IMPERIAL ARMOUR

VOLUME SIX
THE SIEGE OF VRAKS - PART TWO

WARHAMMER VAULT

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EXPANSION

The Warhammer Vault exists to preserve the rich lore and background of Warhammer 40,000 and Warhammer Age of Sigmar. As such, outdated game scenarios and unit rules have been removed from this publication.

VOLUME SIX
THE SIEGE OF VRAKS – PART TWO

by Warwick Kinrade

Being the continued Disclosure of the most gruesome and bitter Siege of Vraks. Bastion world of the Divine Emperor of Mankind, fallen by base treachery into the hands of the Worshippers of the Dark Powers. For Chaos ever gnaws from within, leeching at the strength of the Imperium with its scheming and plotting, and spreading the word of its malicious lies, corrupting the hearts of our loyal servants.

Herein, more will be found on the bloody sacrifices of the regiments of Krieg and of those fallen Mortals who have sublimated themselves before the Powers of Chaos. Of the Legionii Excommunicate Traitoris *and the misguided rebels, mutants and heretics that would bring about the downfall of the Lord of Terra's most Holy Rule.*

The fall of Vraks to the rebel army of Apostate-Cardinal Xaphan meant the loss of a vital Armoury world. A link in the long supply chain that kept the Imperial Guard regiments stationed around the Eye of Terror ready for war had been broken – with direst consequences should a new Black Crusade be launched from within.

Despite the enemy holding a seemingly unassailable position, with the Fortress of Vraks being regarded as impregnable, the Imperium's Generals, Strategos-Adepts and Departmento Munitorum Logisticians were ordered to create a plan to recapture the world. It would require hard fighting in a long attritional war, but they calculated that with sufficient forces and logistics they could grind down the defenders and retake the Fortress of Vraks, the nerve-centre of the planet, in twelve years of siege warfare.

The Imperial Guard regiments chosen to prosecute this were those recruited from Krieg. The Death Korps of Krieg are men born to serve the Emperor. Below Krieg's irradiated surface is a human factory, existing only to produce men destined for the front line in the Imperium's most toxic and gruelling warzones. These indoctrinated soldiers are unflinchingly loyal and willing to sacrifice themselves without question or regard to ultimately win victory. They would need these qualities to face the horrors awaiting them on Vraks…

Meanwhile, the Vraksian renegades were prepared for the Imperium's expected attack, holding very strong defensive positions and, with the Armoury world's seemingly inexhaustible stores to plunder, they were very well-equipped.

In ten years of constant war the renegades have fought bitterly, inflicting millions of casualties on the Death Korps but gradually they have been pushed back. The noose has tightened around the Fortress of Vraks and the Apostate-Cardinal is trapped in his lair, the sound of the guns of the Imperium growing ever closer. And for a brief time it seemed that the end was in sight, that the renegades' strength was at last exhausted and soon they must break. But it was not so… perfidious fate often evades such obvious resolutions.

On Vraks the carnage and slaughter would long continue and the thirsting gods could drink their fill…

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Acknowledgments

Forge World Models Designed by	Daren Parrwood, Will Hayes, Mark Bedford, Simon Egan, Daniel Cockersell, Tony Cottrell, Brian Fawcett
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Terrain Boards by	Mark Bedford, Daren Parrwood & Phil Stutcinskas
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Thanks to	The staff at Forge World and Games Workshop for their continued support, advice and encouragement Everybody who e-mailed the Imperial Armour address with suggestions and feedback on our experimental rules

PRODUCED BY FORGE WORLD

First published in Great Britain in 2008. Second edition published in 2010 by Forge World, Games Workshop, Willow Road, Lenton, Nottingham, NG7 2WS.

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Product Code: 60040187009

Forge World Code: BK-PUB-B-013

British Cataloguing-in-Publication Data. A catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1841549101

Printed in China

Games Workshop Web site:
www.games-workshop.com

Forge World Web site:
www.forgeworld.co.uk

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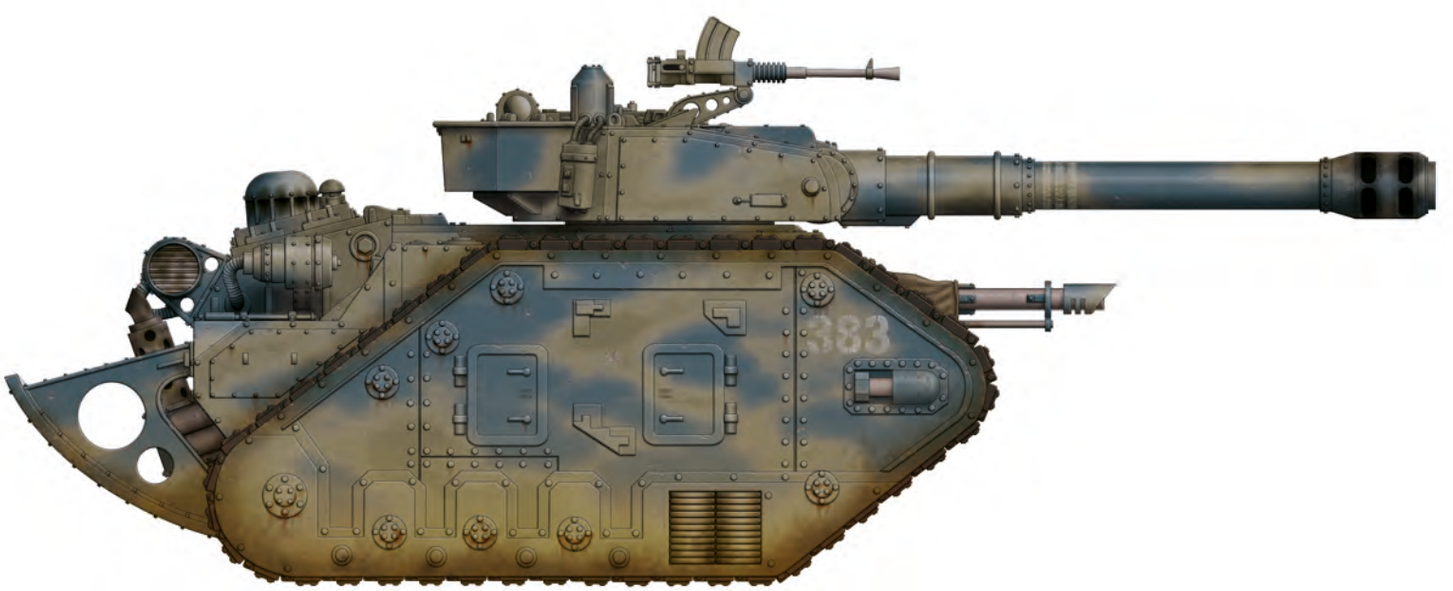
THE SIEGE OF VRAKS



Leman Russ Vanquisher of 7th Tank regiment, the 3rd tank of 8th company's 3rd squadron.
Note the additional air filters on the engine deck, common on tanks deployed into Vraks' toxic atmosphere.

CHAPTER SEVEN
THE FIRST BATTLE OF VRAKS

"You are expected at all times to conduct yourself in a manner appropriate to the great duties and traditions of the Emperor's Most Glorious and Honourable Navy. Our orders demand nothing else. Look only to your duties gentlemen."

Rear-Admiral Rasiak before the first Battle of Vraks.

The siege of Vraks officially began in 166813.M41 when the heavy artillery of the 88th Imperial Guard (Krieg) siege army opened fire upon the outer defence lines of the Fortress of Vraks. As the guns thundered out their first bombardments, millions of men were digging the first trench lines, ready to begin the slow attrition needed to wear down the traitor forces. In this battle there would be no swift victory, but a twelve-year campaign that would remorselessly bleed the enemy to death. There would be a high price to pay in blood for each small advance but the men of Krieg were bred and trained to make just such sacrifices for their Emperor.

For ten years the war has continued. Across the artillery-churned desolation of no-man's land, both sides have launched attack after attack. There have been victories and defeats for both, but the outer defence line has been cracked and the second defence line smashed. In 821.M41 the deployment of a strike force from the Dark Angels Space Marine Chapter saw Vraks' starport destroyed. In 822.M41 just the inner defence line and the fortress' curtain walls stand between the Krieg siege regiments and their ultimate objective. Now, Vraks' citadel is encircled and all within are trapped and seemingly doomed to destruction – except that the heretic Cardinal Xaphan is not alone in this war. Through his advisor Deacon Mamon, Cardinal Xaphan has the support of Chaos Space Marines of the Alpha Legion who, even as the Krieg guns merciless pound the defences, are summoning reinforcements to the traitor's cause…

Arkos' Psychic Signal

The sorcerers of the Alpha Legion sent a psychic signal through the warp. It was a call to draw old allies to Vraks. Those forces secretly lurking around the Eye of Terror who heard the call were drawn likes moths to a flame by a flickering psychic light that promised battle, slaughter and plunder.

But the tides of the warp were against them. The warp storms that engulfed the systems of the Eye were fierce, raging without end and navigating them would be impossible even for the most skilled navigator. Imperial Navy vessels that attempted to navigate the storms risked being destroyed or could be cast to all points of the galaxy, emerging in far distant unsuspecting systems. But for the Chaos worshippers that launched their armadas from within, the fickleness of the warp was to be embraced. If the gods deemed they should be cast adrift to some distant system, then so be it… as the gods will it, so shall it be.

Ancient battleships, heavily armed, encrusted in unholy runes and bearing the battle scars of millennia of warfare heard the call. Within their ageless hulls awaited the servants of Chaos and their thralls, all keen for the fight, all awaiting their chance to draw the eye of their gods to them and prove themselves worthy of great rewards.

Ancient engines flared into life and bulkheads strained as the warships and transports began to move, preparing themselves to be cast adrift upon the immaterium once again.

Most of those that received the Alpha Legion's psychic signal were raiding ships and their supporting transports. Such vessels constantly skirted the Eye of Terror, often emerging to launch a bloody raid against a human colony or a poorly defended shipping convoy. Many were simply pirates or other renegades from the Imperium's justice. Worst of all were the fierce warbands of Chaos worshipping warlords, splinter groups from the vengeful Chaos Space Marine Traitor legions. Arkos' spell had signalled to them that Vraks was a system worthy of raiding and rich for plundering... and so they came.

On the Tides of the Warp – the Chaos Fleets Approach

Observation station DM498-066 is just one of many secret outposts that keep a silent vigil on the Eye of Terror. Vraks itself had been a collating point for some of this data, with its choir of astropaths being able to relate any important information to surrounding systems and further afield as an early warning system against attacks or even an emerging Black Crusade. Of course, Vraks' choir was now gone, all long dead or held as captives in the hands of Xaphan's minions. Although Vraks had been lost, other systems were still receiving and transmitting the information from the outposts.

Station DM498-066's sensitive warp vanes detected the passage of several large, unidentified vessels in its vicinity, well off the usual trade and patrol routes. The station's astropath transmitted a warning message which, after several weeks, reached Battlefleet Scarus' High Command. Taking careful plottings and referring to their own diviners, the Imperial Navy commanders dispatched patrol groups to systems likely to be the intruder fleet's destination. Several cruiser groups were alerted and brought to readiness in expectation of a raid by Chaos vessels. Even an Adeptus Astartes fast response strike force was put on alert to move to intercept if needed.

Secretly, the Ordo Malleus, ever wary of any potential threat from the Eye of Terror, initiated its own information-gathering mission. A nullship – a one way mission into the Eye crewed by automated servitors and a single pariah, untraceable through the warp but equipped with powerful augurs and communications equipment was launched. Its augurs would seek out the mystery vessels and report back their location.

The Inquisition's nullship did its job, tracking the target's passage before continuing its suicidal one-way mission deeper into the raging warp storms, transmitting until all communication was lost forever. The nullship's findings alarmed the Inquisition. These vessels were indeed Chaos raiders, many were of at least cruiser size and they had already rendezvoused with other vessels deep within an area of wilderness space. It seemed an armada was mustering for a major attack. So far almost thirty individual vessels had been positively identified.

Astropathic messages flashed around

the ports, bases and command ships of Battlefleet Scarus. Scout and patrol vessels were re-directed to cover the enemy armada's suspected approach. The big capitol ships were also ordered out from their home ports, including the fleet's flagship, the mighty Emperor class battleship *Constantin Valdor*. The battlefleet mobilized and prepared itself for a major action. An enemy fleet of over thirty vessels had been positively identified and must be hounded, cornered and destroyed.

The Imperium's Navy in Vraks system

Ten years had passed since the first transports arrived in the Vraks system carrying the lead regiment of the 88th Imperial Guard siege army. As the build-up of troops was completed, so the need to transport the many supplies to prosecute the war began. Ships bringing new recruits, thousands of tonnes of munitions, replacement vehicles, fuel and every item required to grind down the enemy over twelve years arrived in convoy after convoy. These valuable supplies needed the constant protection of the Imperial Navy so a fleet of Imperial Navy vessels had been stationed in the Vraks system. There was an escort squadron of Sword class frigates to accompany each convoy to and from its destination and patrol the system's outer reaches to guard against raiders. A squadron of system defence monitors had been towed in to provide close protection for the vulnerable freighters in orbit; these vessels carried enough firepower to deter the boldest pirates or even roving raiders from the Eye of Terror. Commanding these squadrons was the venerable Lunar class cruiser, *Lord Bellerophon,* under the flag of Rear-Admiral Rasiak. The *Lord Bellerophon* (known affectionately to her crew as the 'Big Ruffian') was the system's main deterrent. A potent ship of the line, she had been seconded from Battlefleet Scarus for the duration of the campaign. One of over six hundred lunar class vessels in service across Segmentum Obscuras, she was bristling with weaponry and able to outclass anything pirates, aliens or even most Traitor warbands could threaten the supply lines of Vraks with. She was constantly on-station or escorting the supply convoys as the convoy leader.

But, after a decade of war on the ground, with no sign that the system was under threat from outside forces and the destruction of the star port meaning a planetary assault would be difficult and time consuming, the fleet defending Vraks had been gradually downgraded. The *Lord Bellerophon* had its crew stripped for postings elsewhere and manpower for the other vessels had also been re-deployed. The escort squadron had been reduced in number and the remaining three ships were now in need of refits, having ploughed the warp lanes back and forth from supply depots across the Scarus sector or even as far as Lucius forge world. Only the defence monitors were still rated as in good fighting condition. This close to the Eye of Terror the need for ships was always great, and Battefleet Scarus' high command had requested that their cruiser be returned for other, more urgent duties. It seemed that Vraks was becoming a low priority, and that the implacable enemy of complacency had set in. Nobody expected an attack on Vraks, especially not in a sizable enough force to overwhelm its current defenders. In all his reports, Rear-Admiral Rasiak was convinced that the Vraks system and supply line were secure and in safe hands. He was soon to be disavowed of his conviction.

The First Battle of Vraks

Rear-Admiral Rasiak was aware of the frenetic activity of Battlefleet Scarus. He too had received the order to stand-to in expectation of the large Chaos raid in the sector. It was now, under the shadow of this growing threat, that the Rear Admiral re-appraised his status and found it wanting. His small security fleet was in no way ready to engage in a fleet action. His own cruiser was operating with a skeleton crew. His escorts were also under-manned and were suffering increasing reports of malfunctions due to their poor state of repair. They needed an extended period in dock. Only his defence monitors were ready for action, but even these needed extra crew, and their main magazines were not full due to the necessity to maintain regular firing drills. He had just seven ships under his command, which would not be enough.

Rasiak's first priority was to find more personnel. Lowly ratings aboard any Imperial Navy vessel were unskilled workers, or those with minimal training in a particular area, often as ammunition carriers or fire fighters in damage control teams. These he could press-gang from anywhere and so he turned to the Departmento Munitorum's forces deployed on Vraks. Under the conditions of his command, the Rear Admiral had the power to press manpower at need, and now he exercised that power. His officers and bosuns took teams down to the planet's surface and began rounding up men from the labour corps. When confronted by the Administratum bureaucrats that ran the units, they simply insisted that the Imperial Navy's needs took precedence over the Departmento Munitorum's. Before they knew it, many of the labourers were enrolled in the Imperial Navy as ratings, their names added to the rolls of each ship as they were assigned a new post. Soon these new men were under the withering gaze of gunnery team captains or engaged in the thousands of onboard chores that required brute force and muscle rather than skill. These indentured workers, referred by the regular crewmen as 'landsmen' or 'planetsiders' were the lowliest ranks of the Imperial Navy but thousands of them helped Rear Admiral Rasiak alleviate the worst of his manpower shortages.

The Rear Admiral also conducted a thorough inspection of all freighters currently in the Vraks system. A supply convoy was currently engaged in unloading to Vraks' surface, a slow process given the lack of any proper star port facilities. Here Rasiak was in luck. The massive bulk-freighter *Izra Mors* had almost finished unloading, and he immediately requisitioned it for service. It was no fighting ship but carried enough guns for its own protection and so its aging captain found himself enrolled into Rasiak's defence fleet. There were five other freighters also in the system, either inbound or outbound. Of these, two were considered well enough armed for service – should they be required. Rasiak strengthened their small and inexperienced crews with some of his own officers, bosuns and gunners, placing the freighter squadron under the command of his own son, Flag-Lieutenant Maius Rasiak. The other three vessels were judged to be beyond use, offering practically nothing in firepower.

These three freighters Rasiak ordered stripped of crew and weapons, leaving each with only a skeleton crew of a few volunteers. Then he had them loaded with anything explosive or flammable that the fleet's Master of Ordnance could lay his hands on, turning each into a huge bomb. Their cargo holds were packed ready to explode, with their plasma reactor cores prepared to run overpowered and out of control. These three vessels would form a squadron of fire ships. The crew's mission would be to seek out likely enemy targets and ram them, detonating the explosives within and causing destruction well beyond their small size. The crews had orders to abandon ship before contact, but Rasiak knew full well that few volunteers

Left: The Lord Bellerophon in orbit above Vraks. As Rear Admiral's Raziak's flagship, the Lunar class formed the backbone of Vraks defence.

for such missions survived. Still, their sacrifice would be required should fate place his fleet in the path of the expected Chaos raid. The fire ships might just make all the difference when the battlelines met.

Whilst all of Rasiak's preparations were continuing, he placed escort squadron Exuo's three Sword class frigates on picket duty in the system's outer reaches, where they were to search for intruders and act as his early warning. They were instructed not to engage any enemy ships, but to fall back to the main fleet at full speed and take their places in the battle line so that Rasiak could meet the enemy with his full force.

The battleline was being formed high above Vraks, screened from the planet's heavy planetary defence laser batteries (many of which were still in the traitors' hands) by the planet itself. At the front was the *Lord Bellerophon*, from where Rear Admiral Rasiak would command the battle. Behind him would follow the escorts of Exuo squadron – once they had returned. Behind them would come the defence monitors. These were slow cumbersome vessels, with most of their power systems dedicated to their gunnery rather than engines and manoeuvre thrusters. It would be the monitors that dictated the battleline's speed. Behind these followed the two armed freighters, with the *Izra Mors* bringing up the rear. Held back in reserve were the three fire ships, ready to be committed at the Rear Admiral's command. In truth, it was a rag tag fleet of thirteen mismatched vessels but Rear Admiral Rasiak had done all he could to defend Vraks. Now he and his officers prayed to the Emperor that they would not be needed.

The Rear Admiral knew his prayers had gone unanswered when he received a priority message from the frigate *Exuo-Four-Three*. She had made contact with a squadron of three ships inbound and their energy signatures confirmed them as of the Infidel class. The frigate was tracking their approach, but remained in position to watch for further ships. More would follow, Rasiak knew it in his blood. This was just a probe, scouts testing his defences. He could try to counter them with his frigates but that would leave him blind in the outer reaches and might cost him one of his valuable ships. Better to accept that the enemy would have good intelligence of his own fleet but retain his strength for the battle to come.

The Infidels did little more than skirt the battleline now sheltering behind Vraks. They did not risk entering into range of the *Lord Bellerophon's* guns, even to unleash a speculative volley of torpedoes at long range. Instead, they scanned and watched warily before withdrawing. Now the enemy knew Rasiak's strength – or lack of it. Now the enemy would surely feel that the day would be theirs and come in strength enough to overwhelm his scratched together fleet.

Six days later at 054823.M41, *Exuo* squadron contacted fourteen different energy signatures as the Chaos fleet by-passed the outer asteroid fields and made best speed sunward for Vraks-Prime. As ordered, the frigates turned tail and sped back to the battle line, over-worked thrusters burning at flank speed to outpace the attackers. Meanwhile, Rear Admiral Rasiak broadcasted his final instructions over each ship's tannoy, quoting the first line of the Imperial Navy's articles of war to men who had little naval experience.

"You are expected at all times to conduct yourself in a manner appropriate to the great duties and traditions of the Emperor's Most Glorious and Honourable Navy. Our orders demand nothing else. Look only to your duties gentlemen."

With that, the *Lord Bellerophon* powered up all systems, the engines rumbling into life as the old hull creaked and groaned under the mounting strain. Slowly, with glacial majesty, the cruiser began to power out of orbit and behind her the fleet followed in line astern, ships so close that those men stationed in the bow quarters reported that they could feel the vibrations of the engine-wash reverberating through their own hull from the ship ahead.

The returning frigates fell into line as the fleet slowly powered away from Vraks, mindful of avoiding the planet's defensive guns, until they were far to the rear. They made painfully slow progress

with the monitor gunboats in tow, but Rasiak urged all to maintain their close formation and discipline and stay tight.

His plan for the imminent fleet action was simple and brutal, and may have had something to do with his close study of Lord Admiral Ravensburg's plan at the Battle of Gethsemane, now over 700 years ago but still regarded as the great naval victory that turned the tide of the Gothic War and won the legendary Ravensburg his place in Imperial Navy history. Rasiak's fleet would approach in a single line, closely deployed to prevent the line being easily cut. Behind a screen of torpedoes from the *Lord Bellerophon* they would progress through the enemy fleet, taking fire from both sides, but maximizing their own firepower from both port and starboard batteries at the same time. At the height of the engagement he would send in the three fireships, targeting any stricken enemy vessels that could not manoeuvre to avoid them. The fire ships' impacts should cause enough damage and confusion for his well-ordered ships to gain the upper hand in the trading of blows. With luck and solid discipline, he hoped he could inflict enough damage on the enemy that their fleet would feel it wiser to withdraw then advance.

And so Rasiak's stately procession into battle continued, hour after slow hour, as the enemy fleet closed on Vraks.

As the two fleets converged, Rasiak's makeshift crews came to battle stations. Ratings stacked extra ammunition in the ready lockers at each gun port. Work teams shored-up bulkheads and blast doors were sealed to contain the inevitable fires. On the *Lord Bellerophon's* upper bridge, high above the clamour on the gun decks, the Rear-Admiral alongside Flag-Captain Drost and his command crew stood in silent calm, each engrossed in their own tasks, watching their command screens as the cadre of logisticians routed the flow of technical data to them. Meanwhile the ship's preachers roamed the corridors and hallways, chanting hymns and litanies and blessing each gun and its crew in turn. They should all stand-fast and their Emperor would protect them.

Unknown to the lower deck crews, ahead of them the Traitor fleet was approaching fast, their engine signatures flaring brightly across the *Lord Bellerophon's* augur screens. There was no need for caution here, they were falling on their prey like a voracious predator, hungry and eager for the kill. Rear Admiral Rasiak ordered that the augurs focus on the enemy's lead ship and the information was routed to his command pulpit above the bridge's deck. Watching the stream of runes closely, he realised with alarm what he was facing. The *Lord Bellerophon* was a powerful weapon, a cruiser, a mighty ship of the line but before him was something else. Out there in the void, approaching at full power on an intercept course was a ship of an entirely different magnitude altogether. Facing him was a monster, a true leviathan of the deep. Almost certainly it was a Despoiler class battleship, or at least something very closely related. The Despoilers were almost legend amongst the officers of Battlefleet Obscurus. Some of the largest vessels ever constructed, they carried enough firepower to level cities, as well as squadrons of attack craft, bombers and assault craft. Here was a beast that his cruiser could not trade fire with and hope to win. 'Emperor's mercy!' Rasiak muttered to himself, in the crashing realisation that he was going to die and his fleet was going to be torn apart and left as so much floating space debris. He felt his heart sink. Where now did his duty lie? There was no call for him to commit suicide in a one-sided engagement. Was it too late to order his ships to disengage? Should he save what ships he could and abandon Vraks to the enemy? He could flee, cut power and skulk to the edge of the system, in the hope of returning with a more powerful fleet to take on this monstrous enemy. As Rasiak's morale wavered, caught between his duty to stand and fight and his knowledge that it was a hopeless cause, Flag-Captain Drost approached the pulpit. "Rear Admiral, the enemy fleet has changed course". Rasiak hesitated, should he break off or continue with his battle line's approach? Was he just making a futile gesture or was he doing the job his duty, honour and rank demanded of him?

"The leading enemy vessels are veering to port. They have divided their line."

Rasiak's courage wavered. Captain Drost waited. "Our vessels are awaiting orders, sire." he urged his commander.

Rasiak looked down on him, "To me, Flag-Captain, sometimes the demands of the service seem a futile gesture against a universe bent upon our destruction. I think today we shall be joining our ancestors in the Emperor's embrace. We had better make sure we are not ashamed to dine in their glorious company. Maintain current course and speed, fire all torpedoes tubes when in range." Rasiak had found his resolve and courage.

Rasiak did not need to hear the report of "Torpedoes away!", he – like everybody else aboard, felt the deck shaking earthquake rumble as the torpedoes were fired. Ahead of the *Lord Bellerophon* the enemy fleet had indeed divided. Five vessels, led by the Despoiler class battleship *Anarchy's Heart*, had manoeuvred to swing around his battleline's port ship. A larger concentration of nine enemy vessels of varying sizes and classes, with the Styx class cruiser *Blood Dawn* in the vanguard would pass by him off the starboard side. Rasiak's gun teams would be hard pressed with multiple targets for each broadside. He instructed Captain Drost to have every gunnery captain re-check his firing solutions. Being outnumbered, every shot needed to count.

The first torpedo salvo raced ahead, the spread targeted various enemy vessels, which immediately responded by taking evasive manoeuvres. The *Lord Bellerophon's* bridge tracked the torpedoes as they closed in. The first missed the *Anarchy's Heart*, whilst the second detonated against her void shields to no avail. The third was destroyed by defensive fire, whilst the fourth malfunctioned and detonated in open space. The fifth torpedo narrowly missed an Iconoclast destroyer, part of the battleship's escort squadron, the small ship was nimble enough to swing hard out of the torpedo's path. The sixth provoked a sudden cheer from the bridge crew as it impacted against a second Iconoclast. The torpedo's internal logis engine making the last second corrections to guide it directly into the swerving target. The torpedo's melta warhead detonated with a terrible force, overwhelming the small vessel's shield generators in a flash and tearing a great rend through the vessel's aft quarters. The escort was venting plasma, a sure sign that one of her reactors had been breached. The Iconoclast dropped out of the line, fatally wounded and began to drift helplessly, soon her plasma reactors would detonate and the ship would be torn into space wreckage. "First blood to the Big Ruffian!" cheered Flag Captain Drost, but all jollity at the small victory was cut short as the cruiser was jarred and jolted by impacts in return. The Despoiler's big guns had opened fire.

The *Lord Bellerophon's* void shield generators screamed their defiance as waves of broadside volleys pounded

the cruiser. Still well beyond her own effective range to respond, the lunar class cruiser was taking a pounding. The energy blasts of laser turrets flickered through space, plasma bolts bursting in sun-bright flares along the length of the ship. Deep within, void shield capacitors were overloading, bursting apart in a shower of sparks and molten steel as they attempted to contain the enemy's firepower, starting small fires that soon spread. As yet the damage to the hull was minimal. In response, Rasiak ordered the fleet to move in closer, he needed to return fire.

The two fleets slid past each other in a murderous gun battle. From starboard the second enemy line was now approaching, their attack heralded by the swarms of bombers and fighters now filling the void between the fleets. Target icons swamped the bridge's surveyor screens. Every gun and every turret onboard the *Lord Bellerophon* was in action and the ship rattled and shook with each volley. The din rose. On the gun decks the orders of master gunners and captains could no longer be heard above the thunder of macro-cannons and scream of high-energy lance batteries. Under the lash of their bosuns, the green crews toiled hard, hauling the guns back into position after each recoil sent it skidding backwards. Ammunition, shells so large they required ten men to carry them, were hauled into the breaches. The air became thick with the noxious fumes of firing. It was hot and the temperature was rising as power packs overheated with the strain and gun barrels began to glow. Cooling systems were overheating. Swabbing teams worked to cool each gun between shots, the better to aid accuracy. It was the same on every ship in the battleline. The Sword escorts added their firepower to the fight, trading blows with enemy escorts, whilst the monitors thundered away at the bigger ships – like pugnacious fighting dogs attacking a bull-grox, they tore at the bigger enemy with a strength that belied their size. The void was alive with gunfire, streaking, blazing, screaming and exploding left and right in a withering, deadly crossfire.

It was a vicious duel and both sides were wounded. The *Anarchy's Heart* had raked the length of the Imperial battleline, its firepower stripped shields and buckled armour as it passed. The Sword class *Exuo-Four-One* had been crippled by the enemy battleship's batteries. She was adrift and helpless, raging fires burning on all her decks, the bridge crew wiped out by repeated lance hits that had torn away the superstructure. Two of the monitors were also gone. The first's plasma reactors detonating in a sudden all-consuming explosion that had burned like a new sun, if only briefly, before leaving an expanding cloud of dust in its wake. The second had been pounded into silence by enemy guns and was now a drifting wreck. Both the armed freighters had miraculously passed through the gauntlet, but neither were unscathed. Void shields were gone, decks were alight, casualties were heavy but both were still in the fight. The *Izra Mors* had lost three plasma reactors to enemy bombing attacks, and was operating on minimal power. With manoeuvre thrusters disabled she was a sitting duck and Rasiak was forced to abandon her to her fate. Rather than abandon ship, the *Izra Mors'* captain ordered his surviving crew to man the guns and keep shooting.

The *Lord Bellerophon* itself had been blasted and buffeted. Her guns had damaged the Chaos heavy transport *Aharon's Bane* and destroyed another of the Iconoclast destroyers. Two port gun decks had been immolated and the fire teams were struggling to bring the blazes under control. A primary communications tower had also been torn away. Most of the void shield generators had been overloaded and were shut down to prevent them exploding. One plasma reactor had also been read its final rites after a macro-cannon salvo had penetrated the number two engine room. Most of the techpriests within had been annihilated in the ensuing explosions. She also had two hull breaches and several crew decks had been sealed against the hard vacuum of space after the *Anarchy's Heart's* lance turrets had scored direct hits. The old warship was battered and listing, wounded but still fighting.

The Chaos fleet had also been wounded, but for reasons as yet unknown two of the cruisers had failed to engage. These had been the rearguard of the second battleline and even as Rasiak watched on his pulpit console they were coming about and seemed to be disengaging. It was a stroke of luck, maybe they were abandoning the fight, but their guns could easily have finished the *Lord Bellerophon* and her surviving escorts.

