

## Fifth Week: The Battle for Verdun

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Thus ends the fifth week in minor as we were once again unable to puncture the dark forces their defensive line. Our worst fears were now realised: a gigantic stalemate, involving thousands of men, elves and dwarves along the entire front. Both sides have now reinforced their positions so that a breakthrough seems impossible. The armies are equally matched as a victory is compensated by a defeat elsewhere. We only seem ably to launch some spoiling attacks with no material gain and losses at both sides. This has become a war of attrition which drains both sides' strength and ability to fight.

For most part of the week I was stationed along with the Guardians at the Lighthouse where few battles were seen. We as the forces of darkness seemed content to stay in our defensive positions. Finally I received word from Marshall Alain de Montgallion that we were to gather at the fens. When we arrived at the swamp, I was astonished to see the greatest army to have gathered there: elves from beyond the sea and woods, the sturdy dwarves, men from the Empire and fair Bretonnia. The Council has gathered this assembled army in greatest secrecy for a massive assault on the enemy lines. Promises were made that this would be the breakthrough we have waited for a month now. After scouting the area I wasn't as sure as the various members of the Council: the swamp was impenetrable at some places, forcing us into bottlenecks which were easily defended by the chaos-corrupted. To make matters worse was that it had been raining incessantly for over a week now, making any safe routes through the rising swamp a muddy bog in which both men and horse sank knee deep. Logistics would be a disaster as heavy equipment and armoured personnel needed to push forward but instead being stalled by the mud and rain. Although these were my thoughts, I kept them for myself as enthusiasm and optimism has struck me: such a grand army would be unstoppable and with Lady's luck holding we would be torching their headquarters next day, ending the war once and for all.

At the hour of marching, thousands of horns, drums and cannons roared over the battlefield. Banners were held up high as we steadily marched on into the stinking bog. We achieved complete surprise and after a few skirmishes we defeated the enemy lines and their retreat turned into a rout. Riding alongside the Marshall, I saw he was laughing at loud of sheer joy and even I wasn't able to constrain my hopes and relief. The premonitions seemed to smile on us as we moved deeper and deeper. However the defence of the chaos-tainted stiffened at certain pathblocks and we took severe losses overrunning such strong points. The bodies of the fallen were dishonourably dumped into the swamp to make way for the advancing armies. The longer our march and columns, the slower our progress, seemed to be the rule as our advance slackened after a few miles. The forces of evil has organised their defences and started forcing us to commit atrocious amount of casualties to overrun their defensive positions, only to run into a new one some yards further. Then the assault came to a complete stop as both sides attacked and counterattacked but to no avail. Fighting was the fiercest in a small abandoned swamp village of Verdun. Hours of fierce house-to-house fighting inflicted a huge toll of death on both sides as we were equally adamant to give up the village.

After a few hours of incessant fighting, weariness and the sheer number of casualties were wearing us down. I was standing alongside the Marshall and with the other Generals on top of a small hill in the swamp as an Elf approached us. The Marshall took the message and quickly read it. He turned pale as the message got through to him: we were to retreat back to our starting positions for the losses and logistics were straining our advance and the momentum was gone and evil knew our plans now, ever reinforcing their positions. As we rode back, we were disappointed and on the verge of a mental and physical breakdown. Even though the attack was a failure, we had bound a lot of the enemy's forces they needed for their attack thus weakening their offensive to come. We have upheld Bretonnian honour by continuing to fight the odds and weather in spite of heavy resistance. The soaked six banners of the main Bretonnian armies were still held up high against the threatening sky, a beacon of hope and glory to all to witness.

We were redeployed at the Lighthouse to gather our strength and lick our wounds. A though has been wandering my mind for some time now: in whose favour did we tip the scale?