still block each others' line of sight. Any of the formations on the next page are perfectly valid for your unit.

Opposite you can see a very safe but not particularly useful skirmish unit - long range missile fire like this is not overly effective.

You could say there are really only 4 general uses for skirmishers. Covering your own formed units and protecting them from missile fire. Using missile weapons to wear down enemy units. Grabbing terrain features that you don't want your formed troops to get bogged down in. Stopping the enemy skirmishers from doing any of the above.

Using skirmishers to cover your own troops from enemy missile fire while they advance, the -2 to hit means that their general lack of armour is cancelled out to some extent. At long range your skirmish units will be fairly safe, medium and they will start to take casualties but when they get to close range be prepared for them to break after a round or two of fire. Of course by this time they have shielded your formed units and have done their job anyway. If you can do so then get the remainder back beyond the main line before they break- even skirmish units add to the army break point.



Charging through other units isn't allowed but because of the Crusader game mechanics it doesn't mean that the skirmishers will be blocking your formed troops and stopping them charging. Simply activate the skirmish unit first, they will be able to fall back their full move distance and are allowed to interpenetrate the formed units behind them. Then its time to activate your main unit which can now charge forward without any hindrance. The trick here is to make sure that the skirmishers are close enough to the formed troops so that they can move fully through them, if they would end up 'on top of' the unit behind then they would not be able to move back.

Using missile fire to wear down the enemy depends on what missile weapons your guys are armed with. Its simple to form up a skirmish unit in some convenient rough ground and pop away at the enemy with arrows but if you only have javelins it becomes a bit more tricky.



The key to getting the most out of the skirmish unit is that the closer they are to the enemy the more damage they are going to do. Your skirmish archers may well be very safe in the woods but if the enemy is at long range their arrows are going to do almost nothing.

Skirmish troops take no modifiers for moving and firing so get them as close to the enemy as they dare. In the case of javelin armed guys this is going to have to be very close but it will be something that the enemy cannot ignore. If you want to goad formed units into attacking and breaking their battle line 6-8 stands of javelin armed skirmishers will generally do it.



Grabbing terrain should generally be left to your highest morale class skirmishers and try to give them average combat skill and a bit of armour/shield. Against shaken formed troops skirmishers might just about stand a chance but your best bet is still to evade, pepper them with missile fire and hope for an open flank. Unless the terrain is of no importance (in which case why did you bother to grab it?) the enemy cant have your skirmishers shooting up his troops so is likely to send his own skirmishers against you and this is where the morale, T&L and armour will come into its own.

Countering enemy skirmishers. You can employ some formed troops to do the job – cavalry are perfect skirmish killers but you'll usually find they have other things to do on the battlefield. Archers can take skirmish units apart at close range but if they are busy doing that it means the enemies formed troops are staying undamaged. Light troops are perfect for taking on skirmishers in rough going as they will be able to move and (almost) keep in contact with them. Of course one of the best ways to stop skirmishers doing their job is to counter them with your own. Piling forward with a unit of fairly high morale javelin and buckler/shield armed skirmishers with average combat skill will clear skirmishing archers quicker than most things.

Keep them alive and don't underestimate them. Skirmish units are not totally expendable. If they get destroyed they will add to your army break point so when they are down to 50% losses it's a good idea to pull them back if possible – who knows, they may even come in at the end of the battle and do some good against weakened enemy troops.

Flanks and rears are particularly susceptible to being harried by skirmishers. I once marched forward two pike blocks and ignored the skirmish units which fell away to the flanks and then in later turns closed in and subjected my pikemen to annoying close range fire. Two turns of skirmish fire from both of these removed a stand from each unit which turned out to be enough of a factor to lose my melees. Even more annoying was that the pikemen retired unsteady and still kept getting shot at by the skirmishers in the opponents turn. (The enemy player could elect to activate each skirmish unit and shoot with it before he activated his own formed units to charge my unsteady pikemen) Needless to say I lost the battle.

So, if I had to sum up my advice for skirmishers – be aggressive and get them forward.