With much of his communications destroyed, Rear-Admiral Rasiak had no idea that reinforcements were on their way. Battlefleet Scarus had directed the closest battle-worthy force to Vraks. Cruiser group Mahzur, under Rear Admiral Titus Mahzur, had arrived not far behind the Traitor fleet. Led by the Gothic class *Consul Thracii*, with the Dominator class *Orion* and the ancient grand cruiser *Covenanter* in support, as well as a squadron of escorts, the cruisers were now racing towards Vraks and the battle. Together they could swing the battle in the Imperium's favour. The first to detect them had been the rearmost Chaos cruisers and they had taken immediate steps to intercept.

Coincidently, the two Rear Admirals, Mahzur and Rasiak, were well known to each other. Both had graduated from the same officer cadet class on Cypra-Mundi and both had enjoyed very similar careers. There was some history of rivalry between the two, a mutual dislike. Rasiak had once acted as second to a young officer Mahzur challenged to a duel and subsequently killed. Now fortune had thrown the two together in the heat of battle. Rasiak remained unaware of the reinforcements racing to his aid and would only learn later when communications with Mahzur's ships was re-routed via escort *Exuo-Four-Three*. Rasiak had his own more pressing concerns.

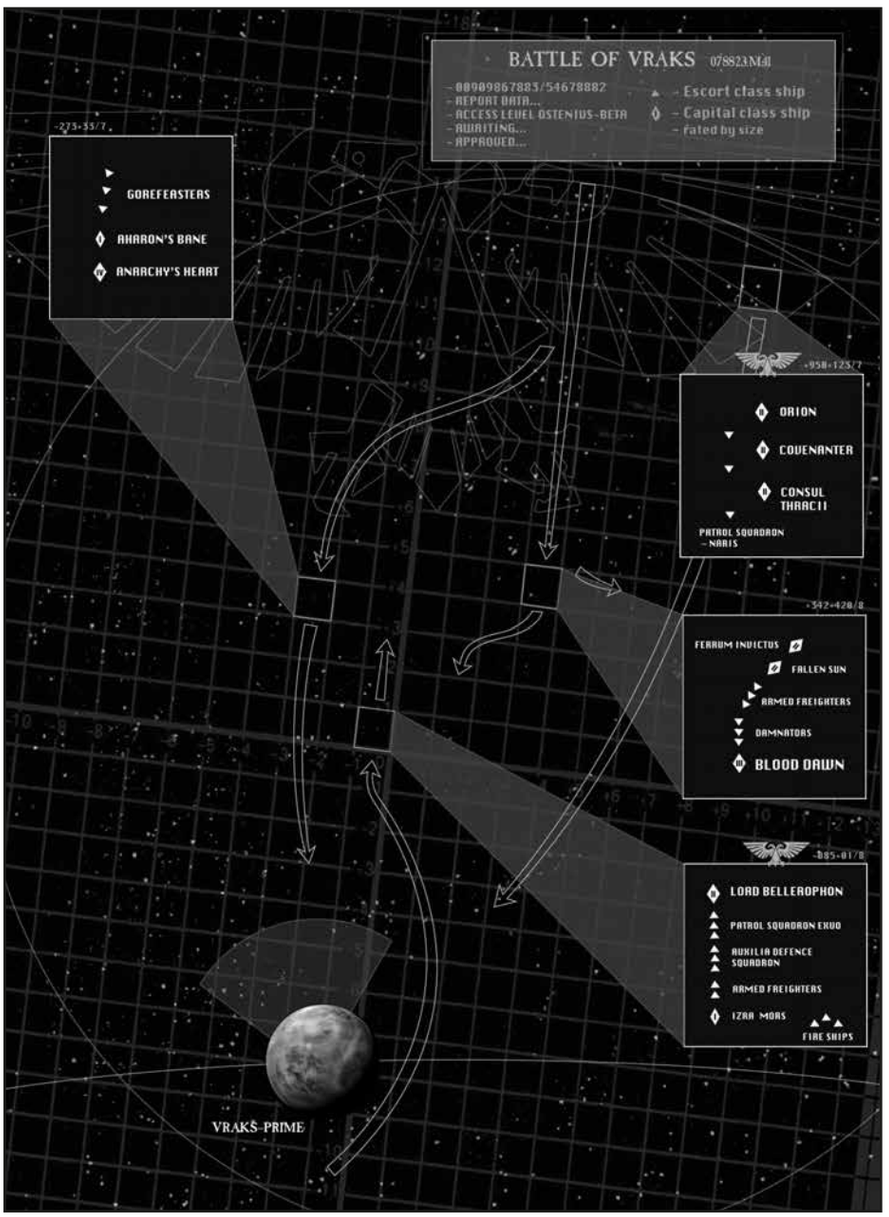
Mahzur's aim was to cut off the enemy fleet's approach to Vraks and prevent any planetary landing. He had his work cut out for him, his ships were flat out at flank speed, straining their reactors, but he intended to leave Rasiak's fleet to its fate, to draw the enemy's attention and fire whilst he raced for the planet.

The two Chaos cruisers moved to intercept Mahzur's vessels and just as the first engagement faded, a second battle flared into life. The Slaughter class cruiser *Fallen Sun* and the Devastation class *Ferrum Invictus* swung hard about, the *Ferrum Invictus* launching her attack craft and opening fire with long range batteries. Mahzur could not afford to be delayed by the enemy attack, but equally could not ignore them. He ordered his escort squadron and the *Orion* to engage the enemy and hold them off, whilst the other two cruisers raced for Vraks, risking dividing his forces.

Meanwhile, Rasiak was ordering his remaining battle-scarred ships to regroup. His battleline had been scattered and the surviving ships were trying to reform for another pass. Constantly menaced by the Chaos fleet's small escort vessels, Rasiak could not afford to let his guard down. Reforming his fleet was a slow process, given the battle damage they had sustained. Mercifully, the *Anarchy's Heart* and the Aharon's

Bane had both moved towards Vraks, intent on achieving orbit and delivering their payloads to the surface. At least the battleship was out of the battle, even if it meant the siege regiments on Vraks' surface would have to deal with the consequences. The Blood Dawn manoeuvred to launch her re-armed attack craft, this time Dreadclaw assault boats sped towards the crippled Izra Mors, intent on making the stricken giant transport their prize.

It was now that Rasiak ordered his reserves into the fray – the three fire ships. The first targeted the *Blood Dawn*, the second two headed for the enemy ships approaching orbit. It was a brave gamble, aiming his reserves at the biggest enemy vessels in the hope of swinging the battle decisively in his favour. The first fire ship never reached the *Blood Dawn*. Drawing heavy enemy fire, the vessel was soon ablaze and detonated harmlessly in deep space, taking its crew with it. The second fire ship was caught in a salvo from the *Anarchy's Heart* and was also vapourised in a catastrophic explosion well short of her target. The third, although hit, made it through the salvo and, with its plasma reactor throbbing at overload, powered towards the *Aharon's Bane*. The massive transport, once a merchant vessel but long ago captured, was packed full of thousands of troops ready to land on Vraks. Tens of thousands of howling Chaos worshippers, mutants, beastmen, renegades and the wretched scum of the galaxy were packed into the holds. Already approaching orbit the massive vessel could not take evasive manoeuvres and the fire ship was approaching like a thunderbolt. Her bridge crew ignoring instructions to abandon ship to steer her directly into the *Aharon's Bane.*



The fire ship hit the *Aharon's Bane* in the stern quarters. The merchant vessel's hull buckled and collapsed as the fire ship impacted, crushing decks and tearing a rend deep into the rearmost engine rooms. Seconds later the explosives detonated in an almighty explosion that tore the rear of the transport apart, scattering debris into orbit as the ship's plasma reactors suddenly vapourised, adding to the destruction. Far below on Vraks, Imperial Guardsmen watched as a sudden bright new star flickered into existence and burned fiercely above their battlefields.

In high orbit the big transport was crippled and listing, wildly out of control with no drives to counter the ship's momentum – critically damaged by the collision. Already caught in Vrak's gravity well she started to plunge planetwards. Onboard the *Lord Bellerophon*, the bridge crew were cheering the impact, watching their monitor screens as the *Aharon's Bane* began its death plunge, streaming fires from within its rear decks. And so the transport went down, burning through the atmosphere as the remaining bridge crew wrestled for control of the ship. Was her super-structure still strong enough? Could she survive the stresses of atmospheric entry, or would she simply burn-up and be torn apart?

The transport's death-plunge turned her into a fiery comet. Seen from the surface it was a streak of fire burning high in the sky. It tore through the atmosphere, trailing flames, but the ship's armoured prow remained intact and its thick ceramite shielding kept the vessel behind safe. The fickle tides of fate, no doubt under the influence of the dark gods, kept the *Aharon's Bane* together and she burst into Vraks' atmosphere, all the time shedding debris, but deep within her sealed holds the raving, insane followers bayed to their masters as the vessel fell. Despite being terribly damaged, the bridge crew regained some control, by some god-granted miracle they found the power to break the vessel's wild descent. The

Left: Brace for impact! The Lord Bellerophon takes a direct hit.

ground was rushing up to meet the *Aharon's Bane*, but she was a vessel build to withstand the rigours of travel through the warp, and her hull was old, but very strong.

The *Aharon's Bane* impacted with the ground close to the Chaylia Plateau, tearing a great gouge into Vraks' surface, throwing up a dust cloud that could be seen half way round the planet. Like a meteor strike the *Aharon's Bane* punched a crater into Vraks' surface, grinding along on its belly until it came to rest in a steaming, twisted wreckage of steel, girders and bent plating, like the bones of some ancient behemoth sea-creature. The transport was surrounded by a pall of dust too thick to see through. For kilometres across the planet's surface, the ship left its scattered remains. Many within had been crushed by the crash landing, but many more had not. From within the hold the hordes slowly began to emerge, dazing and blinking onto Vraks' surface.

Onboard the *Lord Bellerophon's* bridge, elation at the successful detonation of the fire ship had turned slowly to dismay at the dawning realisation that the transport was going to hit Vraks' atmosphere. The officers on board the *Lord Bellerophon* had watched the enemy vessel plunge down through the atmosphere and then lost track of the vessel inside Vraks' stormy atmosphere. Could any ship have survived that? Only by the intervention of the cruellest of fates. Rear Admiral Rasiak called his bridge back to order, regardless of the *Aharon's Bane's* fate there was still a battle to fight. The remains of his fleet had regrouped, and he was still trying to make contact with Rear Admiral Mahzur to co-ordinate a joint attack. The enemy was not defeated, but neither was he.

Whilst the *Aharon's Bane* fell, the *Anarchy's Heart* manoeuvred into low orbit, and was even now casting hundreds of drop ships and landing craft down onto Vraks. The Alpha Legion had gathered together their allies, other warbands keen to seek battle and plunder. Waves of Dreadclaw assault pods rained down onto Vraks, carrying bands of Chaos Space Marines to the war below.

Rear Admiral Mahzur knew he was too late to stop the *Anarchy's Heart* seeding Vraks with her evil cargo, but he still raced onwards in the hope that he could engage and destroy the mighty battleship, a prize worthy of the highest honours of the Imperial Navy.

Behind him the Dictator class *Orion* was locked in battle with two enemy cruisers. Supported by the Sword class frigates of *Patrol Squadron Naris*, the cruiser traded broadsides with the enemy, big guns pounding away at the enemy's shields, whilst squadrons of attack craft scrambled and launched to intercept approaching enemy fighters and bombers. As the fighting closed within range and the guns tore into each ship's hull, the *Orion* saw two of her escorts destroyed. The first took a salvo of powerful laser blasts in a direct hit amidships. The lances blasted clean through the frigate, tearing it in two. The second was destroyed as she closed with the *Ferrum Invictus*, bravely firing until the last, as squadrons of enemy bombers mercilessly pounded her hull, until it was breached on every deck, many of her crew were sucked out into the void, leaving her as another drifting hulk. The *Orion* herself had been breached in several places and burst cooling pipes on the starboard hangers had filled the decks with super-heated steam. With all her squadrons already in action, the *Orion* was now in grave danger. The *Ferrum Invictus* was preparing to launch assault boats in an attempt to capture the hard-pressed cruiser. Abandoned to her uneven battle, the *Orion's* captain conceded to his sub-officers that they had done their part. The enemy cruisers had been drawn into this fight instead of pursuing Rear Admiral Mahzur's force, but now the *Orion* was damaged and might soon fall into enemy hands. He ordered the ship to disengage and withdraw rather than continue a fight he could not win. The *Orion* and her surviving frigate escort powered down their active augur systems and engines and silenced their guns. As the Chaos ships continued to seek their target, the *Orion* plotted an evasion course and sort refuge further out of the system.

Admiral Mahzur accepted the *Orion's* exit from the battle. She had completed her mission and bought him the time he needed to close in on Vraks and the *Anarchy's Heart.* The battle was approaching its final act and the *Orion* could do nothing from her isolated position. At least this way she would survive to fight again.

Meanwhile, the crippled *Izra Mors* had finally been lost. She had made a brave stand but was out-classed and out-gunned by the heavy cruiser, *Blood Dawn*. Enemy assault boats smashed into her sides and soon the corridors of the bulk freighter were filled with the din and smoke of close quarters combat. Traitors were cutting a bloody swathe through the merchant crew. Many were trapped and surrendered rather than be annihilated, resigned now to a cruel life as slave-hands aboard the *Blood Dawn*. The transport's captain led the final counter-attack, but he was hopelessly outnumbered. Along the corridors and across the cavernous main holds the battle raged for an hour, men fought with any weapon that came to hand. In the end the bridge fell, and the *Izra Mors* was taken as a prize of battle, lost to the enemy with all hands.

Even as he tracked the progress of Rear Admiral Mahzur's two cruisers, Rear Admiral Rasiak was powering up his battle-scarred ship again. He urged his Techpriest Majoris to find him more power for the weapons and to get his void shields back online. He faced the prospect of meeting the *Blood Dawn* and the *Anarchy's Heart* for a second time and it was unlikely the *Lord Bellerophon* could sustain the same punishment again. He issued his orders for the remaining vessels to advance with him. Behind him, in line astern, were the single monitor, the two armed freighters and his last frigate. As he listened to each ship's status report through the garbled and static-distorted vox-speaker in his pulpit he felt the *Lord Bellerophon* suddenly lurch beneath him and an ominous rumbling groan echoed through the bridge. Clinging to his pulpit he could see the bridge officers scrambling for damage reports. The *Lord Bellerophon* continued to slowly keel over, its bulkheads screaming their distress as the ship's great mass shifted, testing their strength to the limits.

Reports came flooding in, the numbers three and four main thrusters had been destroyed. An unseen and untracked torpedo had hit them completely by surprise. It may have been one that had failed earlier in the battle, or a speculative long range shot from a Chaos raider that had evaded detection, but out of nowhere, the *Lord Bellerophon* was suddenly crippled. Without her thrusters she could not hope to lead a second attack to assist Mahzur. Without the cruiser to lead them in, the other small ships could not face the heavy cruiser and battleship that now sat between them and the planet. Mahzur's two cruisers were racing into battle alone. Rasiak ordered a message be forwarded to the *Consul Thracii*, he was disengaging due to crippling engine damage and would limp away out of the system as best he could. Onboard the *Consul Thracii*, with just the *Covenanter* in close support, Rear Admiral Mahzur was on his own.

The crippling of the *Lord Bellerophon's* engines turned the battle decisively in the enemy's favour. They still had four capital rated ships still in the fight, including a battleship and heavy cruiser.

The Imperial Navy could now muster just two cruisers. It was obvious that the Vraks system had been lost. As news of the loss of the *Lord Bellerophon* reached him, the Captain of the *Covenanter* requested that they call off their attack run against the *Anarchy's Heart* and disengage. Rear Admiral Mahzur accepted that his intervention had come just too late to save the day and gave the *Covenanter* permission to withdraw. He would not. To Mahzur it seemed that Rasiak had betrayed him by not supporting him. Rasiak had failed in his duty as an officer of the Emperor's Navy and he gave instructions that the Captain of the *Covenanter* should see to it that these opinions were passed to a board of enquiry on Cypra-Mundi. Rear Admiral Rasiak might survive the battle but he should pay for his failure with his career. For himself, Mahzur would not return to base with his tail between his legs. His only chance for glory now was the destruction of the *Anarchy's Heart.* The Emperor stood at his shoulder as he ordered the *Consul Thracii* to ramming speed.

It was foolhardy bravery, the *Consul Thracii* was entering a killing field, thick with enemy guns including those of the defence laser silos on Vraks. Soon the cruiser was buffeted by incoming fire and taking hits from all sides. The *Anarchy's Heart* soon had her biggest lance batteries and turrets locked-on to the approaching flagship and was pounding away. The *Consul Thracii's* armour prow shook under the impacts, armour plates feet thick were being burnt away by the energy beams as they smashed into the *Consul Thracii's* prow. The ship's captain requested that the attack be called off. They wouldn't make it to their target, already most of the void shield generators had been destroyed. Mahzur's response was to have the captain arrested by the ship's commissar and take direct command of the ship himself.

Rear Admiral's Mahzur's single-handed attempt to ram the enemy battleship was the stuff from which Imperial Navy legend is made. It was a heroic but doomed act that cost Battlefleet Scarus a good Gothic class cruiser and the Rear Admiral and his crew their lives. Officer cadets on Cypra-Mundi still argue to this day, was the attack on the enemy battleship the height of bravery or foolhardy beyond redemption?

As Mahzur's ship was torn apart by repeated enemy blows, nobody ever gave the order to abandon ship but soon the escape pods and any craft that could fly were scattering from the dying vessel. Many would only escape to be captured by enemy vessels. Others fell into Vraks' gravity well and joined the rain of assault pods now falling on Vraks' surface. Mahzur stayed on the bridge as it was engulfed in flames and toxic smoke. A junior flag-lieutenant tried to drag him away but the Rear Admiral refused to leave his post, standing erect and to attention as if back on the cadet's parade ground, as the flames surrounded him. His mind had cracked. Soon he too was engulfed in flames and the *Consul Thracii* was adrift, another burned out hulk.

The battle had turned the immediate area of space around Vraks into a graveyard of such hulks. Debris from vessels and the abandoned hulks of eleven Imperial Navy ships now littered the area. The butcher's bill had been a costly one. They had lost the *Consul Thracii*, the largest capitol ship to be destroyed. With her had also gone four Sword class frigates, two defence monitors and the heavy freighter *Izra Mors*. The three freighters converted to fire ships had also been lost. Added to the losses was the damage to just about ever other vessel. The *Lord Bellerophon* had survived, but barely and would need years to be re-fitted and made ready for duty again. Likewise the *Orion* was heavy damaged. Only the *Covenanter* had survived with slight damage, fit to continue her duties.

Of the enemy fleet, kills could be confirmed on the *Aharon's Bane* and at least four Infidel or Iconoclast raiders. But the enemy had seized total control of the Vraks system and were now free to unload their cargos of troops to the surface. The *Blood Dawn* would launch more Dreadclaws, all full of Khorne worshipping Berserkers, including the infamous Berserkers of Skallathrax and the Skulltakers warband of the Warmaster Zhufor the Bloodreaver, himself believed to be a trusted lieutenant of Abbadon the Despoiler. In all, tens of thousands of new troops would land on Vraks, screaming their insane prayers and liturgies and eager to kill in the name of their blasphemous gods. The *Ferrum Invictus* unleashed a large warband of Iron Warriors, whose expertise in siege warfare would aid the defenders of Vraks greatly.

Defeat in the Battle of Vraks would also cost the Krieg siege regiments engaged below heavily in blood and ultimately cost them the victory that the last ten years of hard trench warfare had placed within their reach.

CHAPTER EIGHT
BREAKING THE DEADLOCK

"For these men, there can be no 'after Vraks'. "

Commissar Oblonsk, 19th siege regiment.

The Greatest Obstacle

At 124822.M41 the 468th siege regiment had cracked the second defence line, and the floodgates had opened. With Krieg forces pushing forward on all fronts, the renegade forces had been forced to retreat or face encirclement and assured annihilation. Recoiling from their positions the enemy forces left behind their rearguards to slow the pursuit and rapidly fell back to the inner defence line, where they could stand and fight again.

Encircling the Fortress of Vraks along a front of 150 km, the inner defences was no single line of trenches, but a zone of heavy defences up to 8 km deep. It was thicker again than the previous two defence lines, which had already taken nine years of fighting to be broken. The inner defence line was the oldest and best of Vrak's citadel's defences. Ever since Vraks' founding as an armoury world and the establishment of the Departmento Munitorum storage facilities, the Imperium had been building defences to protect their valuable war materiels. Subsequent planetary governors and Administratum overseers had continually added to the defences with ever more ambitious schemes, and as more and more underground warehouses were constructed, so more defences were deemed necessary.

The defences themselves consisted of well-planned and sighted trench lines, bunkers, pillboxes, gun emplacements, hardened artillery firing pits reinforced with sandbagged redoubts and supporting positions. Underneath were labyrinthine bunker complexes and shelters, buried safe from enemy artillery. All had interconnecting fields of fire to turn each approach into a killing zone. As before, the defence line was further protected by belts of razorwire, thousands of tank traps and dense minefields. Unlike the previous two defensive belts, this one was supported by Vraks' large arsenal of defence laser silos. The defence lasers' primary role was to protect the citadel and starport from direct assault from orbit. These huge lasers could target and damage enemy spacecraft, but could also be used as heavy artillery on the ground. The defence lasers' range was such that they could easily engage the Krieg attackers and the defence laser bunkers would be targets for the Krieg heavy artillery, but each had been constructed to protect it from an orbital bombardment, so it was unlikely any land-based artillery would be powerful enough to destroy them. All of this made the inner defence lines a daunting prospect for an attacker. Worse yet, the traitor forces of Cardinal Xaphan had had a decade in which to reinforce them, pre-sight guns and artillery and have every inch swept by fire.

Before its sudden fall to Cardinal Xaphan's uprising, Vraks had been considered impregnable. Only the inexhaustible might of the Imperium with its endless resources of fighting men and war-supplies could have considered attacking Vraks' defences head on, and even the seemingly unstoppable war machine of the Imperial Guard had taken the best part of a decade, at the cost of 4,000,000 dead (and many more wounded), to batter its way to the inner defence line.

Many amongst the 88th siege army's high command believed they now faced the army's greatest obstacle. The inner defensive zone had been reinforced and upgraded since Vraks' founding. Beyond it lay the fortress' curtain wall and within that, perched atop a volcanic outcrop stood the fortress itself, the nerve centre of Vraks. Both were well defended, but they were immoveable obstacles that could be pulverised with heavy artillery. The inner defence line was not a single target and the siege regiments in the front line would have to begin the slow process of attrition and small gains at high cost to eventually breach it. Once inside the inner defence line, they believed the curtain wall and fortress itself would fall relatively quickly.

Small Gains

The High Commander of 88th Army, Lord Commander Zuehlke, observing from his distant headquarters on Thrace Prime was keenly aware that he had been given 12 years to recapture Vraks. Twelve years with the full support of the Departmento Munitorum for supplies and replacements behind him. His campaign plan had been brutally simple and carefully laid, with great care given to the logistics required and little thought of the casualties it would entail. He now had just three years left to complete his mission. Given what still faced them, no staff officers seriously believed that the 12 year timetable could be maintained. What happened when they ran out of time nobody yet knew. Most likely it would mean failure and defeat, because the intensity of the war would no longer be maintained, supply priority would slip, regiments might be withdrawn and re-deployed and so the prospect of ultimate victory would recede, leaving the 88th Army trapped in a war they could not win. Cardinal Xaphan might not have realised it yet, but if he could last three more years, then he would have ridden out the storm and survived. His forces had also suffered the horrors of trench warfare and heavy losses, but somehow they had summoned up the strength to endure the strain of nine years of total war. They had a fought a defensive campaign and bled the Imperium's forces whilst minimising their own losses. They still had the stockpiles, the men and the will to fight on.

Lord Zuehlke's problem was straight forward. Time was against him, hence a renewed offensive was of the utmost importance, but the commanders on the ground were reporting that their efforts to crack the second defence line had worn their fighting strength down. The losses in men and equipment had been staggering. The enemy continued to fight hard, at times fanatically. To renew the offensive against the next line of bunkers and trenches would be futile and just result in more losses for no gain. They lacked the fighting power to make any worthwhile inroads. The 18 siege regiments of the 88th Army needed time to dig in deep and re-supply, to rebuild their strength for the new offensive that would see them tear into the enemy again. In the meantime they would continue to harass the enemy with artillery fire, trench raids, and small attacks aimed at draining resources, but an all out offensive was impossible. Of course a lull in the fighting also gave the enemy time to recover, re-arm and

Above: Malcador heavy tanks advance across no-man's land.

ROGUE PSYKER

Before Cardinal Xaphan's apostasy, the secure dungeon facilities on Vraks were used to provide temporary housing for Inquisitorial prisoners and tithed psykers from nearby worlds awaiting transfer to the League of Black Ships. Not long after Vraks' rebellion, these Rogue Psykers were found to be at the forefront of the heretical forces, often twisted and augmented in an attempt to increase their baleful powers.

1. EQUIPMENT AND AUGMETICS
This Rogue Psyker has been subjected to cybernetic implantation and equipped to increase and control its powers and allow its masters to control them. Clearly visible are the drug reservoirs for an auto-injector rig designed to carry a cocktail of powerful stimulants and chem-crafted psi-boosters directly into the Psyker's bloodstream analysis of recovered samples has noted Slaught, Ghostfire Tincture, human blood plasma and other as yet unidentified substances in the mixture. Also shown are spinal-fused Ætheric wave-spars designed to channel and bleed away excess psychic energies, along with crude warp-conduction bracers and a totemic psi-focus crafted from a severed human head (probably of another psyker). These devices enable the Rogue Psyker to more easily focus its powers into a destructive form.

Many similar devices have been tested for use on Scola Psykana sanctioned psykers in the Emperor's service, but found to be too unpredictable or to boost powers to dangerously uncontrollable levels (use of most such devices is now proscribed by Inquisitorial order).

2. BLASPHEMOUS SYMBOLS
As with many of the heretical psykers, shown clearly here inked into the Rogue Psyker's flesh (and in some reports alternately stitched or carved) are a number of unknown glyphs and occult formula, as well as blasphemous symbols of the eight-pointed star. It is likely that as well as being used as an expression of vile belief, these symbols served some definite purpose, most likely to further increase the Psyker's power and also to invoke and possibly contain daemonic energies drawn from the warp. Just who brought such forbidden knowledge and dark arcane lore to Vraks remains unclear, but its use became increasingly widespread as the conflict wore on, appearing increasingly not just inscribed on the skin of these malign creatures, but used as votive markings by the renegade rank and file, who were in all likelihood totally ignornant of these symbols' true portent. Further investigation has been recommended, with the capture of a heretic rogue psyker a priority for any Inquisitorial forces operating on Vraks.

3. PSYCHIC MANIFESTATIONS
Unsanctioned by Imperial conditioning and often little more than the playthings of Chaos, the Rogue Psykers in the Vraksian renegade forces displayed a bewildering variety of tainted powers and their mere presence was often accompanied by psycho-kinetic and electromagnetic disturbances, freak temperature anomalies and other strange phenomena.

The manifest abilities and witchcraft of these heretics is equally diverse; some are seen to levitate above the battlefield, burning their foes with tainted lightning or boiling blood, others are able to invigorate their allies with unholy fury, while some transformed into seething monsters themselves, or we even able to cloud the minds and crush the wills of the loyalist troops, turning soldiers against their comrades with their malign influence. In all cases the designation of Rogue Psykers as a priority target quickly became a standing order in the Vraksian conflict and with good reason, as the atrocities perpetrated by these renegades far outweighed their limited numbers.

4. TOTEMIC HEAD
This psyker is carrying the severed head as a totem, in the belief that the power of a former psyker can be harnessed and used to contribute its power to the current bearer. Such beliefs are not uncommon amongst the primitive societies of the galaxy and many remain in wide usage despite the preachings of Missionarus Galaxia missionaries.

Many psykers also find their powers are enhanced by the use of a psi-focus, a single device (often a staff) that aids concentration whilst the psychic-energies are being channeled through their mind. Much Schola Psykana training involves mastering the psi-focus. This totemic head may also be acting as just such a focus.

Rogue Psyker, identity unknown, encountered during the renegade counter-offensive against the 261st regiment. This psyker accounted for numerous causalities during the heavy fighting including the death of 9th company's entire command section, before being finally brought down by concentrated hellgun fire.

re-organise his defences.

With any hopes for an immediate offensive quashed, the Death Korps began their slow, remorseless advance. Digging trench lines as they went, they moved up to their new frontline, surrounding the inner defence lines. All the time harassing enemy fire threatened sudden and unexpected death, but the work continued, day after day, week after week, and the landscape of Vraks became riven by a maze of dug-outs, communication and supply trenches running back as far as the second defence lines. This avoided the necessity to use the surviving service roads, which had long been pre-targeted by enemy artillery whose accurate barrages made movement dangerous as clusters of shells suddenly fell without warning.

The Assault on Mortuary Ridge

In sector 558-470, the 468th regiment of the 46th line korps, holding the korps' right flank found itself faced with a difficult tactical situation. Their sector of the front faced a low ridge, with their frontline running along a shallow valley, overlooked by enemy positions. It was obviously not the place to dig-in for long, exposing the forward companies to plunging fire. Their choice was either to pull back out of range but then leave a large no-man's land which would eventually have to be re-crossed, or to press on and attempt to gain the ridge and wrestle control from the enemy.

The 88th Army command urged the 468th regiment to move forward and gain a foothold. From this sector there were a series of low ridges running roughly south-eastwards, and each in turn would require capturing as they provided the enemy with the best firing and observation positions for kilometres in every direction. An assault was ordered up the ridge which the guardsmen, with their typical macabre sensibilities, titled 'Mortuary Ridge'.

Unable to commit to a full-scale, set-piece regimental attack, the focus of the assault would be on a smaller, closer fight with limited objectives. For now the 468th would not seek to drive deep into the enemy lines, only to force the enemy off the immediate higher ground above them. In order to prevent enemy reinforcements from reaching the battlefield, the regiments on either side would be required to launch their own diversionary assaults, to keep pressure up and prevent enemy troops re-deploying.

The attack would be carried out along a 4km front, with five companies committed to the battle in the first wave, and a further two in reserve. On the left flank a further two companies of the 468th regiment would be conducting the supporting attack. After previous battles none of these units were at full strength, several were even below half strength. The time for the attack was set at 078823.M41, with tanks of the 72nd company moving up to aid the main effort just before the off. Of the 72nd company, only four Leman Russ were available for action, but further armoured support had been requested. The key to the attack would be the artillery support. The entire regimental artillery strength was in place for the attack, much of it designated to firing a box barrage to further isolate the area from reinforcements. In all 360 guns would be firing, but many were low on ammunition and in a dubious state of repair after constant use in recent weeks, with worn barrels and failing recuperation pistons a common fault, causing inaccuracy in many of the heavier weapons.

Following the preliminary bombardment, mortars would lay a smoke screen before the men and tanks attacked up the bare slopes of the ridge. As they advanced, supporting heavy weapons, such as autocannons and heavy stubbers, would fire a stream of rounds high over their heads to plunge down upon enemy positions to the rear, with the aim of suppressing enemy heavy weapons positions.

The enemy position atop the ridge line was a strong one. A front line of trenches was backed up by a solid defence line that incorporated numerous pillbox positions for heavy weapons. As well as dug-out shelters below, there were hardened bunkers in the line and razorwire, tank traps and minefields in no-man's land. To the left of the assault area was a concentration of defences and firing positions designated as Fort C-585, and another strongpoint in the line called the 'Mortuary Redoubt'. On the rear slope of the ridge were enemy artillery positions, ready to fire a counter-barrage into no-man's land.

In the line stood the 468th regiment's 31st, 33rd, 53rd, 54th and 68th infantry companies. 31st company had the task of clearing the Mortuary Redoubt whilst the 54th faced the daunting task of attacking Fort C-585. Their attack would be supported by the available tanks, including two Macharius heavy tanks released from their reserve companies to help deal with the strongpoint.

The attack time was set at 078823.M41 and in the hours beforehand the forward trenches began to fill up with the assault platoons. Extra grenades and ammunition were issued and a final roll call taken by the quartermasters as the grim figures prepared themselves to follow in the attack's wake and recover any equipment they could.

At 077823.M41 the opening bombardment began. Overhead the sky shrieked with the passage of out-going shells and behind them came the bass rumble of the massive bombard shells as they climbed high and plunged down on the enemy bunkers and pillboxes. Looking out over the lip of a trench through his periscope Captain Fodor, commanding the 54th company, watched as his objective was shrouded in flames, smoke and dust. The barrage crashed across the enemy's defences, rolling like thunder as it moved forward over the rear positions, churning the ground and casting boulders high into the air. The almighty bombardment continued as the forward mortar squads opened fire, flinging smoke shell after smoke shell into no-man's land. All watched as the clouds thickened into a dense blanket that mingled with the dust to form a cloying grey smog. It was time to go. Sergeants barked the orders to advance and hob-nailed marching boots scrambled up the ladders to the parapet and out into no-man's land. Hunched figures could be seen advancing at a steady pace until they vanished from sight into the smoke. Tank engines roared into life and they churned forward alongside the infantry.

As the guardsmen advanced, the artillery fell silent and the enemy's own guns opened fire. From the rear it was impossible to see what was happening in the smoke. On the right flank 33rd company had pressed forward the furthest, advancing beyond the Mortuary Redoubt but were now caught under a lashing crossfire of heavy bolter and stubber rounds from their left. Men were seeking cover in shell holes, the company commander was already dead, killed in the initial salvoes. The 31st company was pressing towards the dangerous redoubt, but again was taking concentrated fire. Soon enemy mortar shells began to land, including incendiary rounds that burst in bright orange and yellow explosions, scattering oxy-phosphorous gel which burned through clothing and skin. It was accurate pre-sight fire and the 31st company's leading platoons were soon forced to go to ground. In the centre of the attack 52nd company was fairing

Top: Squads of the 468th regiment, marshalled by their Commissar, await the order to attack up Mortuary Ridge. Note that an artillery observer spots the fall of rounds for the preliminary bombardment.

Bottom: Field artillery stands ready for counter-battery fire as the thick smoke screen set off to cover the infantry attack up Mortuary Ridge billows across no-man's land.

little better, but its lead platoons were still trying to move forward as rounds whipped overhead, crawling on their bellies towards the enemy trenches. The 54th company was facing the imposing fort and here the artillery had hit in its heaviest concentrations. The ground was littered with deep craters and one of the Leman Russ tanks had already become bogged. The tank was immobilised, but had become a pillbox, firing shell after shell from its battle cannon up the slope at the fort. The infantrymen pressed around the tanks for cover and crept forwards at a slow pace. As they emerged from the white smoke cloud, the enemy were waiting. Pillboxes and bunkers were soon blazing a withering fire. The supporting tanks weaved a path through the craters to return fire. The first Macharius was repeatedly hit, bullets and laser blasts ricocheting wildly off its hull and turret as it returned a suppressing fire from its twin battle cannons, flaying the trenches with high explosives and shrapnel. The second Macharius attempted to find a route forwards but enemy heavy artillery shell landed close by. The force of the explosion tore its right hand tracks away, leaving the armoured behemoth immobilised in no-man's land. The armour wasn't faring well on the churned ground. A second Leman Russ was destroyed by a mine, its crew tumbling from the smoking wreck only to be cut down in turn by heavy stubber fire.

On the left flank of the assault, 65th company was climbing the steepest part of the ridge and it was slow going under intense enemy mortar fire. Behind the attacking companies, the two reserve companies moved into the front trenches to await their turn to advance into the maelstrom. Behind them a company of Deathriders was moving up and awaiting a chance to exploit any breakthrough.

All day the battle raged. Artillery rounds shrieked and screamed, crashing and thundering as both sides matched the other's bombardments with counter-battery fire. In the centre the 53rd had successfully reached the enemy trenches and were now clearing with grenades and bayonet. It seemed here the enemy had fallen back into their strongpoints. More platoons were being pushed forward to reinforce the first success against the inevitable counter-attack. They needed more men and heavy weapons if they were to hold what they had captured. A field artillery battery of quad launchers was ordered across no-man's land to set up in support but was caught in a barrage as it moved up, destroying all its Centaur carriers and leaving the guns scattered and abandoned.

The enemy counter-attacked, launching infantry from the cover of the second defence line in a human wave. Roaring and screaming they charged through the defensive lasgun fire, leaping into the trenches. In a swirling chaotic mêlèe men were screaming, fighting with swords, axes, bayonets and their bare hands. Somewhere in the mêlèe the company's commander had been impaled through the chest and lay dying. Those Krieg guardsmen that did not fall back were killed or captured and the trench was soon back in enemy hands again.

At Fort C-585 Captain Fodor crouched in cover behind the still smoking wreckage of a Macharius heavy tank, trying to direct his forward platoons and identify enemy positions as targets for his own mortars. The smoke screen had lifted but dust still lay thick over the battlefield and the sky had darkened rapidly, threatening one of Vraks' torrential downpours. A stray bullet ricocheted off the tank and hit his helmet, knocking him off balance – but he was otherwise uninjured. Recovering himself, the Captain watched as the remaining Macharius scored a direct hit on an enemy bunker, blasting the reinforced ferrocrete into dust and breaching its walls. The tank jolted forward again, heavy bolters rattling out a stream of shells as the crew inside worked to reload both barrels for the next shot.

Fodor waved his leading squads on and rose from his cover, his command squad at his heels. Pulling his laspistol from his holster he beckoned his men onwards, leading by example. Inch by inch, crater by crater they were closing in on their objective. Soon his squads were hurling grenades into the enemy firing pits and trenches. Within their bunkers and pillboxes the enemy still held out. Fodor raced for cover, sliding into a shallow crater where five Krieg guardsmen already lay dead, bodies torn to shreds by shrapnel. He was close to his objective. With just a few more squads he could carry his attack home and take the strongpoint. Calling for his vox-operator he saw his aide flung into the air, his leg severed after stepping on a mine. Fodor crawled to the wounded man, who lay groaning, blood from the stump of his leg pooling in the mud about him. The captain hauled the vox-caster from his back and called for assistance. Send in the second wave to support him now and the objective would fall, he urged his commanders.

As Fodor battled for his life in no-man's land, the ferocity of the initial artillery exchange slackened as the gunners found their natural rhythm. Back in the Krieg trenches the second wave platoons were still organising themselves and issuing extra equipment when they received the urgent order to attack. Men scrambled to their feet as the Watchmasters roused them to action and they piled over the parapets and out across the fire-raked ground of no-man's land.

A few of Fodor's men had reached Fort C-585. Hunkering down in the enemy trenches and guarding their flanks, they were the furthest forward of the attack which was now stalling, like so many before, in the killing ground of no-man's land under withering fire.

The second wave scurried across the wasteland as a ragged grey tide, crouching low against the continued artillery explosions that still erupted about them. The attacking platoons raced onwards, disregarding the men who stumbled and fell, plucked from their midst by well-aimed enemy fire. They soon overran Fodor's position and raced on to attack Fort C-585, bayonets fixed. Many died as they charged home, but many more leapt down into the enemy trenches or over their sandbags, thrusting and slashing with their long glittering sword bayonets, driving the enemy back. Laspistol still in hand, Fodor himself led the attack against one bunker. Already breached by the Macharius' shells, Fodor could see enemy figures still holding out inside. He gathered the men around him and led them towards the objective, crouching in an enemy trench he worked his way along it, pistol in hand. He instructed those behind to throw grenades around each corner and down into each dug-out they passed. When he was in range he called forward a squad flamethrower to blast the bunker's breach, then he ordered everybody else to follow him and charge the breach.

The flamer roared as its bright orange jet of promethium gushed over the bunker, burning and smoking fiercely. A second blast arched through the breach and ignited all inside. Immediately, Fodor jumped up and rushed the blazing breach, running headlong through the flames, emptying his laspistol as he stormed into the bunker's smoke-filled interior. His men followed and quickly overwhelmed the few enemy inside,

Left: Dreadclaw assault pods carrying Berserkers of the Skulltakers warband plunge toward Vraks in search of fresh victims for the Blood God.

killing them all in hand-to-hand combat. During the fight a stray bullet struck the captain through the wrist, forcing him to abandon his sidearm. In pain, bleeding, blackened and charred from the smoke and flames, Fodor organised the defence of the captured bunker, refusing to retire despite his wound.

The first of Fort C-585's bunkers had fallen to the assault and the others would soon follow, each after a similarly furious attack. As reinforcements arrived, the surviving Macharius tank rolled into position creating a new bulwark for the fortress. The 54th company had captured their objective and now it seemed they had the strength to hold it.

Attacks further along the line had met with little success and most had been forced to ground in the craters and shell holes. As news of 54th company's success spread, the stalled attacks resumed. With 54th company now clearing trenches ahead, the weight of enemy fire had slackened. Soon the 52nd and 31st companies also reported they had achieved their objectives for the day. The first defences of Mortuary Ridge had been captured.

Riding the Lightning

As the 468th regiment's attacking companies were seizing their objectives so the darkening storm broke, shattering the skies with flashes of lightning and rolling peals of thunder. The dark sulphurous clouds deluged the battlefield in a blinding monsoon that quickly turned the planet's volcanic dust into sticky grey mud. As the short but violent storm lashed down, the Dreadclaw assault pods and larger landing craft from the *Anarchy's Heart,* now in orbit high above, plunged down onto Vraks.

The launch bays of the Chaos battleships unleashed their terrible cargo and the gunners turned their weapons upon Vraks below. In trenches and dug-outs across the Van Meersland Wastes, the guardsmen felt the awesome power of the battleship's guns. The orbital bombard that presaged the arrival of the assault force exploded with an earthshaking roar on the already tortured landscape. The air crackled and fizzed with the impact of lance batteries, in places scorching the rock to black glass with the intensity of their heat. Macro-cannon shells tore great holes in the planet's surface, the splintering crash of each round rending the rocks and leaving a thick layer of cordite and dust. The siege regiments had no response to the firepower raining on them from above. No counter-battery fire could suppress this enemy. Trenches were destroyed in single hits, heavy artillery guns were flipped like a child's toy, left smashed beyond repair. Krieg guardsmen scurried for cover as the tempest landed upon them.

Captain Fodor watched the bombardment from his captured, half-ruined bunker, his wounded hand stuffed inside his greatcoat, leaking a red stain across his chest. He saw a great yellow streak of flame race across the stormy sky as a huge shell tore through the atmosphere and streaked earthwards. The distant explosion raised a towering mushroom cloud before the reverberating crash of its detonation reached him. All around fire was falling from the skies. His own trench line at the base of Mortuary Ridge took a direct hit and he felt the shock wave buffet the bunker like an earthquake as it rolled over him.

More lightning split the skies as the drop pods fell, each trailing a fiery comet's tail as it burned into the atmosphere, thrusters driving each towards its target. The sky was full of falling assault pods, plunging through the rainstorm, riding the lightning down onto Vraks. The Chaos forces crashed down onto the planet, each pod springing open to release a horde of baying, bloodthirsty, blasphemous servants of the dark gods.

The orbital bombardment ceased as the assault forces landed. Most had aimed their attack at the frontlines around the inner defence lines. Bands of Khorne Berserkers from the Skulltakers, World Eaters and Berserkers of Skallathrax now roamed the trench lines, attacking with divinely inspired fury wherever they encountered the enemy. This was no frontal assault across no-man's land and

the Krieg defences were not prepared for such a sudden attack. They had very little in the way of anti-aircraft defences, and each regiment's main strength was at the front. Suddenly artillery positions were being overrun and important supply trenches were lost to the enemy. Command dug-outs were attacked and turned into gore-filled carnal houses by the blazing bolt pistols and chain axes of Khorne's psychopathic warriors. Chaos and confusion reigned, just as the Lord of Slaughter willed it. The set piece battles of their carefully organised trench warfare could not help the Krieg guardsmen who found themselves suddenly beset from all sides. Reports of attacks were coming in from distant sectors, long thought to be beyond the enemy's reach.

At Fort C-585 Captain Fodor and his men were suddenly attacked by the crimson armoured traitors of a Skulltakers warband. Each was an enraged, unholy killer with an insatiable lust for blood. The Chaos Space Marines raced from their assault pods and were soon clearing the trenches in savage close combat, piling the bodies of the slain Krieg guardsmen as they advanced. It was a desperate close combat, but the Krieg guardsmen stood little chance. Their opponents were no longer the weak flesh and breakable will of mere men, but Space Marines driven by the power of their insane gods. They were unstoppable, tearing Krieg squads apart in a welter of slaughter. Captain Fodor attempted to rally his troops, but many were already falling back across no-man's land. He saw the Macharius heavy tank firing its heavy bolters as the Traitor legionnaires climbed up its sides and onto the turret. The hatches were torn open and the crew were dragged out screaming. One massive Khornate champion lifted the tank commander clear from the turret, dangling the commander's struggling body by a single hand. It inspected the feeble mortal before a slash of his blood-soaked chain axe decapitated him. The body was thrown aside, blood running in rivulets from the corpse. The champion roared his triumph to the skies then jumped from the turret in a single mighty power-armoured leap and raced on in search of his next victim.

All around him Fodor's men were shooting from the battle-scarred bunker's remaining firing slits. Now it was the Captain's turn to grimly defend the bunker as the enemy closed in. The first Traitor Space Marine to leap into the breach was annihilated by a meltagun blast at point-blank range that turned it and its armour into a charred and smoking slag pile but more soon followed. Fodor's men dived for cover as a grenade detonated inside, the ringing blast stunning them. Another grenade exploded, then another, filling the bunker with blinding smoke. Through the smoke the enemy charged, axes held high, their spinning blades spraying blood. With his uninjured hand Fodor drew his sword and lunged at the first enemy. His thrust was parried aside, the enemy's sweeping chainaxe shattering his blade. The traitor battered him aside, dipping his shoulder and barging into the Captain, sending him dazed and sprawling across the floor. The enemy followed their leader in and soon the bunker was overrun. The corpses of the defenders lay torn and shredded, their severed heads gathered into a gore-soaked pile. The floor was slick with blood which dripped from the walls. Dazed and wounded, Fodor crawled through the gore in search of an exit, but was suddenly plucked from the ground by a powerful grip. Barely conscious he was lifted from his feet, dangling limply he saw the steaming face grill of a red armoured helmet, a baleful light glowing behind its visor. The helmet was blood splattered and bore the engravings of many unholy runes. The power armoured grip tightened around his neck and he began to choke as the Traitor Marine's chain axe spluttered into life. One swift blow added the Captain's head to the gathering pile.

The attack of the Skulltakers saw the 468th regiment thrown back down Mortuary Ridge. The sudden planetary landing had swept them aside and restored the front lines.

Counter-offensive – Disaster at 61-47
The sudden Chaos attacks had thrown the Krieg regiments into confusion and transformed the nature of the siege of Vraks. A slow, static war of attrition had suddenly become a more fluid battle, with the enemy able to strike deep behind the lines. The single long frontline was no longer the only battlefield. Although the sudden attacks caused much damage, as yet the reinforcements did not possess the heavy equipment and weapons to smash the Krieg regiments' defensive positions. Their raids could not hold the ground they had captured

and after the initial shock the Krieg regiments began to recover. In places the frontline had been breached and the enemy had capitalised and pushed it back, in others it had held firm. Over the coming weeks more heavy equipment would arrive from orbit, and the Chaos forces could look to make more permanent gains. The Apostate Cardinal's forces would also look to join the attacks, charging out over no-man's land to attack the weakened frontline positions and reclaim the lost ground. Where once there had been a clear ring of trenches around the fortress of Vraks, now the picture was less clear. In places the frontline remained in the same position, in others it was forced to withdraw as the traitor forces captured and held ground they had lost over a year ago.

The problem faced by the Krieg commanders was that after holding the initiative for so long and dictating where attacks would take place, they had now lost that initiative. Now they were fighting a defensive war, trying to hold their captured ground against furious attacks inspired by the arrival of powerful reinforcements for the Cardinal's rebels.

Greater still was the problem of supplies. The loss of the Vraks system left the 88th siege army stranded with its supply line severed. The replacement men, guns, ammunition, fuel and stores needed to maintain the momentum of the war were all ferried to Vraks from off-planet, and whilst the current stockpiles were still vast, it did mean that these could no longer be replenished. It was a dire situation. How long could the Krieg regiments fight the war with ever dwindling supplies? Lord Commander Zuehlke's staff set to work calculating how long this would be based on all the thousands upon thousands of Quartermaster reports they had received.

As their work began, news of the imminent disaster on Vraks reached Segmentum Obscuras high command on Cadia. Alarmed that after ten years of brutal war the mission on Vraks was in danger of total failure, an investigation was commissioned to determine what had gone wrong. Led by Departmento Munitorum High Logistician-adept Istar Ornus, the investigation would have the power to remove the current high command if it was found to have failed in its duty to the Emperor. News of the impending defeat must also be reported to the Lord of the Departmento Munitorum on Terra and from him it would eventually reach the High Lords of Terra themselves. Their wrath for failure and a squandering of valuable resources would see many careers ruined, and many officers banished to penal regiments or dispatched to face the growing Tyranid menace on the Eastern Fringes. But political intriguing to save face and careers did nothing to save the Krieg regiments facing annihilation on Vraks.

More bad news for the Krieg regiments soon arrived. A new threat was looming. From its impact site west of the Chaylia Plateau, the *Aharon's Bane* was now disgorging new warbands. The ship's crash landing had killed many, but far more had survived and were now preparing themselves for battle. They were a long way behind Krieg lines, and worse still, alongside the insane warriors of Chaos stalked many great war machines, amongst them Titans of Legio Vulcanum.

Like their Space Marine brethren, the Titan Legions had once all been stoically loyal to the Emperor, but during the Great Heresy many had fallen to the machinations of the dark gods and joined the ranks of Horus. Those that had survived Horus' defeat fled to the Eye of Terror, and there, enshrouded in the Eye's warping powers and protected from the ravages of time by its corruption, the Titans remained, only venturing forth to join the ranks of the Chaos armies and Black Crusades as they fought to overthrow the Emperor's divine rule.

This new threat had 160 kilometres of Vraks to cover, but were advancing unopposed. The Krieg regiments of the 1st Line Korps were alerted to the army's presence only when it had by-passed the cavernous Mora gorge and was approaching sector 60-53. With the rear of 1st Korps' lines under direct threat, the 88th siege army had to move fast to intercept the enemy. It fell to the 101st regiment of the 11th Assault Korps, who were to withdraw from the line en-masse and to quickly reinforce from the other assault korps regiments with extra tanks to meet the new enemy.

The 101st regiment began its move to meet the approaching enemy at 119823.M41. By the time it was in position to launch its counter-attack the enemy had swept a further 50km south, occupying the old second defence line as it went. The strategic situation wasn't good. The enemy in front was attacking and the enemy behind was threatening to cut off the 1st line korps from the rest of the army. All that stood in the way was the 101st regiment, who were preparing to launch an attack in sector 61-47. If it failed then it was likely to cost the army heavily.

At 158823.M41 the battle commenced. Leading were 101st regiment's tanks, advancing by companies in line abreast, each Leman Russ and Macharius kicking up a column of dust as they advanced at a steady walking pace in parade ground order. With them were the assault korps' few titan-hunters, Shadowswords and Stormblades. Behind them followed the infantry on foot, followed in turn by the field artillery, still behind its tows. There was little in the way of heavier artillery as there had not been time to move the big guns and the ammunition they required. This was a mobile war for which the siege regiment was not well-equipped. There had been no time either to conduct any reconnaissance of the ground.

The approaching enemy was a horde of foulness, renegades, sub-humans, mutants-slaves, beastmen, pirates and other fugitives from the Emperor's justice. The dregs of the galaxy who had come to Vraks to gain plunder and win the reward of their gods. They were led and directed by the Chaos Space Marine warbands, veterans of a thousand battles. Amongst them stalked the Titans, their great strides shaking the earth, each broadcasting a dirge of unholy litanies to urge those about them into battle and whip them into a frenzy.

The 1st korps commanding officers, accompanied by their commissar advisors, climbed a low rise from which to gain a grandstand view of the coming engagement. They looked out with their surveyors across a battlefield that was already barren and broken, crater-scarred like the face of a moon. As the columns of dust advanced, they surveyed the horizon for the approach of the enemy, knowing that first to appear would be the towering figures of the Titans.

In fact the first enemy to strike came as a complete surprise as aircraft suddenly materialised in Vraks' turbulent skies. Like angry hornets they plunged down on the advancing tanks, which found themselves completely without anti-aircraft defences. As the bombs fell, lascannon blasts raked the advancing tank squadrons. First one, then another tank blossomed into flames and smoke. Brown geysers of earth and rock began to spout as the well-drilled formations scattered, seeking safety from the surprise first blow. Aircraft had not featured in the Vraks war previously. Suddenly a whole new dimension of the

DEATH RIDER OF KRIEG

1. UNIFORM
The Death Riders wear the same standard issue uniforms as the infantry, including the distinctive heavy greatcoat. The Mk IX helmet is the same, with the extra badge attached to the front, marking the soldier as a Death Rider. The riders are selected for aptitude during the Death Korps guardsman's training on Krieg, and will have already undergone a rigorous series of exercises on the surface of Krieg before deployment to Vraks.

As well as his uniform, a Death Rider wears an ornamental breastplate. This is a cumbersome item, worn as a matter of tradition rather than practicality and many units choose to discard the item, especially when on long-range patrols, in order to conserve weight. It is made of plasteel with a hardened chrome facing.

The uniform is completed by the tall, hardwearing riding boots. These boots are also popular with high-ranking officers, often men who have served with Death Rider squadrons in the past, as they are regarded to be much more comfortable than the low marching boots.

2. EQUIPMENT
The Death Riders' role as a siege regiment's reconnaissance forces (as well as acting as second-wave shock troops during a breakthrough) means they must carry a lot of equipment. Squadrons can operate far ahead or on the flanks of the main forces, and so must be self sufficient. Saddlebags carry rations and other important supplies such as chemical filters, along with bedrolls and spare ammunition.

This Death Rider wears a Type V respirator unit, the same tone issued to grenadiers, with the regulator unit inside a canister and worn on the back.

3. HUNTING LANCE
The Death Rider's primary weapon is his explosive hunting lance. This 3.5 metre long weapon is constructed of a hollow lightweight metal shaft tipped with a spear point, which is also connected to the impact fuse of the weapon's shaped charge. This small explosive charge is constructed to direct the blast and fragmentation forwards the target and away from the user. Once detonated the user is left with only the shaft, which is then discarded. The lance also bears the squadron's pennant. In close quarters combat against densely packed enemy, or in close confines, the lance is very unwieldy and all Death Riders carry at least one back-up weapon. After the initial 'shock' impact of the charge has been expended, a rider will reach for his sabre.

4. SABRE
The sabre is a long, heavy-bladed sword used mainly for thrusting with the tip rather than slashing. The skewer-like 95cm blade is designed to resist buckling in the impact of a thrust delivered at the charge. The blade ends in a sharp 'spear' point and the bowl hand guard gives protection to the hand. The grip's design causes the blade to naturally align with the arm when the arm is extended, in position for a charge using the point.

The rider's third weapon (not visible here) will be a laspistol. Carried but rarely used, except as a weapon of last resort, the heavy pistol is difficult to aim and reload whilst mounted and generally thought to be ineffective as a ranged weapon.

5. DEATH RIDER MOUNT
The Death Rider's mount is a heavily genetically modified version of the original Terran horse that no longer resembles its ancient ancestor. Having been designed to endure the worse battlefield conditions its physique is far stronger than a normal horse's, with its hind legs being able to clear trenches and power the creature through thick mud or over rubble. Its splayed feet are also better adapted to moving in heavy terrain.

The creature is almost hairless. It no longer has a tail, only the remaining stump and its mane has almost entirely been bred out, leaving just short bristles which do not become tangled and require no maintenance. Its neck is longer with broader shoulder and girth.

Psychologically these creatures are far more aggressive than their domestic ancestors, with drug injectors being used to make the creature fearless in the face of an enemy. In battle the creature will charge directly into an enemy and will not be startled by weapons fire or explosions. Due to the creature's unstable body chemistry, it has to be constantly monitored by its rider and stabilised with additional chemicals. This means the creature can sustain injuries that would kill lesser creatures, but leaves many with horrible scars from previous wounds. It is equipped with armour to protect its head and a respirator system to protect it from poison gases and toxic atmospheres.

These creatures are grown in vitaegenic cloning vats deep below Krieg, with production being carefully monitored by Adeptus Mechanicus Biologis. Each creature is individually number branded for identification purposes.

This is Death Rider 094-343-18560-22-Barjnak of the 19th squadron, 143rd siege regiment, seen here during the 760824.M41 offensive in sector 554-461. He is wearing the standard issue uniform of a Death Rider of Krieg.

Right: Death Riders return from a reconnaissance patrol to track the progress of the approaching Chaos forces.

battle was opened up, and instantly the enemy had aerial supremacy over the entire theatre. With their ammunition expended, the enemy aircraft vanished from the skies as rapidly as they had arrived. Despite their losses, the leading tank companies pressed on. On the horizon the first enemy were now in sight. The bright flash of Titan heavy weapons opening fire could be seen. The lead tanks encountered the first enemy ground troops, Chimera-borne infantry were already in position and waiting to open fire. To the left and right the tell-tale dust columns of advancing armour could be seen.

The Centaur tows had halted and the field artillery pieces were being quickly man-handled to readiness, ammunition carriers coming forward to deliver stockpiles to each gun. Soon the rapid thump of quad launchers was reverberating across the battlefield, their four shells landing in quick succession, small explosions that merged into one and left a thickening cloud of dust smearing the battlefield, obscuring the commander's view.

Now they were relying on vox-relays to get a picture of the battle. At the front it seemed that the first enemy infantry positions had been overrun, smoking Chimera hulls now added to the obscuring haze, but the Titan's long-range weaponry had found its range and was starting to exact a heavy toll. The brown dust columns were turning to blue-black smoke as the tanks were destroyed by the massive power of turbo-lasers, gatling blasters and volcano cannons. The tanks were returning fire, their armour piercing shells whining off the Titan's void shields with electric blue flashes. It was an uneven

FORCE DISPOSITIONS FOR THE SIEGE OF VRAKS

ENEMY FORCES ON VRAKS – circa 841823.M41

VRAKSIAN RENEGADES

Disciples of Xaphan
50,000 (estimated)

Garrison Auxilia
10,000 (estimated)

Labour Corps
1.5 million (estimated)

Planetary Defence Forces
500,000 (estimated)

Militia
1.5 million (estimated)

Frateris Militia
250,000 (estimated)

Other Vraksian Renegades
1 million (estimated)

LEGIONII EXCOMMUNICATE TRAITORUS

Chaos Space Marine Warbands. 11 warbands identified (numbers unknown)

World Eaters sub-factions

Skulltakers

The Sanctified

Berserkers of Skallathrax

Death Guard sub-factions

Lords of Decay

The Tainted

Apostles of Contagion

The Purge

Iron Warriors sub-factions

Steel Brotherhood

Other non-aligned factions

The Faithless
Alpha Legion warband of Arkos the Faithless

Black Brethren of Eyreas
Possible Black Legion sub-faction

Adharon's Reavers

OTHER RENEGADE FORCES

Other Heretical forces
500,000 (estimated)

+++ Compiled by 88th Imperial Guard Siege Army HQ, Thracian-Prime: Thrace sub-sector: Scarus sector +++

+++ For transmission to:
Segmentum Obscurus
Departmento Munitorum
Operational Command: Cadia +++

Traitor Fleet Assets
(identified in the Vraks system)

Anarchy's Heart
Despoiler class

Blood Dawn
Styx class

Fallen Sun
Slaughter class

Ferrum Invictus
Devastation class

Gore Feasters
Iconoclast class

Damnators
Infidel class

Armed Transports
Armed transports

Aharon's Bane
Heavy transport

fight, even with the super heavy tanks in support. One Shadowsword found itself a firing position from which to engage the advancing Titans, but saw repeated blasts flicker off the void shields to no effect. A return blast from a turbo-laser struck the tank's main gun and damaged it. Seconds later a succession of blasts tore straight through the engine compartment and superstructure, immolating the command crew. The surviving hull crew bailed out as the Shadowsword crackled and smoked behind them, its fully charged capacitors threatening to detonate. As the crew sprinted for the rear, the air was thick with fire. Tank rounds and laser blasts by the hundred scorched across the battlefield as artillery rounds started to fall.

On the left flank enemy armour had joined the battle. Led by the ominous, squat bulk of Chaos Space Marine Land Raiders, Predators and Vindicators, the Traitors' armour traded shots with Leman Russ tanks. The momentum of the Krieg attack had already faltered in the face of Titan firepower and soon more hulks were littering the battlefield as the Traitor Space Marines closed in. The battle had raged for two hours, growing in intensity, but vox-reports were soon indicating that the tank attack had failed. The enemy were advancing again, Titans stalking through the smoke and explosions. The 101st regiment's counter-attack had been broken and was in danger of being shattered completely. Orders were issued to pull back and a reserve company of tanks was brought forward to buy more time for an orderly withdrawal. Of the sixteen Leman Russ that had rumbled forward, none returned. Throughout the night the battlefield crawled with wounded and smoke-stained tank crews attempting to return to their lines, whilst the enemy triumphantly reclaimed any damaged vehicles they could salvage.

As the 101st regiment's commanders listened to the bray of voices over their master-vox sets, they could count the smoke columns of burning wrecks before them. Fifty-two black smoke pillars smeared the sky and the dust no doubt obscured more again, as well as those vehicles which had failed to burn. Losses had been heavy, especially in armour. In all, nearly 70 tanks had been sacrificed, including 11 super-heavy tanks, along with 27 artillery pieces and yet uncounted tows and infantrymen.

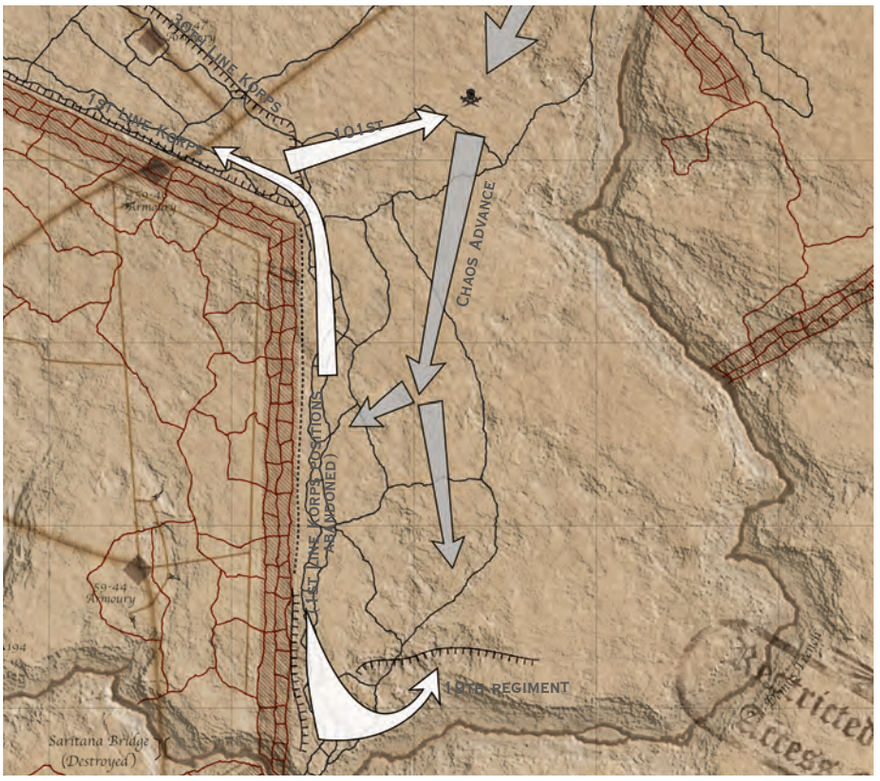
Withdrawals and Retreats

The defeat of the 101st meant that the ring around the fortress could not be maintained. In the aftermath of the battle, 1st line korps was ordered to give up its positions and move westwards, but even then they could hardy hope to avoid the juggernaut that was descending upon them. The eastern flank of the inner defence ring was to be abandoned. In order to save the rest of the Korps' regiments, the 19th regiment was required to act as the rear guard. The order would effectively be a death sentence, as the regiment would now be trapped by the enemy advance, pinned with their backs to the uncrossable Demus trench. Their orders were to fight to the last, forming a pocket of resistance that would buy the other regiments time to reposition against the new threat. Once cut off, the 19th could not be re-supplied and it would not be long before the enemy overran them, especially if they used their Titans. Such uncompromising sacrifices were required to save the strategic situation – if only for a short while.

The 3rd, 5th and 15th regiments abandoned their trenches at 163823. M41, moving north-west and occupying the positions currently held by 30th line korps. The 30th was also to withdraw and establish a new position anchored on the ruins of hab-zone two, with its front line running roughly parallel to the hab-zone's service road to the south-east. They would be reinforced by other units from 11th assault korps, forming the army's backstop. Hundreds of thousands of men and vehicles were now on the move, hurrying to dig new defences as the enemy relief force advanced to meet them.

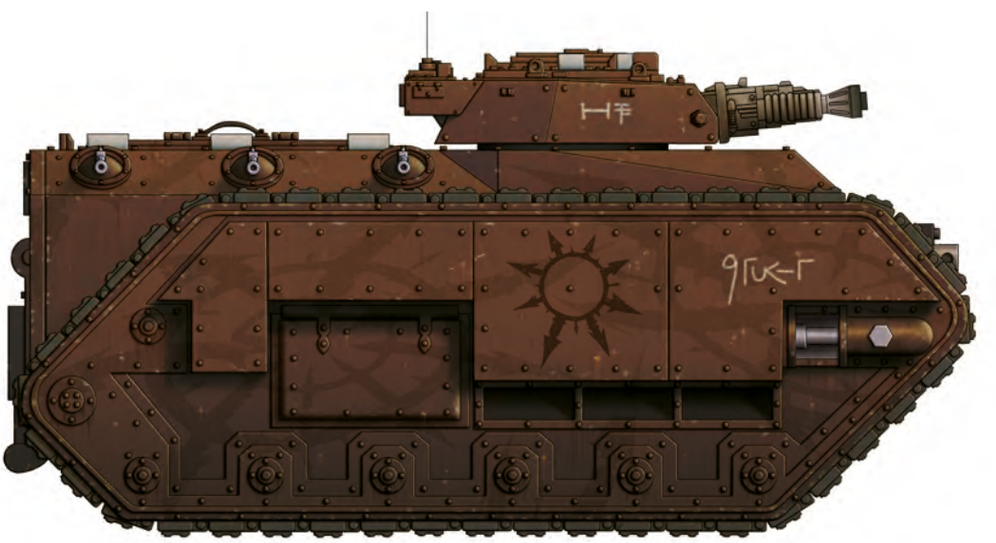
What had once been a war with a clearly defined frontline had become a much messier affair, with the Krieg regiments now forced to face in many directions to meet the enemy. The situation in the eastern sectors had become very fluid. Any slim chance of taking the fortress within the designated schedule was now gone forever.

It would take a major effort just to save the siege of Vraks from ending in defeat.

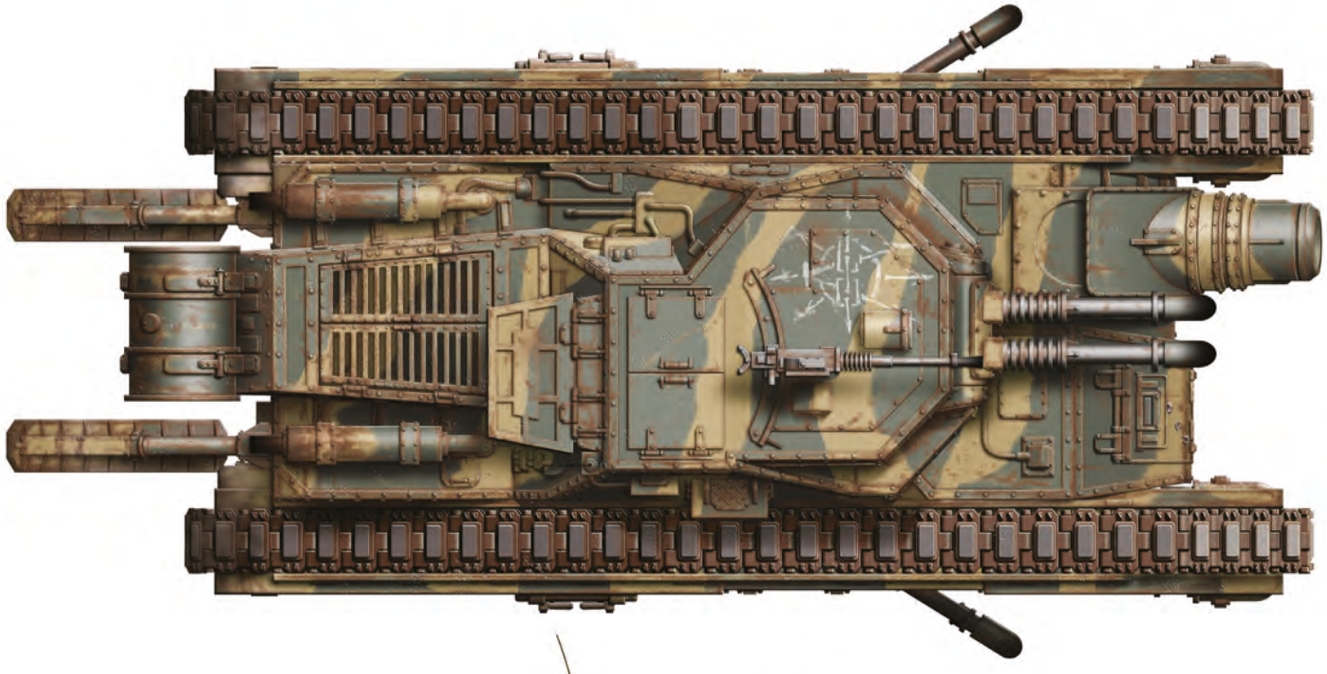


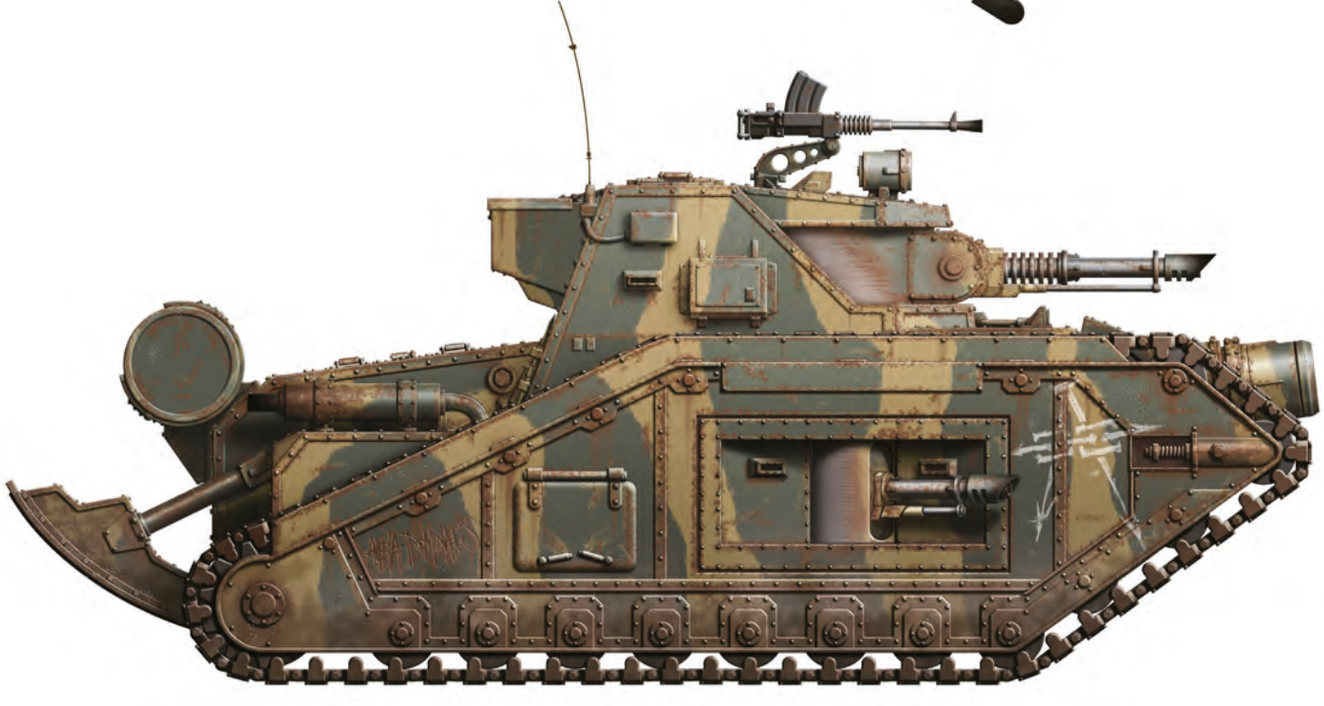
Medusa Siege gun still bearing its camouflage scheme and number from Vraks stores. This vehicle was found destroyed in sector 46-55.

Captured Chimera armed with multi-laser. Note that a damaged panel has been patched.



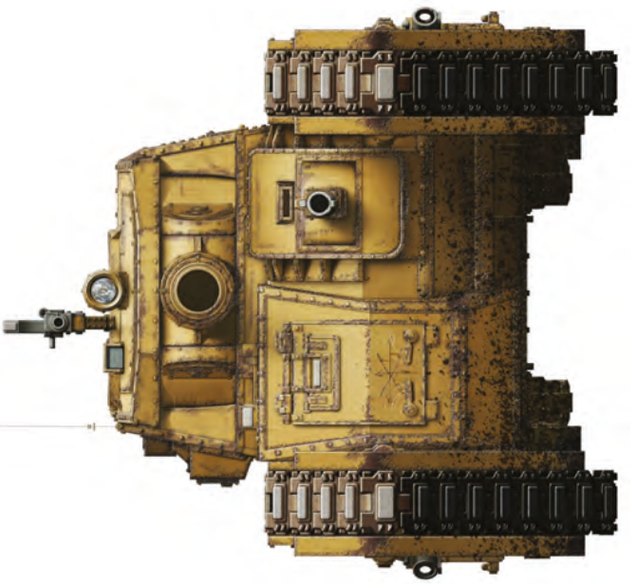
Chimera armed with a heavy flamer. The meaning of the runic graffiti is unknown.

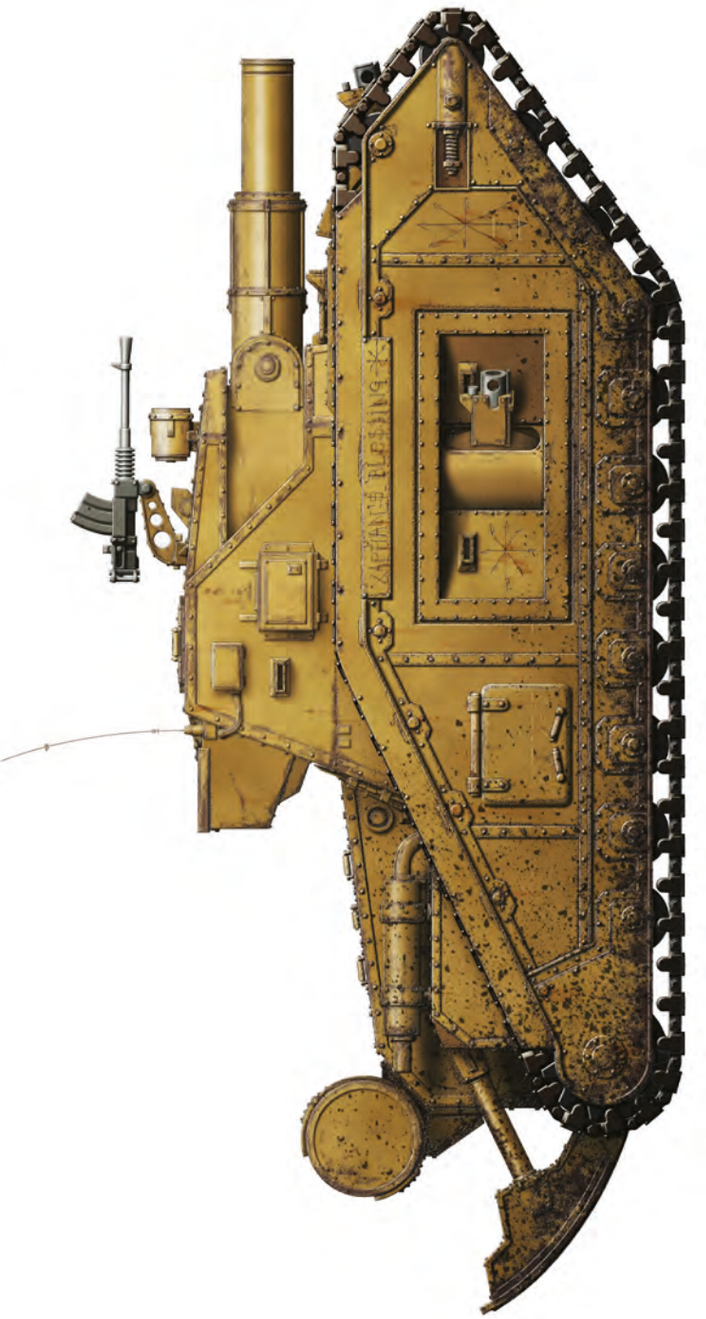


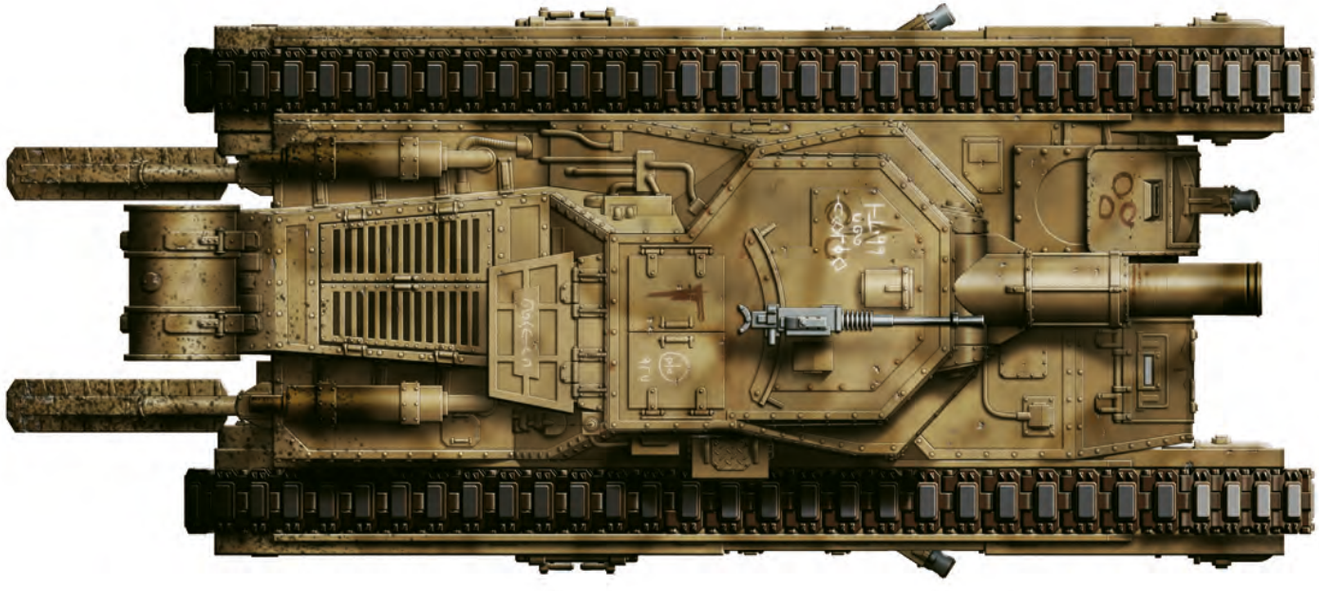


Malcador Annihilator encountered during a counter-attack in sector 54-46. In common with many Vraksian armoured vehicles, this tank still bears an Imperial camouflage scheme and has been deployed directly from storage.

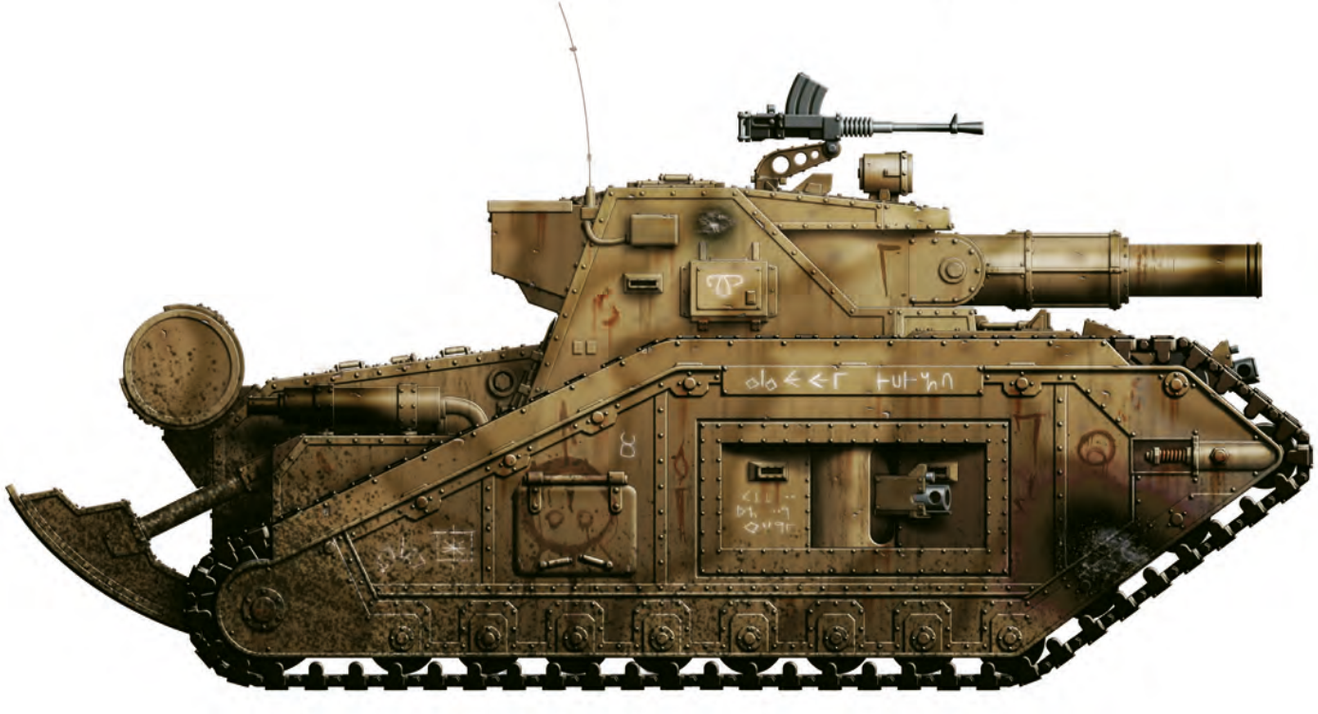
Malcador heavy tank. This vehicle is just painted in a basic undercoat with no additions.

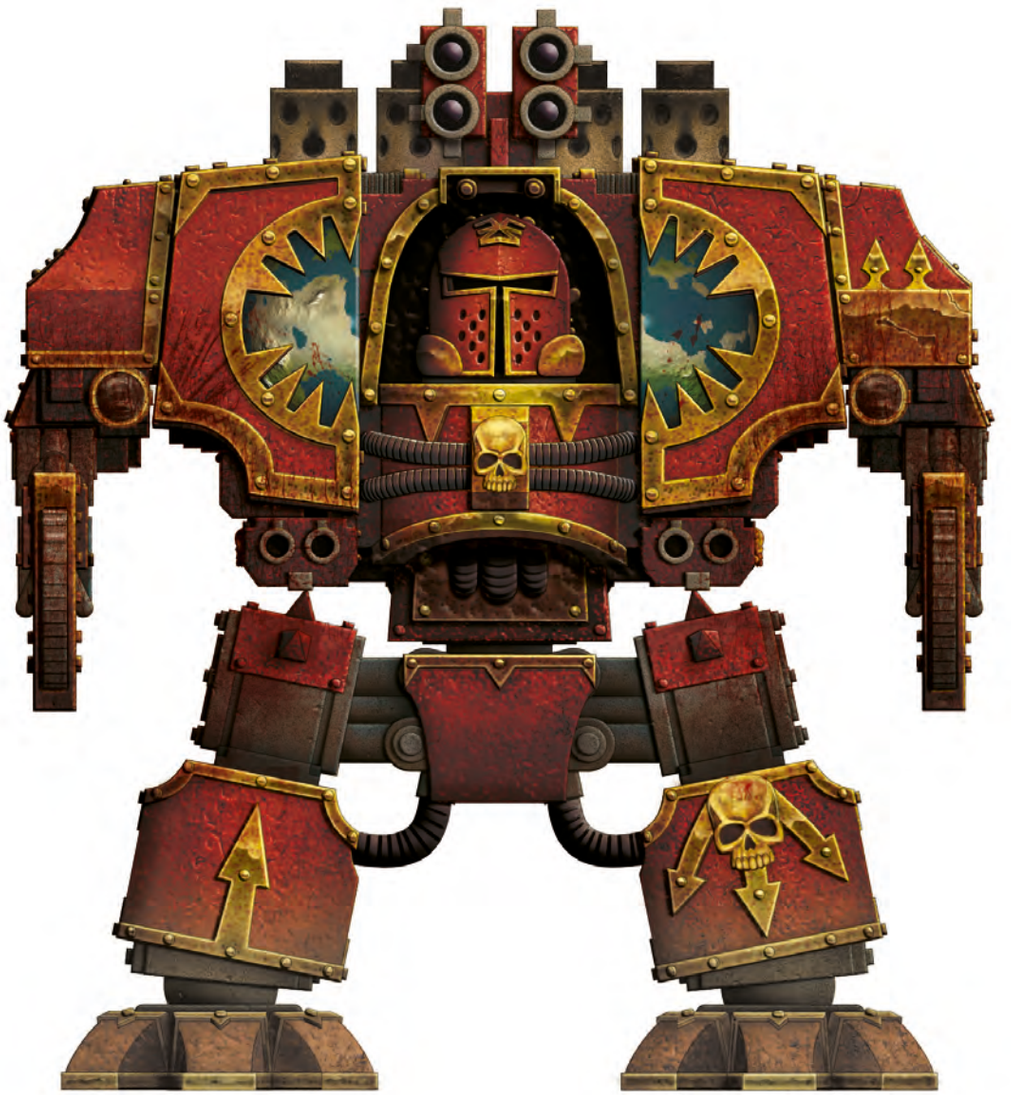




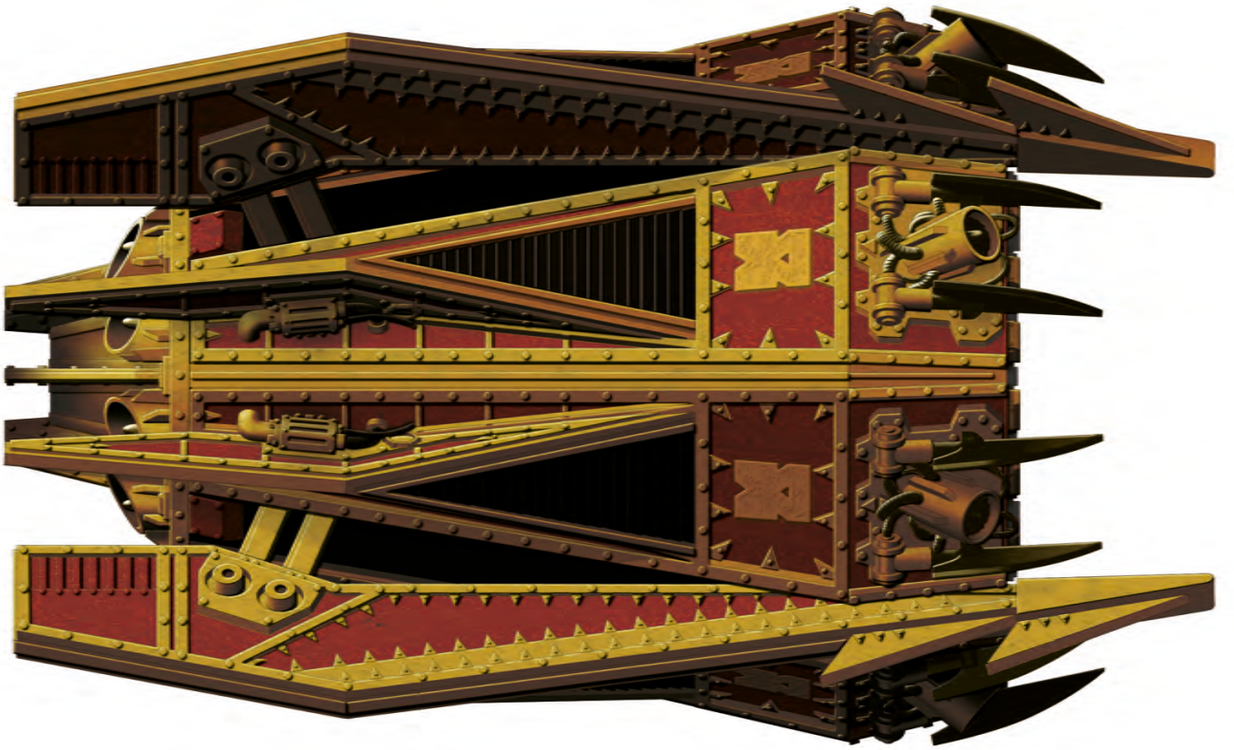


Malcador heavy tank bearing runes of Nurgle. This vehicle has taken (and survived) a direct hit from a meltagun. In this case it is likely that the running gear was destroyed by the impact and the immobilised vehicle has been recovered and the tracks and wheels repaired.

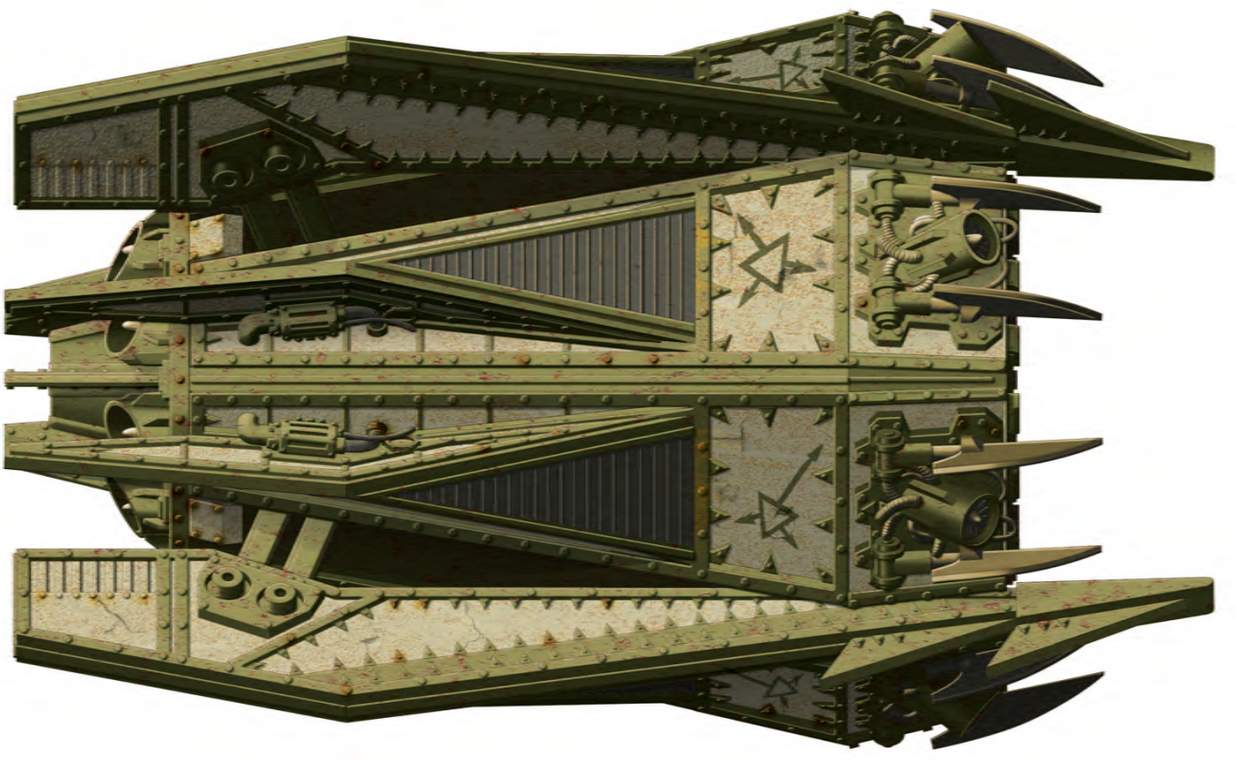




Chaos Dreadnought aligned to the Blood God Khorne. It bears the symbol of the World Eaters, but the Traitor legion no longer operates as a single coherent unit and has fractured into many smaller warbands. This Dreadnought was identified in the service of Zhufor of the Bloodreaver's Skulltakers warband. Note it is armed with two Dreadnought close combat weapons, twin combi-bolters and a havoc missile launcher.



Dreadclaw assault pod of the Skulltakers warband.



Dreadclaw assault pod of the Tainted warband.

CHAPTER NINE
ON THE EDGE OF DEFEAT

'In the Emperor's service, the Death Korps will pay any price.'

– Lord Marshall Arnim Kagori

A New Command

News of the perilous situation now developing on Vraks reached the ears of the Lord Militant Obscurus and his councellors and staff on Cadia. From his massive fortified command centre, he had a view of the entire strategic situation across the whole segmentum. A very powerful man, with thousands of armies at his command and with a direct line of communication back to Terra and the High Lords, it was his staff that had originally conceived the plan to besiege Vraks and appointed Lord Commander Zuehlke. Now it fell to those same men to rescue everything. He had already empowered Prefect Istar Ornus to investigate the situation whose first recommendation was to replace 88th army's command staff. They had failed in their duty and failed the Emperor, squandering the vast resources that had been made available by the Departmento Munitorum.

News of his imminent dismissal made little impact upon Lord Commander Zuehlke. Placid and assured, with the full knowledge that a man of his elevated social rank could not fall far from grace. Zuehlke was already lined up for a command position on the staff of the 7003rd Imperial Guard army, mustering to counter continued Ork attacks by the Great Despot of Dregruk. It was for those beneath him to bear the wrath for this failure. Those that had not already sort appointments elsewhere faced banishment to penal regiments or field commands on the Eastern Fringe to face the growing Tyranid invasions. This was as good as a death sentence for most, as few men who faced the alien Tyranids ever returned.

With the command structure of 88th army being revised, a power vacuum formed. Who was to run this war? There were powerful voices seeking to take advantage of the failure. On the Cardinal world of San Artorus, the Cardinal-Astrals of the Sector claimed that the failure on Vraks was due to lack of faith. The battle should be one to retake the defiled Basilica of St Leonis and liberate the saint's holy relics from the heretics. The arch-heretic Xaphan had been one of their own, and if anybody should bring him to justice it was the forces of the Emperor's Ecclesiarchy. They could provide their own forces to help stabilise the battle on the ground and avert defeat, but only on the condition that they could appoint their own commander. These claims were backed by the Scarus conclave of the Ordo Hereticus, who had their own Inquisitors ready to take command. They would seek to impose the Inquisition's rule on all of the 88th siege army and could induct the whole organisation into their ranks, placing their Inquisitors at the head of each regiment. It was a powerful alliance and lobbying and intriguing to take command of 88th army was ferocious. In the halls and corridors of power, the 88th siege army seemed to be a prize many wanted control over.

But the Departmento Munitorum would hear none of it. The siege army must remain under Administratum control and it was their lines of supply and their materiels the army was relying on. If they could not appoint their own commander, then the priority status of the war would have to be reviewed, warned Prefect Ornus. It was unlikely that anybody who took control could hope to win without the Departmento Munitorum's full support. They might suddenly find that supplies were less abundant and replacement manpower for Krieg regiments was now needed on other battlefields.

As supreme commander, the Lord Militant Obscurus felt it was his right and duty to find a replacement despite being petitioned by all sides. He had a difficult political job reconciling all parties. In the end he reserved the right to appoint the commander of the troops in the field and allowed his most vocal opponents to find men to join the new commander's staff and fill the administration roles. With many unhappy with the final outcome, the command of 88th army would be under pressure to immediately transform the campaign. The Ecclesiarchal lobby still pressing strongly and withholding their support until such time as their influence was sufficient to warrant the deployment of their military might.

The commander eventually chosen to take up this poisoned chalice was Marshal Arnim Kagori, a hard-fighting general with an impressive record of victories. Although now aged, he was seen as a safe pair of hands for the 88th siege army. Like his predecessor he was a nobleman, the scion of a family with a long history of service in the upper ranks of the Imperial Guard. Amongst his large entourage was his personal chaplain, a sign of the Marshal's devout faith in the Emperor. He was also a man of strict routine and fixed ideas of how a war should be fought. He had commanded the 13th Palladius siege regiment during the long siege of Hive Thetis. It was the victory in that campaign that gave him the experience to run the war on Vraks.

Marshall Kagori's first task, after assembling his own staff, was to gather a force to relieve his beleaguered regiments. He needed to quickly break through the enemy's blockade of the system, get new supplies and troops on the ground and re-establish the secure supply lines vital to bring the 88th siege army ultimate victory.

The new commander would mark a change in the Imperium's approach to Vraks. For him, the siege had already dragged on far too long. It was now time to commit more forces for and break the defenders once and for all. The siege regiments had done a good job in wearing the enemy down, now fresh troops and a fresh approach would crush them.

To this end a relief force was gathered. First to be approached for forces was the forge world of Lucius. This mighty planet had strong connections with Krieg regiments and had provided many of the war materiels for the siege. The enemy's Titans needed to be countered and destroyed and the Titans of *Legio Astorum* – the Warp Runners, were called upon. The venerable ruling lords of Lucius agreed. A battle group of Titans would be deployed to reinforce the siege regiments and provide the ultimate in heavy firepower. Only these Titans could hope to match the Chaos Traitor legions. Deep within their forge world base, the great war machines were once again prepared for battle.

Ceremonies were performed, princeps and crews briefed and blessed. Exotic creatures were sacrificed and their blood used to anoint each Titan's foot, symbolic that they would lay the blood of their enemies at the Emperor's feet. Rites of battle complete, they embarked upon their transports for Vraks.

Next, the regiments of Krieg would need a fresh injection of manpower and the production lines of regiments on Krieg was again called upon to provide it. More men, including many specialist engineer companies would be needed in greater numbers than ever. More men, guns and tanks were embarked for the journey to Vraks.

The Imperial Navy would provide the ships and the protection for the relief convoy and also placed a fighter wing and a bomber wing at the service of 88th siege army. These would combat the enemy's complete aerial supremacy and provide the army with the long range strike force it had so far lacked. The slow war of attrition was being upgraded to total war, using almost every means at the Imperium's disposal.

Last Stand of the 19th

The planned new supplies and reinforcements could do nothing to assist the plight of the 19th siege regiment though. It was cut off, surrounded by the enemy with its back to the unbridgeable Demus trench. It had been a necessary sacrifice to save the other regiments of 1st line korps, but that was little consolation for the Krieg guardsmen now trapped and facing certain death.

The instrument of that destruction would be the warbands of the Plague Father – the dreaded Lords of Decay and the Apostles of Contagion. The blighted followers of the Chaos god Nurgle had also come to Vraks and it was a battlefield to their liking. Already devastated by the ceaseless artillery duel, where the dead lay unburied and the ground had become infectious with disease from the decaying corpses of the slain, it would be a fertile ground for Nurgle's followers and his favoured weapons. With the 19th siege regiment trapped, they would become the subjects of the Lord of Decay's special attention and pleasure.

Since the beginning of the war, the Imperium's commanders had suspected that Cardinal Xaphan's forces were in possession of proscribed weaponry. Vraks had once been used as a safe storage dump for chemical weapons that had been forbidden thousands of years ago. It seemed these must have fallen into the Cardinal's hands when the revolt overthrew the Emperor's rule. It was one of the reasons Krieg regiments had been chosen to conduct the siege. They were troops hardened enough to face such weapons of mass destruction without breaking. Chief amongst the chemical weapon stores was the toxin Trimethyline-Phthaloxyic-Tertius, known as TP-III.

TP-III was a horrible combination of highly acidic and corrosive heavy gases. Greenish in colour, it was lethal if breathed in, killing in less than 30 seconds due to massive damage to the respiratory system. Concentrations of TP-III caused acidic burning and rapid corrosion, melting skin from bone in minutes. In strong concentrations it could corrode through metal and armour. The chemical's acidic gases were highly volatile and difficult to control on a battlefield, but it could be devastatingly effective in large concentrations.

So far the Apostate-Cardinal had held his captured stocks in reserve, as his weapon of last resort should the time come when it seemed that all was lost.

The arrival of the Chaos Space Marine reinforcements on Vraks, whilst strengthening the war on the ground, had actually weakened the Cardinal's

Above: The detritus of defeat. Krieg equipment lies abandoned across the battlefield.

position as the ruler of Vraks. Amongst his new allies were men who had no intention of following his orders. The warbands had come for their own purposes and where they did not correspond to those of the Apostate Cardinal's, he was ignored. He had no control over the Chaos Space Marine warbands that now roamed Vraks' battlefields at will, seeking their own glory and following their own agenda.

Even Arkos, the Warmaster of the Alpha Legion on Vraks could exercise little influence and was not inclined too. What was this petty Cardinal's little uprising to him? Only a chance to do the work of far greater powers. Whilst all parties in the loose alliance had been formed with the same goal – the destruction of the Emperor's forces, they had very different ideas of how to achieve it. Xaphan was now hidden away deep within his fortress, enduring the nightly bombing raids and listening to the reports of his corrupt councillors and advisors, chief amongst them Deacon Mamon, the appointed commander of the Cardinal's Disciples of Xaphan. He had little idea of the true situation beyond the fortress walls.

Upon arrival the Nurgle warbands had not plunged directly into battle as the bloodthirsty followers of Khorne had. Instead they gathered their full strength, mustered their followers under the warband leaders and carefully selected their first victims. The 19th siege regiment would be it – they were about to commit a monsterous experiment upon the trapped Krieg guardsmen. This would not be warfare for any strategic gain, but an unholy ritual, a preparing of the ground. They would seek to turn Vraks' already infectious environment into a toxic nightmare of disease and pestilence. To this end they forcibly seized the secret supplies of TP-III and prepared to put them to use. They would show Xaphan's mortal followers that the true nature of the universe was decay and the only way to survive it was to embrace it.

At 711823.M41 the first attacks began. Not with an artillery barrage or bombing raid, but in the eerily cold of dawn a strange light could be seen, staining the horizon in a greenish haze. Steadily the light grew stronger as thickening bilious clouds rolled towards the trenches. Krieg sentries issued warnings as the unnatural fog approached, blotting out the first rays of dawn's light. Thick and heavy it clung to the ground, tumbling into every shell hole and crater. Then it reached the trenches…

The clouds of TP-III had a hideous effect. All Krieg guardsmen had been trained to meet chemical attacks and fight on regardless. They were well equipped for just such events, but against the acid soaked cloud respirators provided little protection. The concentrated acid burned through protective clothing and respirator masks. It melted armour and corroded metal equipment. In minutes it would strip a naked man to bare bones. Then it began to envelope the front lines. Skin blistered and burned as their protective clothes decayed, exposing the guardsmen to the full horrors of the acidic environment. A respirator failure resulted in an agonising death, the acid burning the respiratory system and melting lungs so that blood bubbled up from within, foaming from the mouth and nose of its victims even as flesh melted away to expose white bones beneath. In places the chemical was less virulent and the Krieg guardsmens' protective equipment coped well, but where the gas was densest it destroyed everything in its path. Entire platoons were wiped out in a few nightmarish minutes, turning guardsmen to bubbling, steaming pools of sticky flesh as it struck. As the front line became enveloped in turmoil, the first attack began.

The roar of engines reverberated through the poisonous cloud as the Plague Marines approached, their corroded and corrupted vehicles bouncing across no-man's land. Rhinos, Predator tanks and Land Raiders emerged from the green mist and opened fire. All along the front the followers of Nurgle attacked, quickly taking advantage of the turmoil their heinous chemical attack had wrought. They had crossed no-man's land against virtually no resistance.

The adamantium and ceramite doors of rusted and boil-infected Rhinos and Land Raiders sprang open and out poured the bloated and foul enemy, bolt guns blazing as they spread into firing lines and began the final advance towards the parapets. It was difficult to believe these abominations had once been Space Marines, loyal followers of the Emperor. Now they were a disgusting parody of their former selves. Putrefying flesh hung limply from their pitted and pox-marked power armour. Maggots crawled upon their bodies feasting and fat flies buzzed around them in swarms. For all their grotesque appearance they were still superbly disciplined troops, none of their skill had been lost with their decay – both physical and moral. They attacked with the ruthless efficiency of the Adeptus Astartes, a steady stream of bolter rounds denoting amongst the trenches as the first squads waded the last yards of no-man's land and began to leap down into the trenches.

Just as against the Khornate Berserkers, even the training and morale of the Krieg guardsmen was no match for the supernatural power that drove the Death Guard into battle. They seemed impervious to damage and unstoppable as they swept trenches clear with bolter shells and began tossing blight grenades into dug-outs. These exploded with powerful blasts, spraying more acid and toxins into the air and filling dug-outs with thick noxious fumes. In close combat their powered armour was more than a match for the Krieg bayonet, which was easily turned aside or just snapped on impact. In return the Nurgle worshippers wielded long brutal knives, rusted and oozing unknown poisons. With their massive strength the Traitor Space Marines cleaved through armour and helmets, hacking and slashing their way through the guardsmen as they fought desperately to defend each trench. The Krieg guardsman fought well, standing and fighting to the last. No other Imperial Guard regiment could have withstood the onslaught of acidic gas and bolter fire so well, but they could not hold for long. In desperation platoon commanders called down supporting artillery fire on their own trench lines, and Earthshaker shells were soon screaming in, exploding indiscriminately amongst both sides.

The gas cloud was dispersing now. The fog lifting from the battlefield to reveal more enemy forces approaching. Across no-man's land came a second wave of men, a ragged horde this time of militiamen and mutants advancing through the Krieg counter-barrage, following in the Traitor Marines' wake. They too were soon in amongst the trenches and forcing the survivors back along the communication trenches and overrunning the second trench lines.

No help could be sent to save the 19th regiment from the assault. It was too late for them and they had no option but to fight their last stand. There was nowhere to withdraw to. One-by-one their trenches fell to the enemy, field artillery was abandoned as their crews ran out of ammunition and fell back. The few remaining tanks the regiment could field fought from their dug-in positions, hull down, engaging the enemy vehicles as they rolled forwards. The crushing weight of Land Raiders collapsed the trench walls as they passed over them, crushing anybody below. One after another the Krieg tanks were hit and

Top: Tanks of the 19th siege regiment make their last stand, engulfed in the inferno of enemy artillery barrages.

Bottom: The Apostles of Contagion sweep forward through the sickly green light of their chemical weapons attack.

DEATH KORPS COMMISSAR & ENSIGN

1. UNIFORM
Regardless of which regiment a Commissar serves with, be it Krieg, Cadian, Tallarn or Valhallan, his uniform remains the same. Whilst no Commissar will have exactly the same uniform and some degree of personalisation is acceptable, all wear the distinctive black dress uniform, black overcoat and tall cap. All Commissars' uniforms must be black.

This distinctive uniform marks them out on the battlefield as a figure of authority and inspiration. The Departmento Munitorum insists that Imperial Guard regiments are accompanied by a cadre of Commissars, as part of their indoctrination into the Imperial Creed and to help ensure continuing loyalty. Drawn from disperate planets and cultures, an Imperial Guardsmen's loyalty and devotion to the Imperium's cause is sometimes questionable and often requires reinforcing.

All Commissars are raised by the military schools of the Schola Progenium as grim, authoritarian figures whose personal loyalty is beyond question. Once their rigorous training is complete, they are assigned to Imperial Guard regiments in warzones across the galaxy and expected to immediately take up a role motivating troops, instilling loyalty and maintaining discipline. A Commissar must be vigilant at all times for signs of moral weakness in the men, and more importantly, in a regiment's officers, as well as keeping a wary eye on any sanctioned psykers attached to the regiment. High ranking Commissars will have a wealth of battlefield experience to draw upon and will also act as additional tactical advisors to the command staff.

This Commissar-General's uniform is heavily decorated and braided, as befits his senior rank. Many Commissars frown upon such ostentation and prefer a more puritanical, unadorned appearance. His uniform also bears decorations from previous campaigns and postings, as well as for personal bravery. The silver gorget is a mark of long service.

2. WEAPONS
Commissars are allowed a wide degree of choice when it comes to the personal weapons they carry. Many expect to lead from the front and carry power weapons and power fists. This Commissar is attached to the regimental headquarters and is not expecting to lead men in combat so he has kept his weaponry to the basics. He carries a sword and a holstered laspistol. The laspistol allows the Commissar to carry out his powers of summary discipline. All Commissars are empowered with the ultimate sanction of battlefield execution over those they deem to have failed in their duty. His main target will be weak or inadequate officers, but is not restricted to these. Should a Commissar-General feel that it is absolutely necessary, he is also empowered to remove the commanding officer from his post and take over command of the entire regiment.

3. ENSIGN
Krieg regiments include the officer rank of Ensign. This is a junior officer chosen to carry the regimental or company banner. It is considered a great honour to be chosen and marks the officer as one with the potential to rise to the most senior rank. The rank of Ensign carries a short term of service, so an officer will not be expected to act as the banner bearer for long before being moved on to a combat command with a front line platoon or a Death Rider squadron.

The Ensign wears the carapace breast and backplate issued to all the regiment's senior officer's security staff, as these men will be expected to accompany the commander on ceremonial duties as well as on the battlefield. To aid recognition in the field, they all wear a red sash.

4. REGIMENTAL BANNER
The regimental banner is the regiment's most precious artefact, a symbol of its long service to the Emperor and it bears a history of the regiment's many campaigns. Whilst few men in a Krieg siege regiment have a long life expectancy, the banner will see service in every campaign. It is a rallying point and acts as an inspiration to the men of the regiment, who must all live up the regiment's former glories. Death Korps of Krieg regiments are well known for their morbid attitude and scant regard for casualties and often use the skull motif. The 143rd's banner itself is also a reliquary and the skulls of former commanding officers, killed in battle, are mounted upon it – watching over the latest recruits even in death. The twin hanging banners bear an embroidered list of the regiment's history of battles and campaigns.

This is Commissar-General Maugh, the senior ranking Commissar attached to 143rd regiment and the constant companion of the regiment's command staff. Behind him is Ensign 232-165-87509-19-Dseke.

destroyed by the accurate fire of Land Raider and Predator lascannons.

The Toxic War

Night fell, but saw no let up in the fighting. Colonel Keled, commander of 19th, reported that he would hold for another day, after that his ammunition would be spent, his last artillery overrun and his regiment scattered and annihilated. His men served their Emperor well and the 19th regiment clung on, fighting to the last man and last round for another three days as the frontline shrunk ever backwards. The enemy repeatedly and merciless unleashed more chemical weapons. All the dead were left to rot, often stripped bare and gathered into piles where the airborne chemicals could quickly strip the flesh from them. The muddy ground was littered with stinking, decomposing corpses. Fat maggots writhed over them, merrily feasting. Soon thick swarms of black flies crawled over the dead.

All communication with the 19th siege regiment ceased at 735823.M41. It was over – the last pocket of resistance had been shattered by the remorseless onslaught of the Plague Marines and their foul followers. Behind them they left a fetid charnel house with an atmosphere still thick with poisonous chemicals. Pools of green gas hung in the bottom of blasted trenches and deep shell craters. They had turned sectors 61-44 and 62-44 into a playground for the creatures of Nurgle. Strange beasts could be seen stalking the trenches and dug-outs, creatures from nightmares that crawled and oozed, and spider-like machines stalked the mists. Here was a land fit for Nurgle's servants. Their master was pleased.

The Death Guard's onslaught was just the beginning. It had been a testing ground for their chemical weapons. Now they could turn their attention to other sectors, and subject them to the same treatment. They would use the TP-III indiscriminately and the Krieg guardsmen soon learned that such chemical attacks were always the precursor to an assault or raid. Wherever the Nurgle Space Marine warbands roamed, they left a trail of decay, torturing the land with their foul toxins, spreading disease and poison wherever they could.

It was a deliberate and calculated act. The Death Guard and their allies were not interested in fighting this war of attrition. It mattered not whether Vraks stood or fell. All that mattered was that the Lord of Decay would be pleased by the wanton destruction and corruption of Vraks' surface. They were preparing the ground, creating a toxic land, making Vraks a home from home for those creatures of Lord Nurgle that were unseen but eager to join the fray and spread their own delicious diseases amongst Mankind. This was not war as the Death Korps of Krieg's commanders understood it. It was a giant unholy ritual, fanatically pursued, paving the way for worse horrors to come…

Second Battle of Vraks

Whilst changes were being made in the higher command, the regimental commanders on the ground still had to deal with the enemy in front of them, whilst preserving their supplies and men. All offensive operations were cancelled, with the ultimate objective now placed to one side in favour of a policy of survival. The traitors now had the initiative and it would be they that launched any attacks, while the Krieg regiments dug in deep and tried to hold their positions and husband their diminishing resources until their relief could arrive.

Whilst Marshall Kagori's staff were busy collecting together the forces that would save Vraks, the enemy took advantage of their newly won supremacy. Supported by their new allies they began to attack in ever greater force. Attacks could be expected anywhere along the front and with defensive artillery fire heavily restricted due to ammunition conservation, many succeeded in capturing Krieg trenches and holding them. Soon salients had been pushed deep into the Krieg lines. They were losing ground that had been so costly to win and being slowly driven back. For almost a year the 88th army had to endure defeats, withdrawals and retreats at the hands of the reinvigorated enemy forces. As manpower and supplies of all types dwindled, it seemed they were on the very edge of defeat.

But Marshall Kagori had been working unceasingly and on 084824.M41 his fleet was ready to set course for Vraks. It was a fleet containing a convoy of transports and supply ships, including the precious *Legio Astorum* Titan transport, defended by a potent flotilla of escorts. The defeat at the first Battle of Vraks was not to be taken lightly by Battlefleet Scarus and the presence of a Traitor battleship was a threat that could not be ignored.

Battlefleet Scarus' first move was to send a scouting force back into the Vraks system. Ordering the fastest vessels in the fleet to Vraks, the Cobra class destroyers of Ithica squadron were to discover and report on enemy strength in the system. When the three destroyers arrived they found the drifting hulks and wreckage of the previous battle, but no enemy vessels intercepted them. They returned to report it was all quiet.

Where had the enemy vessels gone? Where was the *Anarchy's Heart*? She could still be in the system, lurking in the outer asteroid fields. It would be prudent to expect attack. The twin Luna class cruisers *Duke De Walle* and *General Dyhane* were detailed to defend the convoy, along with a full strength escort squadron of eight Sword class frigates. The new Battlefleet Scarus fleet entered Vraks system ready for the second Battle of Vraks.

The convoy's approach was slow and cautious, surrounded by their escorts, the transports' stately progress towards the planet was carefully plotted. The *Duke De Walle* led the way, with her sister vessel the *General Dyhane* as rearguard. For the first few days there was no contact with any enemy vessels. Leaving the dangerous asteroid fields behind, the fleet seemed to be in the clear. They passed close by to Vraks Tertius and still no enemy moved against them. Perhaps the raiding vessels had moved on in search of new richer pickings, or returned to their secret hideouts in the many dense nebula closer to the Eye of Terror.

Most of the Traitor fleet had in fact dispersed. Their battle won, the raiders had sort new plunder and new victories. But the *Anarchy's Heart* had remained, lurking, watching like a giant silent predator awaiting an unsuspecting prey. The relief convoy approached and she was ready to pounce.

Hidden amongst the hulks and drifting debris of the Vraks system, the *Anarchy's Heart* and her escorts were invisible with all systems powered down. They lay quietly waiting. Drifting amidst the wreckage she was almost undetectable. As the convoy approached she sprung her ambush.

The battleship's great plasma reactors roared into life and power surged down her ancient cables and circuits like warm lifeblood. Slave gun-teams were driven to their weapons by the lashes of their overseers. The battleship's power signature lit up on the augurs of every vessel in the approaching convoy, and alarm klaxons blared their warning as ship crews raced to battle stations. The *Anarchy's Heart* was already in range as the escort vessel's captains called

for flank speed, their reactors straining at the sudden demand for power The battleship's first salvo impacted with crushing force. Two escort vessels vanished into expanding clouds of wreckage and space dust as they took repeated direct hits from the batleship's big guns. The *Duke De Walle's* shields were screaming as repeated laser impacts flared off them, a second volley raked her hull and destroyed starboard thrusters and manoeuvre drives. One supply transport, loaded with fuel and ammunition was crippled and left drifting.

The Imperial Navy cruisers responded to the ambush as fast as her crews could. The *Duke De Walle* returned fire, her broadsides sporadic at first, but then growing in intensity. The *General Dyhane* swung about, loosed a wide spread of torpedoes, then powered towards the enemy battleship. As the cruisers engaged, the transports made for Vraks with the escorts in close proximity interposing themselves between the valuable cargos and enemy guns. It was a brave act and cost the escorts more heavy losses, with two more ships quickly crippled as the *Anarchy's Heart* thundered out with every gun she could bring to bear.

The two cruisers closed into effective range themselves, and although the *Anarchy's Heart* was a potent vessel and her armour was thick, she could not afford to ignore two capital ships. She turned her guns on them, taking repeated torpedo impacts. Deep inside fires started by the explosions could be seen raging – the beast had been wounded.

But the wounded beast's rage was unholy and merciless. Lances and macro-cannons pounded at the two cruisers. The *Duke De Walle* was caught in the maelstrom, riding the impacts as if tossed by a stormy sea. She was burning, massive oxygen leaks bleeding flames into the void. The *General Dyhane* was close now, and her guns ripped into the enemy's armour. Who would break? Whose will to continue the brutal engage of close range gunnery would snap first?

Damaged, and with her prey escaping towards Vraks, the *Anarchy's Heart* disengaged. Her sudden devastating attack had destroyed four escort vessels and left the *Duke De Walle* crippled and dying. Hundreds of her crew lay dead at their guns, their bodies choking the lower deck corridors, but the *General Dyhane* had remained true to purpose and never flinched in the face of the battleship's broadsides. She had torn into the enemy's flank and set fires raging inside the *Anarchy's Heart*. Rather than risk destruction to no further gain, the ancient leviathan withdrew, soon vanishing again into the drifting wreckage, her two escort ships remaining close for protection. The *General Dyhane* could pursue, but she would then be alone against a far greater enemy. Instead she offered what aid she could to the grievously stricken *Duke De Walle*. Crippled with damage beyond the crew's capability to repair, the captain ordered the survivors to abandon ship, leaving the lower deck fires to gut the vessel. They burned for weeks. The surviving crew were ferried across to the *General Dyhane*, leaving the stricken cruiser as another hulk to add to the growing graveyard around Vraks. Her mission complete, the *General Dyhane* then set course for Vraks again.

Planetary Landing

The convoy had made a narrow escape but, by their bravery and sacrifice, the two cruisers had saved the day and maybe the entire campaign on Vraks. Most of the supplies and all the Titans would reach their destination and join the war. The *Anarchy's Heart* was still out there – lurking, but she was badly damaged and would not risk another head-to-head encounter.

The convoy arrived in Vraks' orbit, and began to disembark its cargo. Soon men by the thousands, tanks by the hundreds, ammunition by hundreds of tonnes, fuel and all manner of equipment were being landed and prepared for immediate transport to the front. Amidst the many unloading cargo landers a

Above: Enemy armour attacking! A Leman Russ Vanquisher and Malcador heavy tank navigate the churned ground of no-man's land during an enemy counter-attack. Such local attacks broke the Krieg front lines and forced them to withdraw.

huge armoured landing ship set down. Its great slab-sided doors rolling back to reveal the Titans within. Down the exit ramps walked the Warhounds and Reaver battle titans of the *Legio Astorum* battle group, under the orders of their ancient and venerable High Princeps, Rand Drauca. The war machines' great strides shook the ground as they took their first steps into a new warzone. In all there were 22 Titans, each bedecked in honour banners and emblazoned with the eagle of the Imperium and the black eclipse symbol of their legion. Ten Reavers towered above all, tall and imposing. Before them strode 12 Warhounds. The battle group was ready for deployment to meet the Traitor titans on the battlefield and resume an ancient war that had been continuous for the last 10,000 years – since the time when many of the Titans legions had revolted in support of Horus, and the loyalists and traitors had first clashed in epic battles between the mightiest war machines in the galaxy.

Vraks would soon see those battles recreated.

Back from the Brink –
the 'Kagori' Offensive

Even whilst the 19th regiment was being massacred to the last man, Marshall Kagori's new offensive was being planned, ready to begin the next big attempt to crack the inner defence line. After a long period of bitter defensive battles, the 88th siege army was re-supplying and reinforcing daily, ready to go over to the offensive again. New attacks were being planned all along the front for every regiment. No longer would they just hold their trenches, the Krieg guardsmen would again surge out across no-man's land and take the battle to the enemy.

Preparations for such a large offensive were long and involved. Each regiment in the line now required vast amounts of staff work to equip new guardsmen with everything they needed from the stores and post them into the fighting companies. The ammunition and fuel stockpiles had to be built up, along with supplies of every type. Companies of men and batteries of guns were on the move, being positioned for the coming battles, whilst regimental commanders worked day and night on their attack plans, artillery fire plans, positioning reserves and all the other myriad of details that would be required for such a big operation.

The 'Kagori offensive', as it had become known, was set to begin at 249825. M41. The aim was to recapture all the ground lost since the enemy counter-offensive in 078823.M41 and to crack the inner defence lines, precipitating a breakthrough to the curtain wall. It was a very ambitious plan and it took almost a year to prepare the battered siege regiments for the coming offensive. This would be Marshall Kagori's first bold stride towards winning the war.

A major decision for the Marshall's headquarters would be the deployment of the Titan battle group. Although the lines of command did not permit him to give the *Legio Astorum* Princeps direct orders, his reports to the lords of Lucius forge world would influence any decision they made. In the end, after a careful review of the situation, it was decided that all the Titans would support a main effort in the sectors held by the 12th line korps. All the Reavers and Warhounds would operate in support of the line korps' four siege regiments: the 143rd, 149th, 150th and 158th. They would also be backed up by elements of the 8th assault korps, including its super heavy tanks.

The first part of the plan involved a prolonged artillery bombardment and new shells and mortar bombs were prioritised for the bombardment korps and artillery companies. With the system now secured, more supply convoys were arriving every week, millions of artillery shells were being transported and stockpiled at the artillery positions, ready to unleash a massive bombardment which would last for weeks before the first men went over the top.

The long bombardment of the enemy was gradually stepped up over the weeks before Marshall Kagori's grand plan was ready to be put into action. The artillery shells rumbled overhead constantly, keeping up their steady rhythm to harass the enemy and make the movement of troops and supplies to the front difficult and dangerous. In the last days before the infantry offensive was to begin, the bombardment intensified, then stepped up again until the guns were hammering away relentlessly, barrels glowing red hot whilst breach blocks and recoil pistons wore out under the strain.

On 249825. M41, everything was finally in place. In the forward trenches all across Vraks the first assault companies stood ready, bayonets fixed, awaiting the order to attack. Across no-man's land the artillery shells impacted in a furious tempest on the enemy frontlines, reaching a crescendo in a constant roll of thunder, smothering the enemy in dust and shrapnel. Then, suddenly the guns fell silent.

In sector 54-46 Colonel Thryan of the 143rd regiment had joined his men, an ensign carried the honoured regimental banner at his shoulder. On time the Colonel ordered the launch of a single red flare that arced into Vraks' sky and burned like a bright drifting star. The master-vox operator flashed the codeword throughout the regiment, the order to attack was given. It was time to go.

Above: Shrouded in acidic smog, as well as destroying the enemy, Nurgle's forces were also poisoning Vraks' surface.

The men scrambled up and over the parapets like so many thousands of times before and out into the crater-scarred killing fields of no-man's land. Behind them Leman Russ and Macharius heavy tanks thumped into gear and began to grind forward. Batteries of mortars launched a barrage of smoke and high explosive shells to keep the enemy gunners' heads down. Still further back High Princeps Rand Drauca received the attack signal on the command bridge of his Reaver, *Praetorian*. Wired into the Titan's cognitive logis engine via mind-impulse leads, Drauca gave the unspoken instructions for the Reaver to advance and its great gears and pistons heaved the mighty war machine forwards in a long stride. The other Titans followed their commander's lead and *Legio Astorum* strode into battle.

All along the 12th line korps' front the same scenario was being played out. Infantry and tanks plunged into the inevitable defensive fire, slithering through the quagmire to reach the enemy razorwire, trenches and pillboxes. Tanks laid down a curtain of high explosive shells. Their heavy bolters and heavy stubbers rattling out a stream of suppressive fire. The field guns and mortars opened fire again, lobbing shells just ahead of the infantry. To the rear the large artillery guns resumed their bombardments, shifting to targets further to the enemy's rear or concentrating on strongpoints. The battle had been joined.

For the first hours it seemed that the battle was being fought in the same old way – with the same old results. Heavy losses for small gains. But on 12th line korps' front the attack was preceding well. The 1,000 tonne metal monsters of *Legio Astorum* were advancing, crushing everything in their path. Engaging the enemy with all their formidable firepower, the Titans smashed a path forward as their void shield generators flared under the impact of enemy weapons. In sector 54-45 the enemy counter-attacked with its own tanks and infantry and a battle developed in the centre of no-man's land with bayonets and knives. Tanks were burning, but they could not stop Drauca's advance. Soon Thunderbolt fighters screamed overhead, adding their bombs and strafing autocannons to the maelstrom of fire descending upon the enemy. The forward trenches were overrun, and Krieg infantry platoons and grenadier squads were pushing on through the maze of trenches and dug-outs, clearing as they went. By the end of the first day the 158th regiment had recovered the ground it had lost, and all regiments could report good progress wherever the Titans had backed them up. At nightfall the Titans withdrew to safe laagers as fresh infantry and tanks were pushed forward ready for the next day's continued push.

Across the Van Meersland Wastes the siege regiments reported a variety of successes and failures. Some had been repulsed by fire or thrown back across no-man's land by heavy enemy counter-attacks. Wherever the Chaos Space Marine warbands joined the fighting, the Krieg infantry faired poorly. The 5th regiment had come under intense attack from enemy chemical weapons and sustained heavy losses. In response the regiment requested that they be allowed to respond in kind. Marshall Kagori, against the advice of many of his staff, granted permission for their own chemical weapons to be used as a direct response. The 5th regiment's barrages were soon soaking the land in more toxic poisons. Little did they suspect that they were playing into enemy hands, even with the losses inflicted.

The second day of the offensive started with more air attacks, but this time the enemy countered and Thunderbolts and Hell Blades twisted and swooped high above the battlefield as the two sides braced themselves for another day of intense fighting. In sector 57-48 two waves of Marauder bombers hammered the enemy frontlines, racing in low and fast to unload their huge payloads directly into the trenches. With such heavy air support the 468th regiment made good gains and Marshall Kagori noted that more Imperial Navy bomber squadrons should be requested.

As another great lightning storm rolled about them, Drauca's Titans pitched forward into the battle again. *Praetorian* itself quickly destroyed eleven enemy armoured vehicles that it had spotted moving forward as reinforcements. Its missile launcher firing salvos of missiles as its gatling blaster and laser blaster raked the column into a burning, smoking ruin. Just as the weapons Moderatii reported the target eliminated, the Reaver's augurs identified enemy Titans approaching. After the previous day's heavy losses, the enemy had responded to the Titan attack with their own. Legio Vulcanum had come to match its ancient war machines against the loyalists. The High Princeps issued new orders. Enemy Titans were approaching, they were to be the priority targets, adjust all firing solutions accordingly. Whilst the land battle raged about their feet, the Reavers and Warhounds engaged the enemy Titans in their own separate dual.

Turbo-lasers and volcano cannons flashed, void shields sparked and flared, blazing under the high-energy impacts of massive weapons. Soon missile launcher pods were empty. The ammunition hoppers of the gatling

Above: Reaver Titan Praetorian first engaged the enemy during the Kagori offensive.

DEATH KORPS OFFICER

1. UNIFORM
This Krieg officer wears a non-standard uniform. Such displays of individuality are not favoured by Krieg regiments, whose indoctrination requires them to sublimate individuality to the greater purposes of the Death Korps and the Emperor. But the Departmento Munitorum's regulations governing the equipment of Imperial Guard regiments do require that officer's distinguish themselves from the rank and file, as figures of inspiration and authority on the battlefield. Hence, the Colonel's uniform is of superior material and design, individually tailored for him. His greatcoat is made of the finest-grade Mukaali hide.

The officer's boots are the tall riding boots issued to Death Riders and regarded of higher quality and comfort than the low marching boots of the infantry. The Colonel has no doubt retained them after his time serving with a Death Rider unit. The red sash is worn for battlefield identification, and is also worn by his security detachment.

Krieg officers are selected by performance and aptitude during basic training and must then complete an additional vigorous training course. Most will be chosen from men already selected for Death Rider squadrons, so officers often have an affinity with the Death Riders. Once deployed, junior officers will be promoted as replacement officers, usually from Watchmasters or the Death Rider companies.

His gas mask is a lightweight unit. Lacking the large regulator unit it is only used for shorter durations of exposure, and is generally issued to staff officers who would otherwise spend their time inside sealed command bunkers.

2. ARMOUR
Like the rest of his uniform, the Colonel's armour is a non-standard configuration. The breastplate is the same as that issued to Death Riders. It has been polished to a gleaming shine for ceremonial duties. In practice it provides little additional protection.

His helmet is a standard issue Mk IX with additional decoration added as befits an officer's rank. It has a gold eagle crest and the winged skull symbol of the Imperial Guard.

3. INSIGNIA
The Death Korps of Krieg reject the awarding of medals for individual bravery, as this is expected from Death Korps guardsmen, and all indoctrinated are willing to face the direst threats without regard for their own survival. It is not in the Death Korps' ethos to recognise individual achievements and those born into the Korps do not seek such. Their training requires them to become just a faceless small cog in a vast war-making machine. Service to the Korps and the Emperor are regarded as reward enough for their sacrifices.

The officer's gorget is actually a small refractor field generator, worn for personal protection by high ranking officers and officials, the generators are often disguised as jewellery or decoration.

Staff officers and higher ranking officers (above the command of actual regiments in the field) are often seconded from other Imperial Guard regiments or from the noble classes that provide much of the Imperial Guard's upper echelons. Often these positions are retained as hereditary entitlements. Krieg officers, with their narrow doctrine of attritional trench warfare, are not generally considered to be suitable for the more political and diplomatic ranks amongst the staff of an army command.

4. WEAPONS
Sabre. The officer's weapons are carried as a matter of ritual and protocol rather than as practical weapons. Only in the direst of circumstances would a regiment's senior commanding officer actually be required to fight, although to have reached this high rank the Colonel will already have a wealth of frontline combat experience. His sabre is another relic of his days leading a Death Rider company.

Laspistol. Although barely visible, the laspistol is carried only as a weapon for personal defence. It is likely to be a standard issue weapon, no doubt kept in spotless condition by the Colonel's aides, and well maintained – lacking the wear and tear of frontline service. Many officers will choose to carry other weapons as a matter of personal preference.

This is Colonel Thyran, commanding officer of the 143rd siege regiment, 12th line korp, seen here during the 469824.M41 'Kagori' offensive, when his regiment forced the first breach in Vraks' inner defence line.

Left: Re-equipped and re-supplied, the 88th Army strikes back with Reaver Titans of the Warp Runners legion in close support as they attack across no-man's land with waves of fresh infantry and tanks. The offensive was planned to recapture lost ground and break the inner defence lines.

blasters were running low as the six-barrelled battle cannons hammered out shell after shell. Plasma reactors were straining under the demand – Techpriests and servitors working furiously to direct extra power to the void shields and weapons as the Titans growled and groaned under the stresses. Evenly matched, the Titans tore at each other, rocking under the impacts, armour scorched, rent and dented. *Invigila Alpha* was the first to fall. Closing with the enemy the Reaver was raked by fire from a Vulcan mega-bolter, the roar of its gatling barrels spitting out thousands of rounds per minute was known as the 'the laughter of the devil' to Titan crews, but the last of her void shields was overloaded and shut down. Before the Techpriest could power up the generators to raise the shields again, the Titan took a direct hit to the command bridge. A super-heated blast melted through the thick armour and blast shielded screens, immolating the entire bridge crew in seconds. The tortured screams of the Princeps and Moderatii burned into the Titan's cognitive engine via the mind-impulse links as they were obliterated. Its higher functions destroyed, the Reaver ground to a halt, weapons still held erect, but silent now. More enemy fire lashed the Titan as it stood motionless and defenceless. The sole surviving Techpriest could not abandon his dying machine. He simply fell to his knees in prayer as the Titan shuddered and groaned in its own death agonies. Peppered by more enemy fire *Invigila Alpha* stood in defiance, a blasted and scorched silent sentinel, looming over the battlefield. There the god-machine would remain for the duration of the war, a towering landmark in an otherwise barren landscape. Back on Lucius forge world a bell would toll for the lost war machine and for each of its fellow Titans that fell on Vraks.

The titanic battle lasted all day, giants duelling over the heads of the men below as they fought back and forth along the trenches. Progress had slowed, without the direct aid of the Titans there was hard fighting all along the front. By the end of the second day, when the Titans withdrew, little extra ground had been captured. Day three would see the battle resume and then continue into day four.

Both sides had taken heavy losses as the fighting resumed on day five. Weary men in grey trenchcoats gathered weapons and ammunition and prepared for another day in the meat-grinder. Of all the regiments in the offensive, the 143rd had pushed the furthest, driving a salient into the enemy lines in sector 54-45, and here the Titan battle group would concentrate its efforts. A slim crack might be forced open, and failing that, it would draw the enemy Titans to them and with any luck allow another regiment to force the breakthrough further down the line.

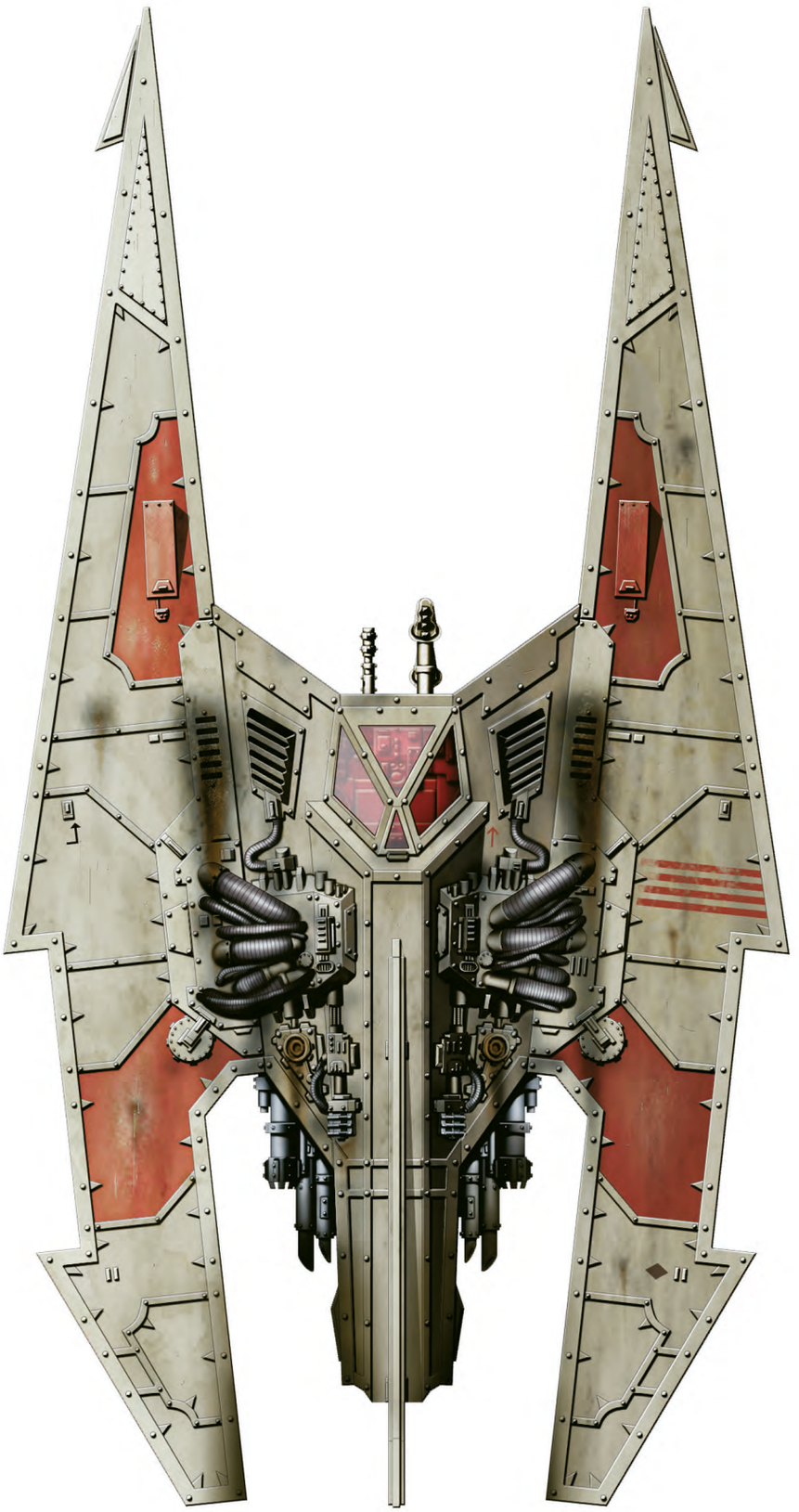
With the Titans re-armed and battlefield repairs completed by the cowled Adeptus Mechanicus ordnancers that accompanied the Titan battle group, Drauca again led his survivors back into the inferno. Striding amongst the tanks, each Leman Russ closely followed by a huddle of grey infantry, the Reavers and Warhounds marched unharmed through the enemy's first artillery barrages. After five days of constant battle the enemy line was thinning. They had lost a lot of men and equipment during the first day's fighting and now those losses were being felt. Their allied Titans had taken losses too, and only their fearsome presence had stemmed the tide. Now, outnumbered and bearing the scars of the last three days encounters, the *Legio Vulcanum* war machines pulled back to regroup. The enemy infantry could not hold alone against Drauca's firepower. They managed to topple one Warhound with the direct hits of a battery of Basilisks – repeated artillery shells eventually sending the Warhound crashing to the earth to lie forlornly amongst the mud, but it was their only success. Some of the renegades fought with fanatical zeal, but others had their will to resist broken by 'Titan-shock', and soon fell back in a pell-mell retreat. The 143rd regiment was pushing ever forwards, and tanks and Death Riders of the 8th assault korps joined the rout. One more day of fighting saw the inner defence line breached and fresh tank columns streaming through the gap. Success at last! Kagori's offensive had broken through the defensive belt and was now driving ever deeper towards the curtain wall. The Titans had won him the battle.

However, unlike when the outer and second defence lines had been broken, the enemy did not abandon his positions this time. The area around the curtain wall and the inner defence line was no longer a bare plain. It was now riddled with a maze of trenches and pillboxes, all constructed over the years as the siege had ground on. It lacked the hardened dug-outs and careful planning of the actual defence line, but the enemy still had many places from which to make his stand and would fight for every inch of ground. The traitors' commanders knew they could not afford to simply pull back to the curtain wall and dig in again. As they drew closer to the fortress, so every inch must be fought for. They could not afford to keep falling back, trading ground for time as soon there would be nowhere left to fall back to. So, this time there was no sudden clear breakthrough and swift advance, but a monotonous crawl forward against daily attacks and counter-attacks. But in sector 54-45 the enemy strength was spent and the 143rd regiment made more large gains before it too had to halt before it outran its supply lines and artillery support. The Titans were withdrawn from the frontline to the reserve, to refit and await their next deployment. They had made the difference and won their battle. Their battle losses – some four Reavers and seven Warhounds would have to be replaced from Lucius. It was estimated that in all a dozen enemy Titans had been destroyed, a fine total for Drauca's men who could return to Lucius with honour.

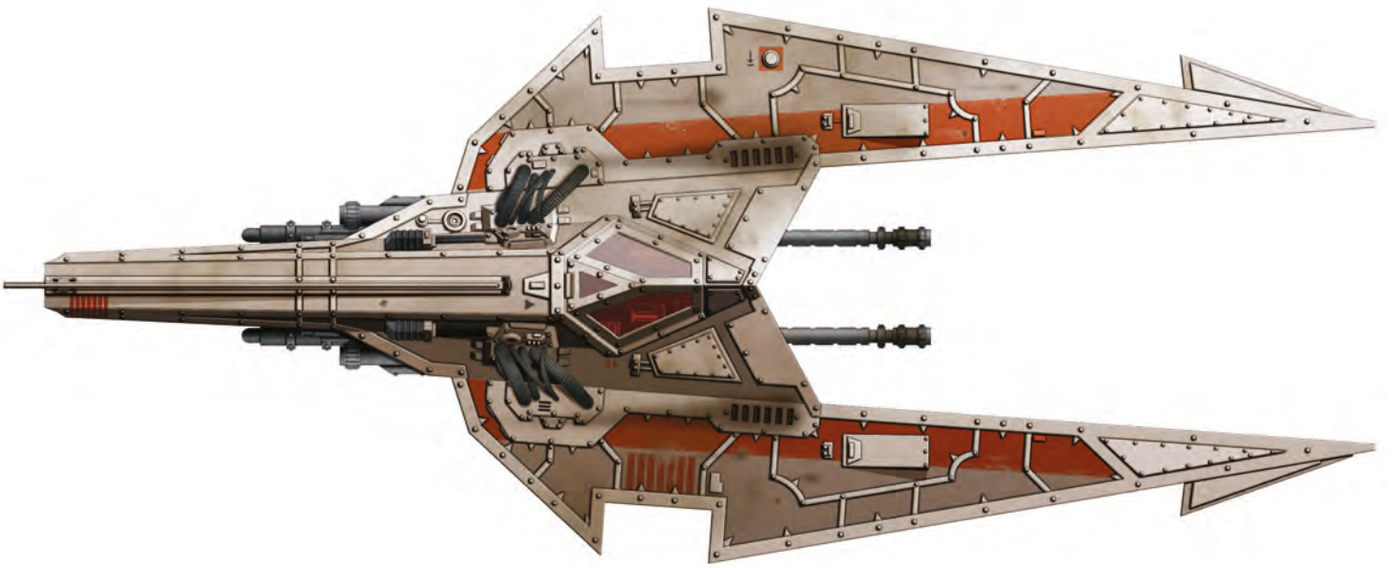
The battle to reach the curtain wall was not over, there were still many more battles yet to be fought but Marshall Kagori was already preparing to put a new phase of his offensive into operation. A large stride had been taken towards victory. The outcome of the siege was no longer in doubt. The enemy had lost heavily and new replacements would soon arrive again for the Krieg regiments. The enemy's losses were irreplaceable and Kagori knew that attrition always favoured the besiegers.

The 88th siege army could at least claim that they were once again winning the siege of Vraks.

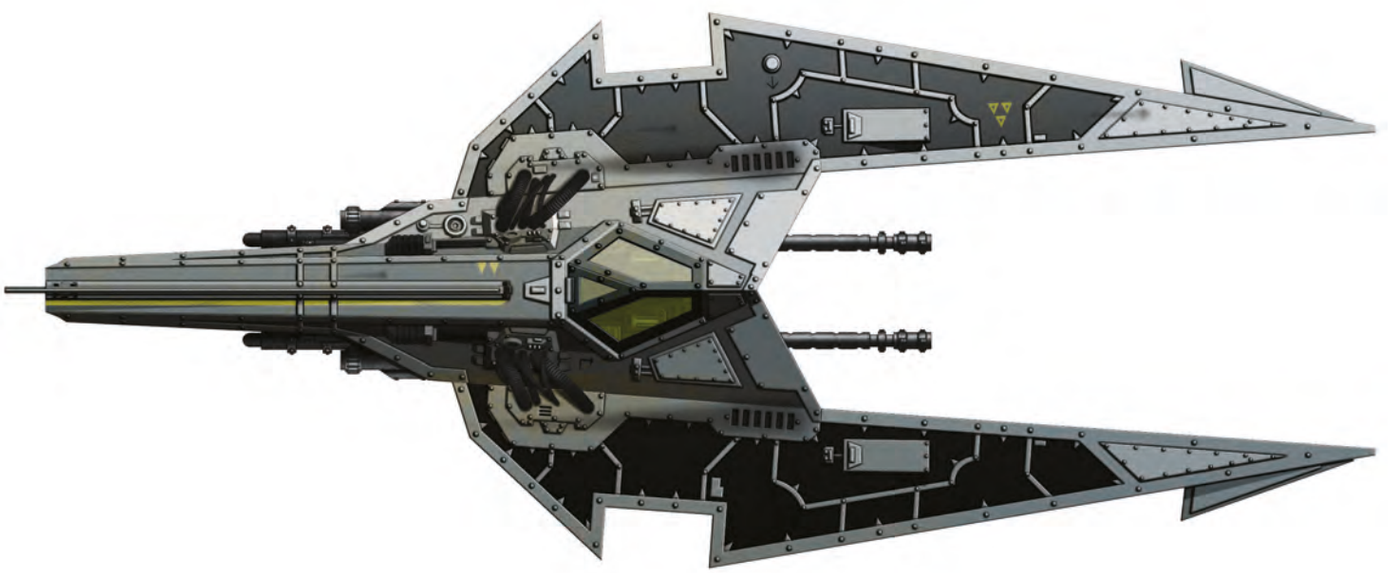
Chaos Dreadnought of the Deathguard. Like all those who have aligned themselves with the power of the Plague Lord and received his favour, disease and decay have covered the hull. This decay sems to have no effect on the Dreadnought's operations.



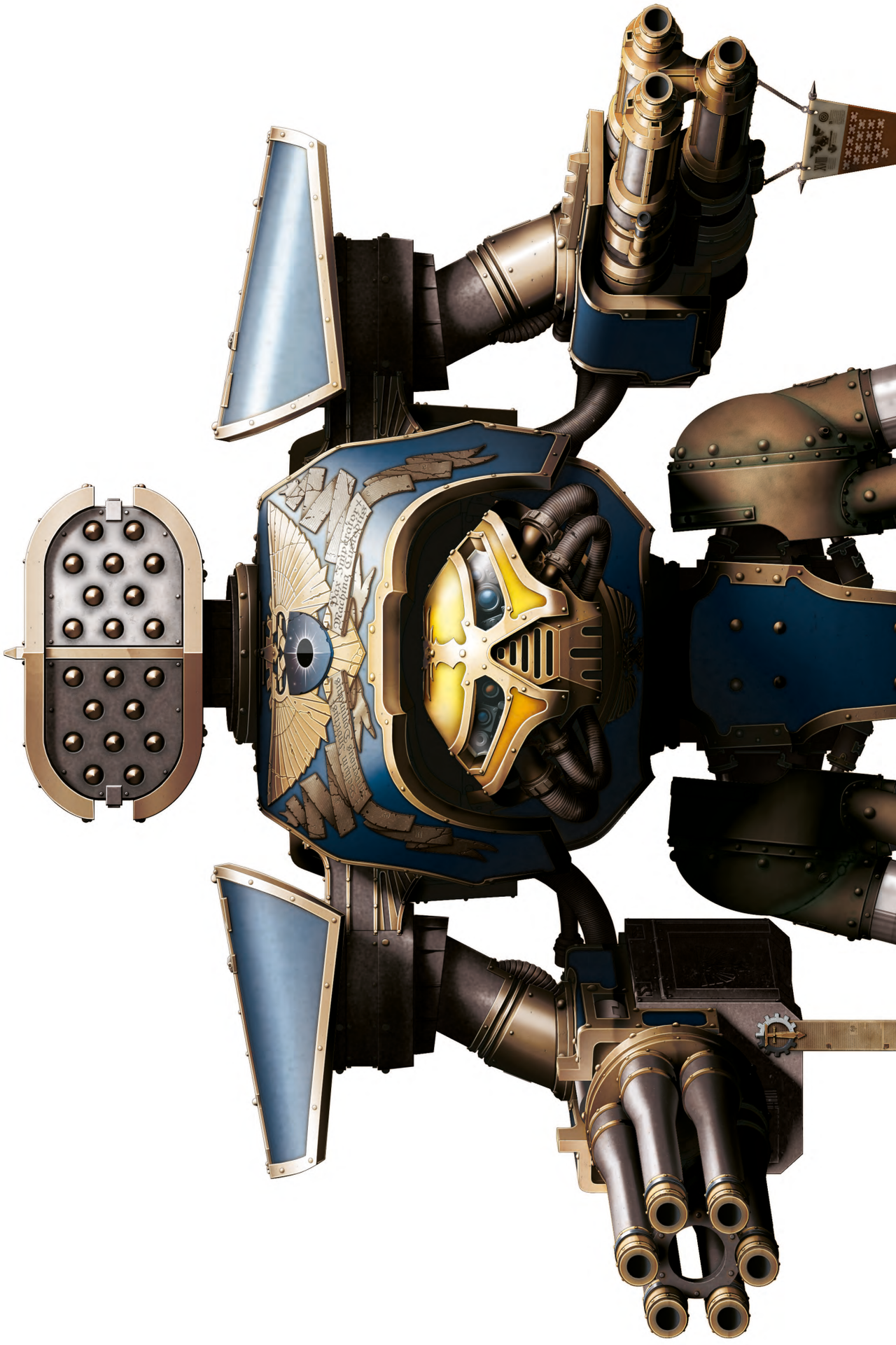
Hell Talon fighter, identification unknown. This aircraft was shot down over the Fortress of Vraks.

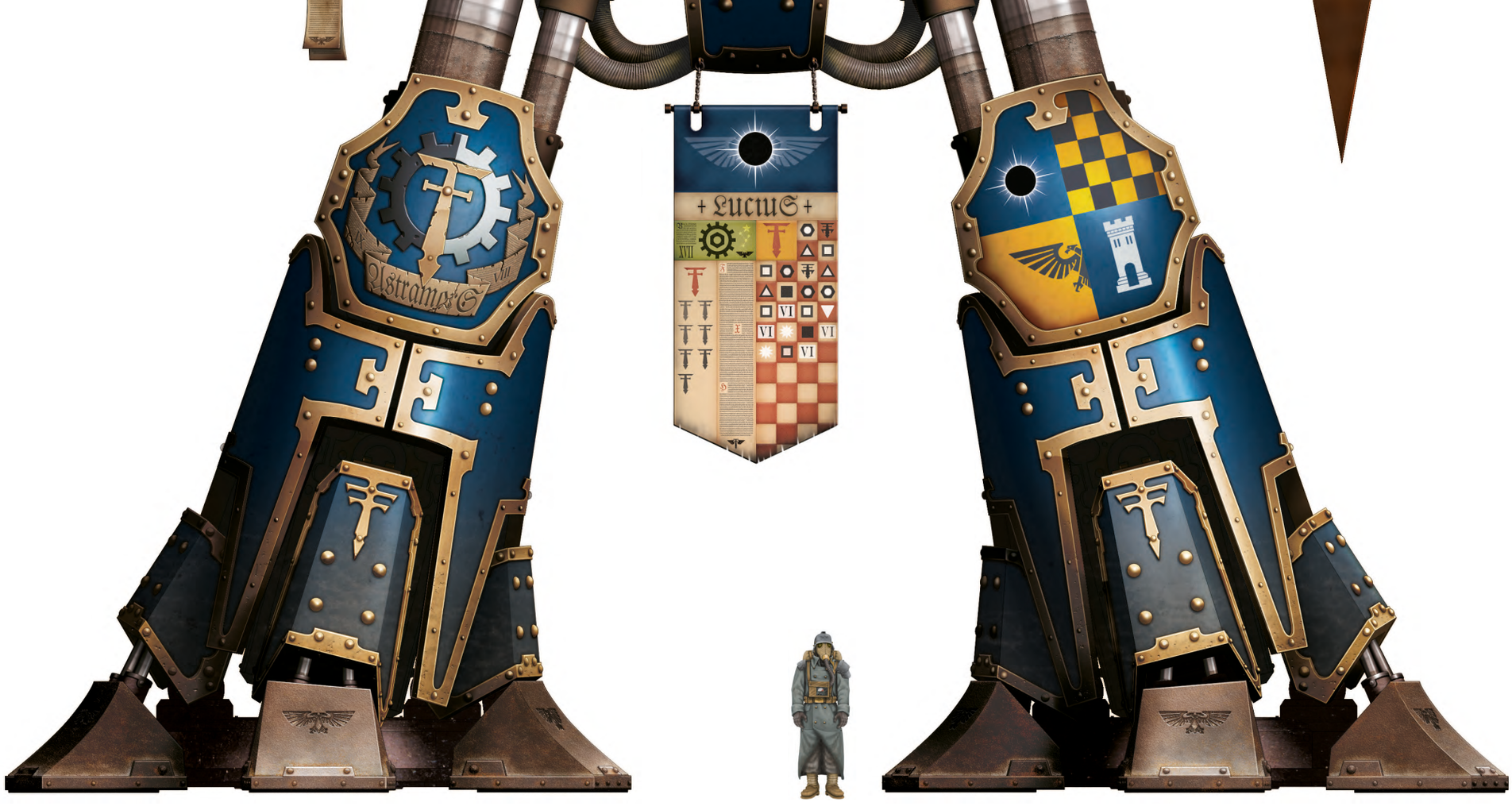


Hell Blade fighter, identification unknown.

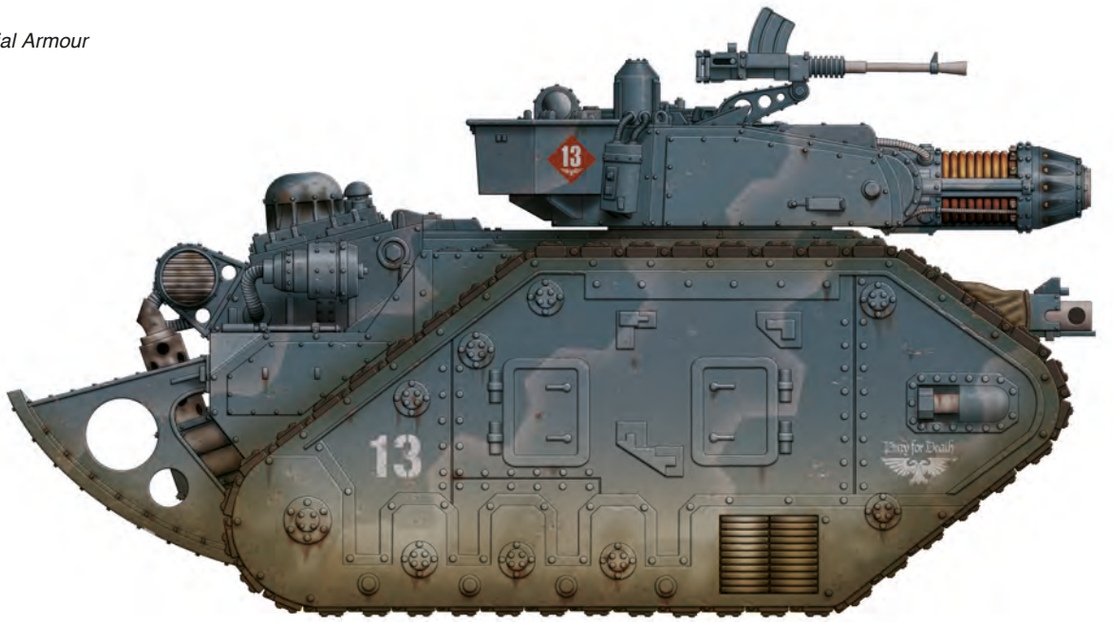


Hell Blade fighter believed to be flying in support of the Black Brethren of Ayreas warband.

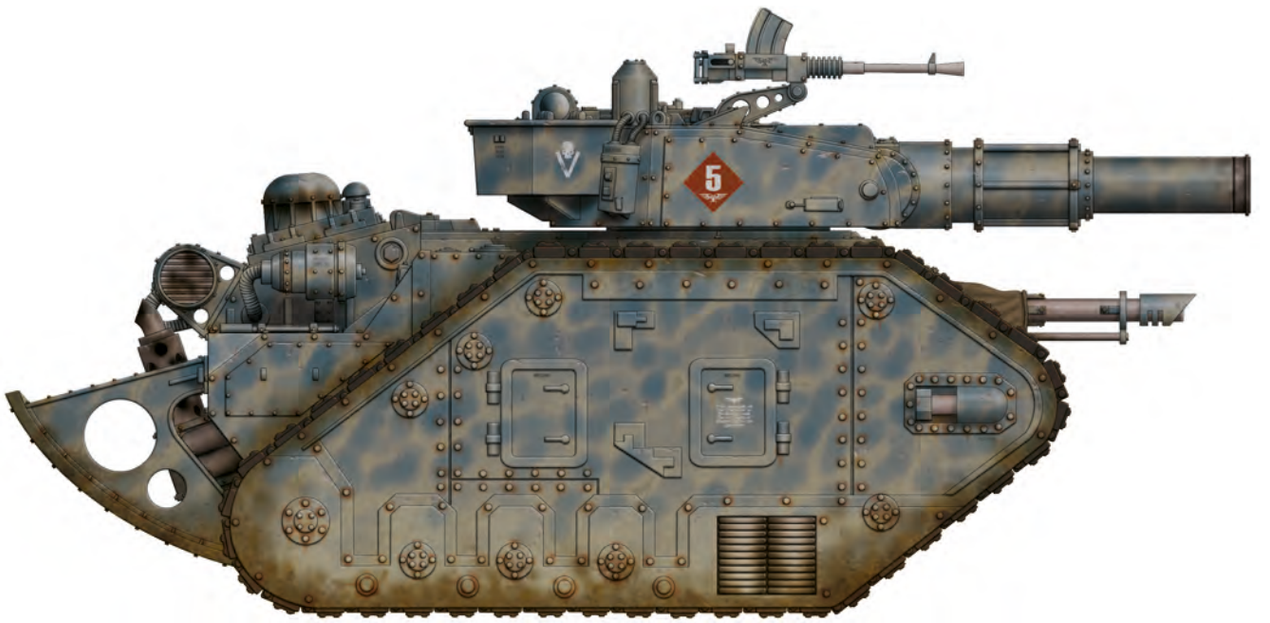




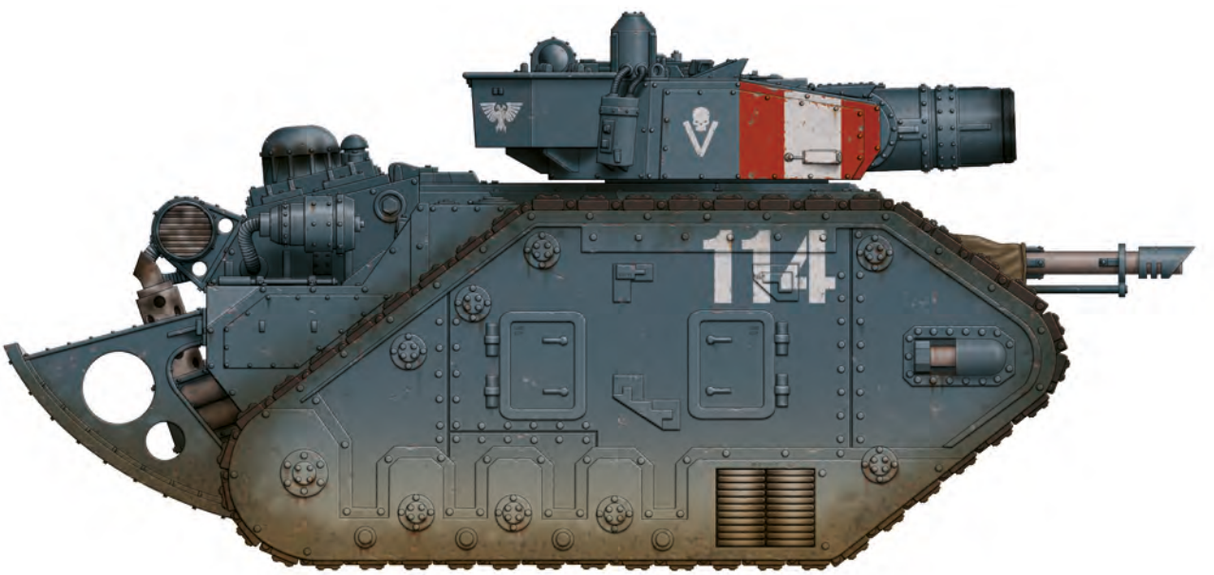
Reaver class Titan (Mars pattern) of Legio Astorum – the Warp Runners. This is the battlegroup commander's war machine *'Praetorian'*. It bears the personnal heraldry of High Princeps Rand Drauca, including the distinctive white tower of knowledge. Honour banners and Kill banners are often removed before batle to preserve them.



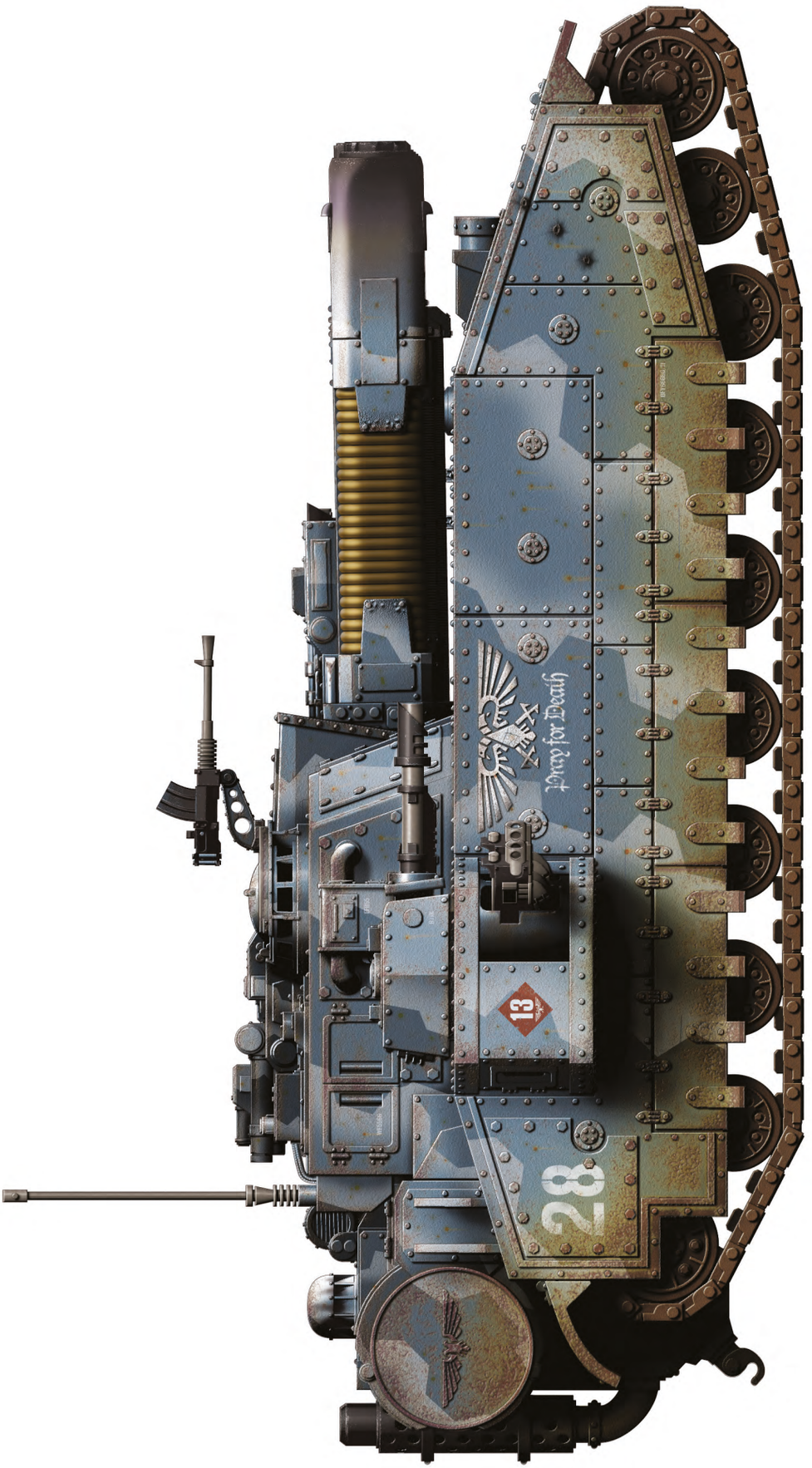
Leman Russ Executioner of the 61st Tank regiment, with additional environment filters and trench rails



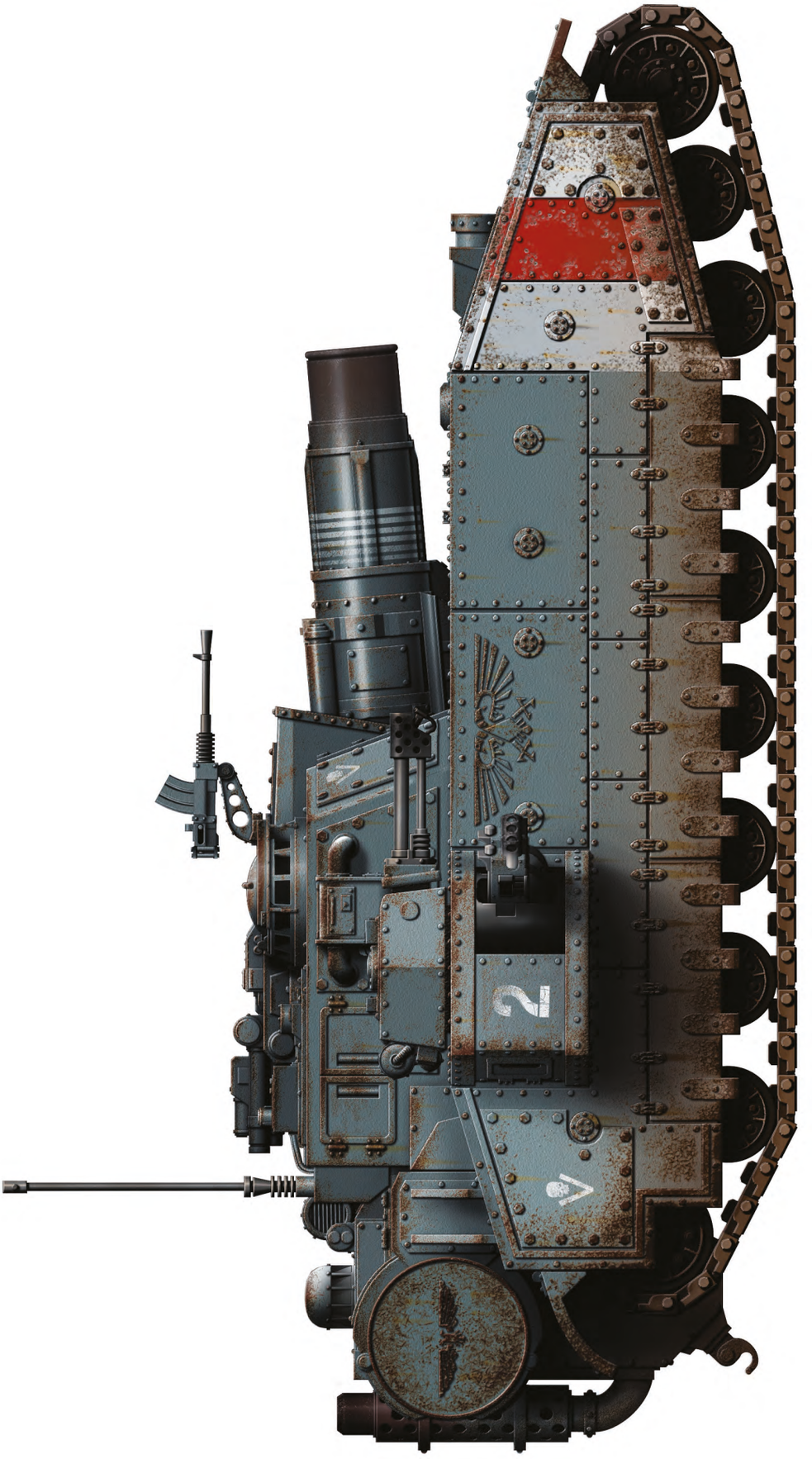
Leman Russ of the 261st Siege regiment, 5th company.



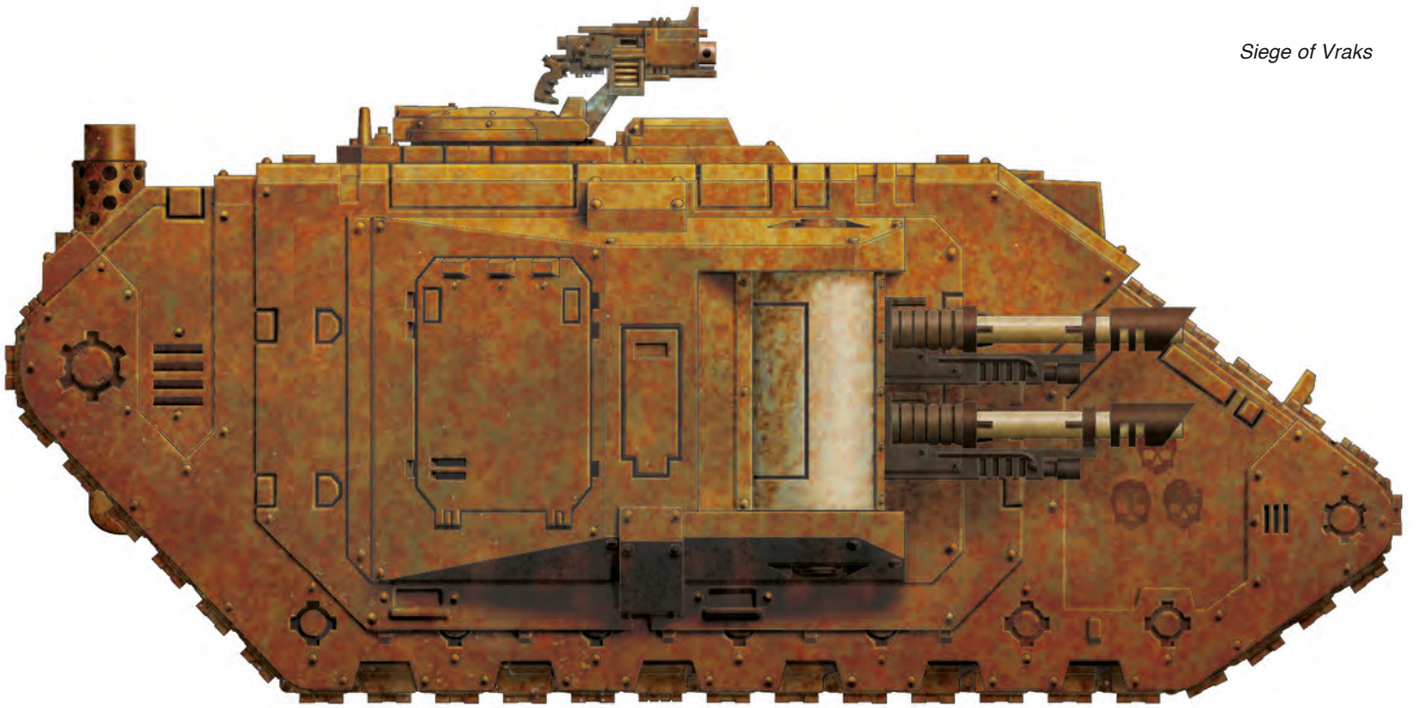
Leman Russ Demolisher of the 143rd Siege regiment, 4th company, 1st squadron, 1st vehicle.



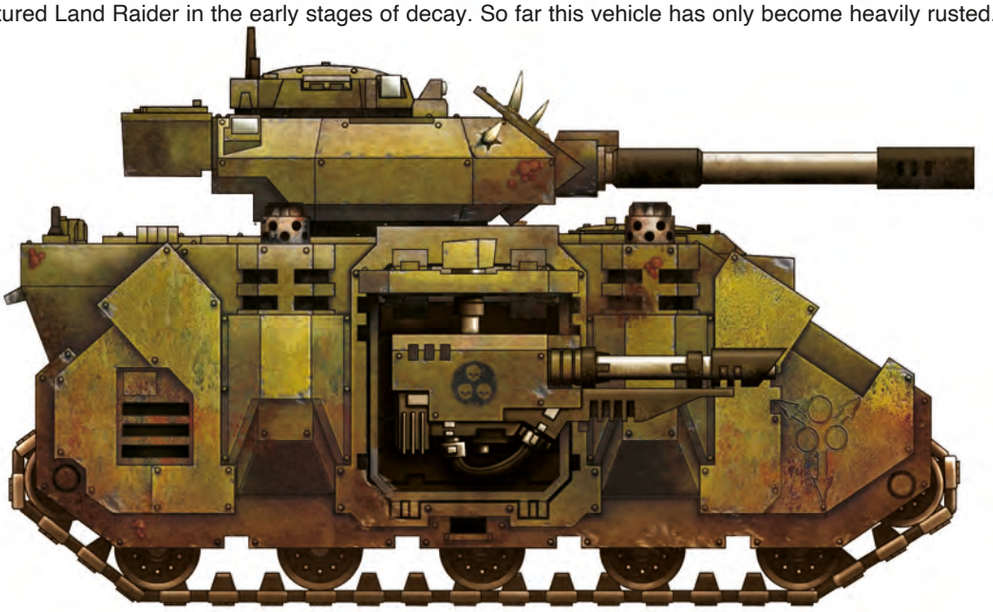
Stormblade of 61st Tank regiment. This is a commander's vehicle, it carries an honour badge of an Imperial Eagle. It may have been transferred between units with the old vehicle number left in place despite the addition of a new number.



Stormsword attached to 143rd Siege regiment. As well as serving in heavy tank companies, vehicles are also detached from their parent unit to support infantry companies. Where this attachment becomes permenent, the tank will be re-painted and numbered.



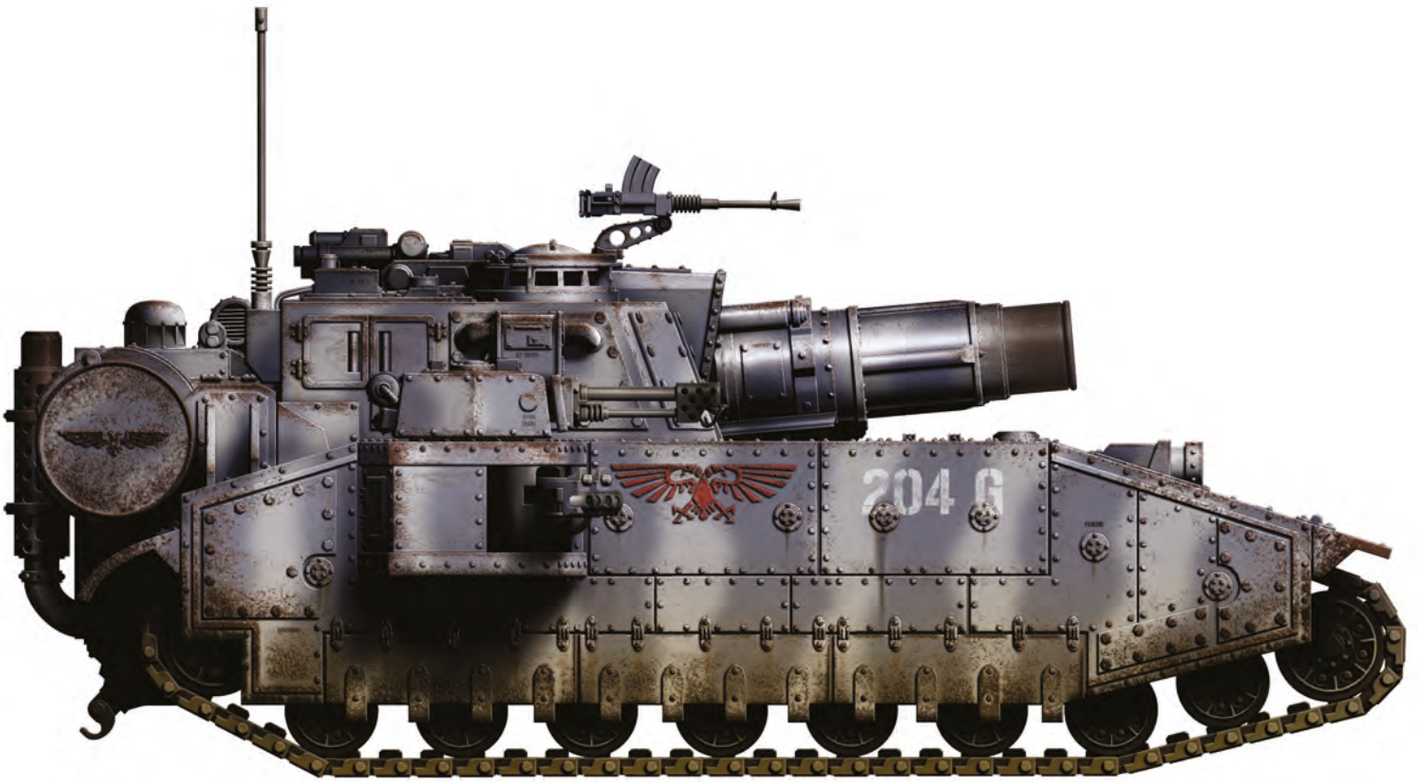
Captured Land Raider in the early stages of decay. So far this vehicle has only become heavily rusted.



Nurgle Predator of the Apostles of Contagion warband.

Nurgle Rhino of the Purge warband, destroyed during fighting against the 19th Siege regiment.

Shadowsword of the 11th Tank regiment, 14th Titan-Hunter Company (Heavy). The 14th was the regiment's only dedicated Titan-Hunter unit. This vehicle was destroyed whilst engaged with enemy Titans in sector 54-44.



Stormsword of the 61st Tank regiment. For its efforts in the Vraks campaign so far, the unit has been awarded the right to bear the Imperial Eagle as an honour badge.

Stormblade of 11th Tank regiment, 18th Heavy company. This company seem to use a wide variety of non-standard colour schemes and numbering.

Mars pattern Warhound *Canis Primus* of Legio Astorum.

CHAPTER TEN
THE WAR BENEATH VRAKS

"Subterran im Genitus"

- Motto of the Death Korps of Krieg Engineer Korps

The ultimate victory over the inner defence line, four years after it had first been scheduled and with an as yet unknown casualty list saw Marshall Kagori introduce a new phase to his campaign plan. Since his arrival as commander of the 88th siege army, it had always been in his mind to utilise large numbers of specialist Krieg engineer companies and open up a new front to the war – deep underground.

Kagori's plan involved using these troops, all well trained in the digging of mines and counter-mines, to tunnel under the Vraksian defences, allowing his men to bypass strong points or attack them from the rear, thus limiting their effectiveness. By adding a new dimension to the war firstly he hoped to take the enemy by surprise and gain quick victories over the strongest enemy positions and secondly that the enemy would lack the resources to match his plans and be at a strategic disadvantage, which might ultimately prove crucial. If necessary he would dig his way right under the fortress and bypass its defence lasers and void shields altogether. Of course the enemy would try to stop him, but he was banking on having superior manpower and resources, a large enough advantage to allow him to tunnel wherever he wished and maybe stretch the enemy beyond breaking point.

It was the Marshall's conclusion that the war on Vraks could be won below the surface of the planet. This did not mean that surface operations would cease, far from it, they must continue as before and press on with the good work of attrition and eating up the enemy's finite strength. It was below the surface that the Krieg regiments would have their greatest advantage.

Going Underground

On Vraks the commanders of the engineer companies were instructed to make preparations for this new phase of the siege. This involved making detailed geological studies of their assigned sectors. Small teams of engineers were sent forward to begin drilling deep bore holes. These would determine the depth of the usable rock strata (and as a useful side effect also locate underground water sources for drinking water for the army), and hence allow them to gauge the suitability of the geology in each regiment's sectors for offensive tunnelling. It was planned that the tunnelling would ultimately serve one of two purposes. Shallower tunnels would allow for the quick and safe movement of men for surprise attacks (sap tunnels), or deeper tunnels would be dug to undermine enemy defences and position large 'mines' – a massive collection of explosives that could be detonated from below, destroying a position ahead of a surface attack.

On 812824.M41 Krieg engineer units joined the frontline infantry in their trenches and began the systematic geological mapping of the front as the first stage of the underground war that would follow.

Vraks itself was not particularly well-suited to large scale military mining operations. Its natural geology meant that shallow tunnels could be dug at great speed as in its upper layers the ancient volcanic pumices were soft and highly porous. Although good for digging surface trenches, for miners the rock was just too soft and unstable. It would be impossible for a tunnel to remain secure and each would soon collapse in on itself. Secondly, the rapid drainage of surface water made it very damp. Tunnels would become running streams in no time, and never have a chance to dry out before another heavy rain storm filled it with water again. The absorption of large amounts of water in a short space of time created a severe problem as it led to expansion of tunnel walls and roofs, placing unpredictable pressures on any supports or roof bracings. It would be like tunnelling through heavy, waterlogged sand – an impossibility.

Deeper below Vraks' porous surface, the rocks began to harden. Here the natural drainage turned into streams and rivers, cutting a labyrinth of underground tunnels and caves. The water carved away at these rocks, draining into ever larger rivers. When these rivers became too large, the cave ceilings above could no longer hold the weight pressing into them and would collapse. This process, repeated over millions of years, had cut Vraks' surface with many deep wide gorges and canyons. This layer might provide a basis for mining, but again conditions would be very wet and any tunnels risked breaking through into a natural river and flooding, with disastrous consequences for the miners and the mine. It was possible to dig here, but mining would be very slow and dangerous and losses too catastrophic.

Deeper still the rocks became harder again, but had the advantage of being strong and dry. Tunnels dug here could be still be hewn by handpicks and, with the addition of some bracing, would have the strength to support themselves. The relative hardness would make the going slow but if necessary machinery could be introduced to speed things up. Of course, this meant that any secrecy would be compromised if the enemy were listening. It was hoped that he was not prepared for an attack from so deep. At this depth oxygen and ventilation would be a problem, and the occasional encounter with the very hard granite-like remains of ancient volcanic activity would bring some tunnels to a premature end, as digging through these would require blasting with such force that a tunnel's location would be easily spotted from the surface.

The Enemy Below

The 88th siege army now had a strong engineering korps, with companies of engineers ready to begin their long task. But the Vraksian renegades themselves had no shortage of personnel with the skills required for a war underground. All of Vraks' many large armoury facilities had been constructed underground, and the labour corps had been required to do all that mining work. Amongst the foot troops of Vraks there were already many men very familiar with the digging of mines and tunnels, and well-equipped for just such tasks with cutting and boring equipment. Once it was discovered that tunnels were being dug, they could expect to meet strong resistance from counter-mining operations.

After the location of a tunnel had been chosen by an officer, the first task of the engineer squads was to sink a shaft to the required depth. These

were vertical tunnels, accessible via ladders, or incline tunnels down which heavier equipment could be moved. The entrance to a shaft or incline needed to be well disguised. Many were hidden behind false trench walls, which could be quickly removed and replaced, and generally had infantry posted on sentry duty outside. Larger entrances had to be positioned further back from the front, using the lay of the land to avoid detection.

Initial progress through the softer outer layers was rapid, even if dug out by hand, with pre-fabricated bracing being added as the shaft deepened. Five-man engineer excavation squads worked together, either hewing at the tunnel face with picks and mattocks, removing the spoil (usually to fill sandbags for the trenches above) and manning a listening post. Using geo-thermic auspex devices, the squad's listener kept up a constant vigil, listening for enemy counter-digging. If a shaft ran into a very wet area of rock then it would need to be sealed with more permanent bracing against the worst effects of expansion or flooding. This was more time consuming and slowed down progress. As a tunnel progressed, so additional power cables could be run along it, pumps to remove excess water were fitted and winches positioned at the top of shafts to move bulky equipment and spoil bags. Once an engineer officer determined that the shaft or incline had reached the correct depth then a horizontal gallery could be started. Digging a gallery required careful planning, as below ground it was difficult to maintain a steady course. Squad Watchmasters were responsible for the constant surveying of galleries, measuring out distances and depths and maintaining direction. Initially tunnels would be narrow, wide enough only for two engineers to work side by side. As the tunnel war progressed throughout the siege so these narrow tunnels became guide tunnels for the creation of wider galleries by heavier tunnelling equipment.

Battles in the Silent Darkness

The tunneller had many natural enemies, foremost being the danger of collapse. This was mitigated by Vraks' highly stable tectonics, with very little seismic activity affecting tunnelling (one of the reasons it had originally been selected for subterranean arms storage in the first place). But any tunnel roof will eventually collapse under its own weight and required supporting. A second danger was flooding, although pre-planning usually meant that areas with underground streams and rivers were detected and avoided, pumps (often operated by hand) were installed to remove the excess seepage. Still it was not unusual for miners to work ankle deep in water. A third danger was the build-up of gases. Working in a low oxygen environment meant that odourless gases were an ever-present threat. Engineers were protected with small gas detection devices and were equipped with respirator masks with an oxygen supply.

The miner's one other great natural enemy was noise. Below ground the only way to detect the presence of an enemy was by sound. Sound travels very well through rock and an enemy could be quickly located by listening for the sounds generated by his work. Picks clashing with rocks made noise, as did digging with spades or the tramp of boots. In the darkness of a deep gallery any noise could give away a position and expose a tunnel to counter-mining and destruction by a secretly placed collapsing charge. The tunnelling war was one of stealth, with noise kept to a minimum at all times.

When enemy tunnels could be detected they could be destroyed by counter-mining. A counter-mine team would seek to intercept the approaching enemy tunnel and set an explosive collapsing charge to destroy it. Collapsing charges, also known as torpedo charges or mole launchers due to their distinctive shape, were used to create a directional blast that would collapse the enemy tunnel. Krieg engineers carried such specialised equipment, whilst the enemy could fabricate their own using blasting charges. A charge would be set by boring it into the side of the tunnel, blocking off the gallery with a wall of sandbags (to contain the explosion) and running a detonator cable back to a safe distance, usually the surface. The charge's explosion would detonate in an avalanche of earth and rock that would bury the occupants of the tunnel alive, or trap them inside an unmovable wall of earth and rock. By the time a rescue party could dig through the wreckage, the trapped miners would be long dead due to oxygen starvation, a slow and lingering death. If the enemy had detected a tunnel and not been detected in turn, mole launcher attacks came without any warning. Just as on the surface where sudden death could come at any moment from a stray artillery shell, so the engineers endured a war where death struck mercilessly and unheralded.

Alternatively, a counter-mine team might seek to break in and capture an enemy's tunnels. In the event that the enemy broke through, then invariably a vicious close quarters fight would ensue. In a darkness illuminated by wildly waving torch beams, with shotguns, pistols, grenades and knives, the two sides would struggle for control of the tunnel.

Above: Engineers prepare to fire a mole launcher

In such a confined space, fights would always be brutal and short.

During mining operations against a bunker in sector 544-469 by the 188th engineer company, an excavation team detected an enemy counter-mine and carefully dug under it, patiently waiting for a chance to break-in and investigate the enemy workings. The company set a collapsing charge behind themselves, as insurance should the enemy break through into their gallery, so it could be quickly sealed. All work ceased as they listened night and day until no enemy digging could be heard. Predicting that no enemy were present Lieutenant Zoltz led a hand-picked squad to the end of his tunnel and ordered them to break through. Working quickly with mattocks and picks they soon opened a hole into the enemy tunnel floor. All was silent and dark beyond. Lieutenant Zoltz was first through, scrambling up, his flashlight showing the way. Squatting in the low tunnel he directed half his squad to the left, whilst he led the second half to the right.

Creeping forwards, Zoltz was approaching the enemy frontline when he came to a fork in the tunnel. Turning off all torches he listened hard. There was the unmistakable sound of approaching boots from the right fork. He ordered his men up the left fork and they waited for the enemy to pass by, hoping they were returning to the tunnel face. Through his monocle eye-piece he counted as six enemy miners, tools in hand, pistols holstered, passed them and scurried off into the darkness, from the direction he had just approached. Zoltz was faced with a dilemma, he might be able to find an access to an enemy trench or bunker, but half his squad would be surprised by the arrival of the enemy that had just passed him. Zoltz determined his plan. He put two men at the junction as guards and to set a demolition charge and destroy the tunnel junction. He would stealthily follow the enemy miners and ambush them before they encountered the second half of his squad.

Moving stealthily, the remaining three men at his back, laspistol levelled, Zoltz approached the rear of the enemy digging team. Suddenly the tunnel was illuminated by approaching flashlight beams. The second half of the squad was returning from the tunnel face, unaware that the enemy was directly ahead of them. Zoltz fired, hitting the rear man in the lower back and he collapsed to the floor with a scream of pain. Suddenly there was total confusion and firing in all directions. The enemy miners were trapped between the approaching squad and those behind but put up a brave fight with their autopistols. The tunnel was alive with ricochetting bullets, sudden muzzle flashes and the bark of shotguns. Smoke filled the narrow tunnel as one by one the enemy were cut down. A grenade exploded, sending a powerful blast wave racing down the tunnel and knocking Zoltz and his men to the ground, dazed and winded. In the confusion Zoltz had also been shot in the arm and could feel his tunic becoming damp and sticky with blood. He flipped his flashlight back on and shouted a warning to his approaching men that there were friendly troops here. The shooting stopped. All the enemy were down, riddled with shotgun blasts. Three of Zoltz's engineers had been injured. These men he ordered back through the hole into their own tunnel. The others should come with him, back to the fork where the demolition charge was almost ready.

The sudden firefight below ground had not gone unnoticed and more enemy were on their way to investigate. This time they were ready for action. At the fork they encountered the demolition team. As Zoltz approached again he heard the echoing blast of shotguns. Running as fast as he could in the low tunnel, he saw his two men emptying their weapons along both forks. Another grenade exploded, its trapped force sent a second shock wave through his squad and filled the tunnel with blinding grey smoke. Both the engineer defenders had been caught in the blast and killed. Through the cloud Zoltz could see more approaching torch beams. There was no time to fire the demoliton charge, it was time to fall back. Zoltz ordered that he would hold the enemy here, the others should get back to their own tunnel and prepare to seal it against an enemy intrusion. Taking one of his men's shotguns and spare ammunition he began firing down the tunnel whilst his men retreated, leaving their officer to his lone defence. The blast of shotgun shells kept the enemy at bay as he worked his way back to the entrance hole and jumped down. The enemy were close behind in the darkness, firing blind after him, bullets whined and buzzed around Zoltz as he made his escape. One buried itself in his rigid breastplate, shattering his torch.

The engineer-lieutenant staggered back to the demolition charge detonator, where the five survivors of his short but bloody expedition awaited his return. Still bleeding and starting to lose consciousness, he waited for the enemy to close in, then ordered the charge to be fired. The explosion collapsed the roof of the tunnel in a landslide of rock, crushing the advancing enemy and sealing the tunnel. During the skirmish, Zoltz had lost two men and a further four had been wounded, including himself. His expedition had killed at least six, and maybe more, enemy miners. Other mole mortar shells could now be fired to destroy the enemy workings entirely.

The enemy responded to such incursions below their positions and into their tunnels by using booby traps and leaving more guards in the tunnels.

The Attack on Armoury 55-46

The most heavily undermined area of the entire front was in sector 55-46, with both 12th line korps and 46th line korps making constant use of engineer companies to attack enemy positions. Here the main objective was the capture of the large underground armoury, known to be located at 554-467, which was still being used as a stockpile and a safe shelter for enemy equipment. It had already been heavily shelled by the siege guns, but with little effect as the important war materiels were buried deep underground. As the engineers dug forward they attempted to work their way towards the armoury with the objective of effecting a break-in and over-running the facility in a surprise assault. But the enemy detected their approach and counter-mined the area heavily. Soon, deep below Vraks' shell-tortured surface, a second war was raging in the darkness. It soon became clear that the enemy was aware of the target and taking every step it could to stop the engineers' progress. A labyrinth of shafts, galleries and tunnels was soon forming and with the element of surprise lost, the heavy tunnelling equipment was brought in to speed up the digging.

The fighting underground in this sector was equal to that above ground, with casualty rates amongst the engineer companies even exceeding those of the infantry. Tunnel fighting was a daily occurrence where the mines and counter-mines collided, battles could rage for days as both sides fought to capture enemy tunnels and exploit any gains. Slowly, by strength of numbers, the Krieg engineers gained the upper hand, pushing the enemy back and on790825.M41 reported that they were finally in a position to attempt to breach the underground armoury. In all, five full strength companies would be dedicated to the task of breaking

DEATH KORPS ENGINEER

1. UNIFORM
Krieg Engineer uniforms are a modified version of the standard infantry uniform. The long overcoat has been discarded in favour of a short tunic jacket to reduce encumbrance and aid mobility when operating in the very confined spaces of tunnels. The trousers, leg bindings and boots remain standard issue. The uniform is impregnated against chemical and biological attack.

2. SHOTGUN
All engineers carry shotguns as their standard weapon. In the confines of tunnel fighting, the weapon's short range and inherent inaccuracy is not a major drawback, and its hitting power at very short range makes it useful to engineers whose fire fights are typically short and lethal. The shotgun's blast means they can sweep a tunnel clear and potentially hit multiple opponents in a single blast. These weapons are sometimes favoured by veteran Krieg Watchmasters for trench and dug-out clearance.

The weapon is a Lucius pattern Mk 22c semi-automatic shotgun. It has an eight round revolving magazine, uses a gas-operated self-loading action to fire and can be loaded with a variety of ammunition, including solid slugs, pellet loaded canisters and low velocity flares. The revolver action is prone to mechanical failure, but the weapon's high gauge and the heavy cartridge fired make it a deadly weapon at very close quarters, although it is infamous for its ferocious recoil.

3. EQUIPMENT
Engineers carry a lot of specialise equipment for their duties. Worn instead of the standard issue backpack, they wear a simple frame to which other equipment is then attached. This engineer is carrying a pair of heavy-duty cutters and a folding spade. Other squad members will be carrying a wide variety of engineering equipment such as mattocks and pickaxes, rope and cable, detonators and detonator cord and various shaped explosive charges used for blasting during mine construction. Technical equipment such as seismic-augurs and geo-thermic auspex are also common.

Engineers wear the type VI respirator, a modification of the type V utilising twin air-lines. This respirator can also be fitted with an oxygen supply as well as a regulator unit. During deep mining operations air will become very scarce and dangerous gases can build up. This emergency supply allows an engineer to continue to work in any atmospheric conditions. The respirator mask is also fitted with a monocular infra-red night vision eye-pierce, allowing engineers to work and fight in the total darkness below ground.

4. ARMOUR
Like grenadiers, engineers wear distinctive heavy carapace armour to improve survivability when in close combat with the enemy. The armour comprises of the standard issue Mk IX helmet, rebreather mask, shoulder guards, breastplate and additional abdomen plates. The shin guards are not used, being replaced by kneepads, as most engineering work must be done crouching or kneeling. Each breastplate mounts a powerful flashlight for use whilst working in the darkness.

5. OTHER WEAPONS
Although his shotgun does not have a bayonet lug, this engineer still carries a sword bayonet. This long knife makes a fine close combat weapon, being almost the length of a short sword and very useful in the close confines of tunnel fighting.

This engineer is well supplied with krak grenades. All engineers carry grenades as standard for use in close confines and are trained in the use of other special weapons such as melta-bombs, demolition charges and chemical warfare agents.

This is Watchmaster 221-548-95664-08-Garis, commander of engineer squad 226, attached to the 143rd regiment's 20th company during the sector 54-45 offensive.

226
226

in and then securing the breach. Behind them more companies were ready to exploit their foothold. These were stiffened by grenadiers squads, themselves equipped with melta-bombs and demolition charges to aid in the mission.

The enemy knew the attack must come soon and had prepared to meet it when it did. Reinforcements had been rushed to the armoury, including a warband of the Berserkers of Skallathrax, whose lust for hand-to-hand combat would be well sated in the close, room-to-room, tunnel-to-tunnel fighting to come. Unknown to the Krieg commanders, most of the enemy's heavy equipment and stores had been evacuated to safety, leaving the armoury almost bare. The stage was set for a savage isolated battle beneath Vraks, where no tank, artillery shell or mortar bomb could aid either side.

To assist the underground battle, 150th and 471st siege regiments were ordered to launch attacks in the neighbouring sectors. Although just diversions, they were to push hard and drew in more enemy forces, stretching their resources. The 27th artillery company was positioned with orders to fire a box-barrage over the attack, to help seal it from further reinforcements. The 27th company's guns were in position and well stocked with ammunition when the time for the engineers' attack came.

Deep below sector 55-46, the lead companies filed down the shafts and tunnels, all carrying heavy loads of equipment and rations for a sustained battle. Two tunnels had been excavated under the armoury and inside each of these a huge breaching charge had been laid. Hundreds of tonnes of explosive had been packed in, then the tunnels sealed with thick sandbag 'tamps' to contain the blasts. When the detonations came, it would smash wide holes through to the armoury above and annihilate any enemy forces within. Then, as the dust settled, the engineer squads would rush in and start the job of clearing the armoury's galleries, warehouses, storerooms and barracks.

The armoury itself was a huge ferrocrete construction, a warren of cavernous warehouses and storerooms, along with barrack facilities for its guards. Most of its defences were on the surface. Inside, the defenders had built barricades from rubble-filled fuel barrels, flak board, sandbags, boulders and anything else solid that came to hand. These barricades blocked the vital corridors and positioned heavy weapons to cover the approaches. Defending a barricade, one militiaman manning a heavy bolter or stubber could rake a corridor with fire, turning it into a killing ground. Every corridor would have to be stormed at a high price in blood.

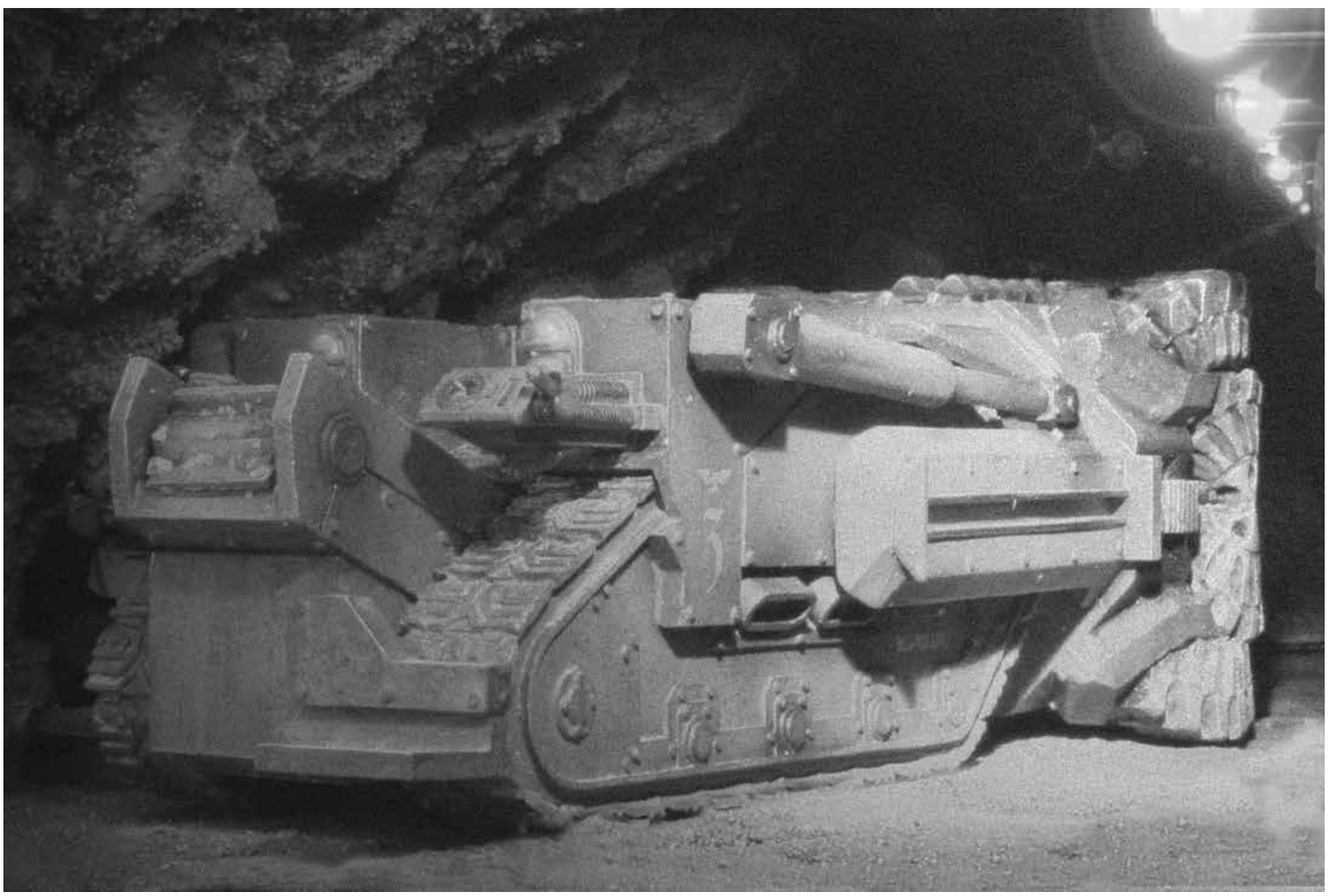
On 803825.M41 the order to detonate the breaching charges was given. Captain Garis of 98th engineer company pushed down the plunger, the electronic signal raced along the wires to the detonators and then the world collapsed. The explosion could be heard in the trenches above ground, rumbling like approaching thunder, shaking the ground like an earthquake. Within the 55-46 armoury, the twin charges demolished two storerooms, the force of the erupting explosion sending chunks of rock as large as a Leman Russ battle tank hurting through the area to shatter on impact with the crumbling walls. The ceiling collapsed in a landslide of ferrocrete and earth, shaking the entire complex. The emergency lighting failed and plunged all into darkness, and the smoke, fumes and dust rolled out down the corridors like an enveloping fog. Those defenders caught too close to the epicentre were crushed by the shockwave or trapped in the rubble. The battle had begun.

The first squads through the twin breaches clambered into a world of eerie darkness, shrouded in a thick choking fog. Rubble lay everywhere, piled metres high. The squads spread out, flashlight beams flickering as they climbed over the rubble scree. Whatever had been in place to defend these rooms had been destroyed and for now the engineers could advance against no resistance. In minutes engineers were swarming through the breach.

In the darkness the militiamen were holding their nerve and waiting, fingers poised over triggers, as the shock of the breach charging subsided. Then, the echoing retort of a heavy stubber shattered the silence. A long stream of bullets ricocheted down the corridor and tore through the engineers, more guns opened fire, bright muzzle flashes in the darkness, grenades exploding with ear shattering force. Men were hit, cut down with nowhere to hide, their bodies piling up in the corridors. The Krieg engineers returned fire, shotgun blasts ringing and echoing. The traitor gunners continued to fire at the engineers attacking down each corridor, or across each storeroom. The Krieg engineers threw grenades back, trying to dislodge each gunner in turn, but they were protected behind their barricades and any wounded defender was quickly replaced by another gunner. Each barricade took its toll in dead and wounded. Flamethrowers were brought forward, filling each corridor with blazing promethium that consumed the oxygen, replacing it with toxic fumes. High above the rumble of the box-barrage could be heard, like a distant heavy drumbeat, it dislodged dust and mortar from the ceilings to rattle down on the engineers' helmets as they crouched in the darkness.

The first attack had stalled, each probe forward was cut down in turn in a blaze of automatic fire. The engineers had a slim toe-hold inside the armoury but could advance no further. The initial firefight died down, just the sporadic blast of shotguns reverberated through the corridors to harass the enemy and keep their heads down. Concerned with the lack of progress, Captain Garis of 20th company came forward to assess the situation and find a way of breaking the deadlock. He ordered his men to set melta-charges to blast holes in the interior walls. They could create their own corridors, blasting through into rooms from unexpected directions. He also authorized the use of corrosive gas grenades to dislodge the defenders.

Garis' intervention got the engineers on the move again, allowing them to cautiously make their way forward. Captain Garis led the way as one melta-charge revealed a dark narrow corridor beyond. Jumping through, with squads at his back, he advanced to a set of steps leading downwards, the bottom of which was sealed by a heavy metal blast door that had been welded shut. Quickly he had a melta-charge placed and fell back to a safe distance as it detonated in a bright orange flash, the door itself becoming molten and steaming violently before the centre collapsed inwards in a pool of liquid slag. Behind it the enemy were waiting, crouched behind a barricade in the darkness, shielded from the melta-charge's superheated blast. They were ready, poised to pounce, chainaxes gripped tight in one power-gauntleted hand, bolt pistols and plasma pistols in the other. As Captain Garis advanced again, climbing through the now cooling breach, the enemy sprang up and charged. Screaming an unholy curse to their god, their bloodlust over took them. The Khorne Berserkers counter-attacked in a rush of blazing bolt pistol explosions and the shriek of chainaxes as the spinning blades bit deep. Captain Garis was the first to die, torn into bloody offal in seconds. The



Top: Fighting inside Armoury 55-46, a squad sergeant leads his men into the darkness. Engineers are trained and equipped for fighting in such confined spaces.

Bottom: In the depths of the armoury complex, a Hades breaching drill lies abandoned.

engineer squads behind recoiled as one after another they were cut down, their blood spraying the walls and running along the floor in rivulets. The corridor was a slaughterhouse, Khorne laughed long and drank deep of the massacre wrought by his favoured followers. The engineers were no match for these fearsome warriors, each a towering superhuman, strong and fast, protected within blood-encrusted red powered armour, psychopathic with the desire to kill in their master's name – insane for blood and skulls. In the darkness they killed uncounted numbers and left the mangled bloody corpses to rot.

The violence of the counter-attack halted the engineers' advance again. They sealed the breaches against the Khorne Berserkers who were now stalking the corridors at will, and fought to hold onto the ground they had captured. Their gas grenades had little effect against powered armour.

For the rest of the first day the deadlock could not be broken. The next day the grenadier squads were sent into the attack from reserve, hoping that they could succeed where the engineers could not. Again they had to face a headlong rush along fire-swept corridors and be cut down. But in some places they did dislodge the defenders with a well-aimed grenade, and turned the barricade to their own defence. Again the Berserkers counter-attacked, charging the barricades, heedless of the enemy fire slashing about them. At one barricade defended by grenadiers, the madmen charged as hellgun shots ricocheted off their powered armour, leaving deep scorch marks but doing no real damage. Grenades exploded but the Berserkers barely broke stride. Then a heavy flamer fired, sending a burning torrent of promethium down the tunnel. The lead Berserker ignited, doused in burning fuel he staggered but ran on, a blazing in human torch, chainaxe raised to strike, still screaming Khorne's name as he leapt the barricade, bright orange flames engulfing him. Those grenadiers who did not run were cut down. What could mere men, even the stoic men of Krieg, do against such insane and reckless foes?

The third day of battle saw it take a turn for the worse. The enemy had expected the engineers' attack and had prepared well, including the digging of counter-mines in secret. They aimed to cut the enemy approach tunnels, and as the battle raged within the armoury, their miners stole ever closer to the Krieg tunnels. A sudden explosion collapsed one tunnel, an engineer squad on their way to the armoury was caught in the explosion and all were killed in the cave-in. Suddenly the flow of men and supplies to the battle was cut to just a single tunnel, if this should be attacked then all the troops ahead would be cut off and face annihilation. The engineers could not afford to have their last lifeline severed. Engineer squads were pulled from the front in order to dig new counter-mines and to man extra listening posts for enemy digging. The heavy artillery still drumming above made the task all the harder.

Bottom: In the depths of the armoury complex, Krieg engineers make a cautious advance through a wall breach.

For three days it had been a desperate fight. Of the first five engineer companies committed to the attack, all had taken horrendous casualties. Of the 600 men in each company at the start of the battle, many were now below half-strength, Captain Garis' 20th company was down to just 187 men. Many had been slaughtered in close combat with the Traitor Space Marines.

After four days of no gains, the attack was called off. The enemy were digging again, seeking to attack the remaining supply tunnel. An attempt to dig through the first collapse had ended in disaster as the enemy had been waiting for the new miners and fired a second charge, causing a new collapse and trapping or killing more engineers. It seemed there would be no breakthrough here, and one by one the Krieg squads pulled back.

Dirty, smoke-blackened and with many walking wounded, they emerged from the tunnels below into the frontline trenches, weary men that had been underground for four days, locked in a pitiless battle. For now they had failed to capture the objective, but they would try again. In all, three such battles would be fought for the armoury until it was finally overrun by advancing ground forces of the 471st regiment. The enemy forces that were trapped within by the advance were afforded no mercy. The exits were all sealed and guarded, then the armoury was pumped full with corrosive gas, entombing them below ground forever. Nothing could have survived in an environment so corrosive that it stripped flesh from bones in seconds and then melted the bones to liquid. The engineers had taken their revenge.

The Sector 57-44 Mine

Failure in sector 55-46 did not stop the progress of the underground war in other sectors, and every regiment now had engineer companies attached and at work below ground. There was a second frontline forming below the trenches, and the stealthy tunnel fighting

continued day after day, extracting its toll of attrition from both sides, but with the Krieg engineers slowly progressing towards their ultimate objective – the curtain wall.

The curtain wall itself was no single defence line. Over the long years of the war the curtain wall, a tall, thick defence bristling with weaponry and housing bunkers and barracks, had been reinforced with extra trenches and pillboxes laid in front to form another formidable defence line. If not as thick as the previous three, still it must be taken by direct assault.

Marshall Kagori's plan had always been to undermine the curtain wall, lay large mines and blast breaches through it. Hammering it with siege artillery and bombing it from the sky might work, but would redirect resources that were always in demand elsewhere. Until such time as the trenches could be dug closer to the wall and it could be targeted by direct fire, then a large mine posed the best chance of making a successful breach.

On 673826.M41, over one patient year after the mining operation had first begun, the objective was reached. In sector 57-44 the 383rd engineer company reported it had located the wall's deep foundations and was in position to set a mine and attempt a breach. Working in total secrecy and silence the engineers ferried the explosives to the chamber constructed to house them. Each explosive charge was carefully stacked and a secondary detonator attached back to the main detonator. It took many days of stealthy work to build the mine. Meanwhile, on the surface an attack was being prepared by the 308th siege regiment. It would fall to them to lead the way and force a route through the last defences between the fortress and ultimate victory.

Preparations for the attack were a closely guarded secret, only the engineers of 383rd company were aware of what was actually being planned. Across Vraks other mining operations were stepped up, to draw enemy attention away whilst the mine was readied. In sector 56-46 heavy cutters were used in a sudden drive for the curtain wall as a deliberate diversion. Quickly spotted by the enemy it drew several counter-mines to it and provoked more bloody underground firefights.

The 57-44 mine would be the largest yet, a massive amount of explosives were needed to make a wide breach, almost emptying 34th line korps' stockpiles. They would have one shot at it and they had to make it count!

714826.M41 was set as zero-hour for detonation. The 34th line korps' high command gathered in a distant bunker to observe the mine and subsequent attack from a safe distance. The cables were checked and double-checked and all engineers removed to safety as the countdown grew ever closer to zero. Over the vox-casters a warning was broadcast – until 10, 9, 8, 7, 6... 2, 1 – 'Fire!'

A tornado howled down the underground tunnels, blowing earth and rock back through the entrances. The ground began to tremble violently as a yellow flame shot hundreds of feet into the air, followed quickly by dense columns of smoke and then the debris behind it. Growing like a mountain in the sky, the black column of rock, earth and masonry rose, up and up, ever upwards, forming a broad mushroom cloud until it peaked and began to tumble back down. With a great booming crash the shock wave rolled out across no-man's land, rattling the dugouts and trenches of 308th regiment as it swept over them. In the distance all was obscured by the dense pall of smoke and gas now expanding from ground zero. As the smoke cleared the observers could see that the curtain wall had gone. A huge stretch of it had been obliterated into shards of masonry. Nothing remained except a yawning crater. It was a scene of complete devastation. The mine had done its work, 88th army had their breach, now they had to seize it.

The guns of 308th regiment opened fire as one. The barrage that signalled the start of the attack impacted beyond the curtain wall, shells bursting in rapid succession as the artillery prepared the ground for the first wave of infantry in their Gorgon transports.

Top: As part of operations to divert attention from the sector 57-44 mine, Krieg infantry prepare a Cyclops remote controlled demolition vehicle for a surprise attack across no-man's land.

WAR IN THE AIR

With the 88th siege army re-equipping and re-supplying and with new allies on the way to the front, the balance of power had again shifted in favour of the Emperor's forces. They could now match the Traitor Titans of Legio Vulcanum and the arrival of 717th fighter wing and 1099th bomber wing meant that they could also contest the enemy's aerial supremacy.

Along with the planetary landings of thousands of battle-hardened Chaos worshippers and the renegade warbands of Chaos Space Marines, there had also arrived the infernal Hell Blade and Hell Talons. Sleek and fast, they now streaked into battle, bombing and strafing with impunity. The 88th siege army had little to respond with. It was severely short of anti-aircraft weaponry, the plan for the siege had not envisioned requiring it in great numbers and that which had been deployed had long since been converted for ground use or lost to the endless artillery bombardments. The Krieg regiments had no air support to call upon themselves, so the enemy had free reign over Vraks' skies.

Enemy aircraft could strike far and wide, making nowhere on Vraks' surface safe from attack. Across the Van Meersland Wastes, Hell Blades and Hell Talons plunged down onto supply depots and artillery positions, even attacking the distant landing fields and interrupting the flow of supplies. The losses to the air attacks were mounting daily.

Marshall Kagori's reinforcements could now however meet the enemy above Vraks with Thunderbolt and Lightning fighters to provide air-defence and escort the Marauder bomber missions. The Marauders gave the 88th siege army a reach well beyond its artillery range so the Imperium's army could now strike at the heart of the enemy and the citadel would soon come under regular air raids. Strongpoints could be targeted by low-level precision bombing, whilst entire areas of the frontline could be carpet bombed in preparation for an offensive. The siege of Vraks would take on a whole new dimension as the war esculated again.

The 717th fighter wing consisted of ten squadrons, each of approximately 20 aircraft. They would be deployed mainly as a defensive force, flying constant combat air patrols ready to intercept enemy attacks, whilst others would be required to fly as long range escorts alongside the Marauders. 1099th bomber wing consisted of seven squadrons, each of approximately a dozen bombers, supported by four Marauder Vigilants for long-range reconnaissance and command and control support. This was a potent asset for Marshall Kagori, over 80 heavily ladened bombers would be able to pound the rebels and their defences night and day.

It took time to prepare the aircraft after their long journey and to stockpile enough fuel and ammunition whilst labourers constructed airbases for both wings. On 930824.M41 the work was finally complete and the first missions were ready to be launched. The stormy skies of Vraks, once filled by peels of thunder would now reverberate to the roar of jet engines.

To those in the trenches below, looking up to see the vapour trails of high flying bombers and their escorts, it seemed that the Imperial Navy crews had the easiest of lives. They did not face the ever-present threat of sudden annihilation by enemy shelling or the prospect of going over the top in the face of withering enemy fire. These crews knew little of the torments of life on the frontline, living safely in well-protected barracks far away. The pilots knew differently. Part of Vraks' system of defences against planetary assault was heavy concentrations of anti-aircraft weaponry, much of which surrounded the citadel. The pilots sent to attack the citadel soon named it the 'hornet's nest'. A bombing raid would be met with a tremendous barrage of flak and Manticore missiles. Enemy fighters swooped in to meet them, recklessly attacking without fear for their own lives. The Chaos worshippers threw themselves into the new aerial war, seemingly heedless of their losses. Ferocious dogfights swirled and dived and the Imperial Navy's losses started to mount. Proportionally, during attacks on the citadel, an air crewman actually had less chance of survival than an infantryman. Just like the ground war, the battle in the skies was bitter and merciless.

The fortress was their main target and Marauder Vigilant missions quickly revealed that over the years of the siege the enemy had not relied wholly upon the plundered stores (massive through they were). The fortress was now surrounded by its own crude manufacturum. A shantytown of arms and metal working factories had sprung up, where tanks could be repaired and weapons and ammunition constructed. Clustered around the foot of the fortress rock these armouries, workshops and forges were burning night and day to supply the troops at the front. Well beyond the range of Krieg artillery, they soon became a priority target for the bombers. The fortress itself was very well defended and almost invulnerable beneath the shroud of its void shields. The surrounding workshops were also well protected by Vraks' many anti-aircraft weapons. Here the air war raged with its greatest intensity, Marauders roaring in to unleash devastation into the teeth of heavy flak concentrations. Although other missions to strike at strong points on the front or to interdict the service roads that acted as the main supply routes were also planned and executed, the citadel remained the priority. As the air war intensified, aircraft became a common sight over Vraks.

Marshall Kagori was assured that the Imperial Navy's commitment to Vraks was in it for the long haul. They would see the campaign to its conclusion, just as the siege regiments must. A constant stream of replacement aircraft, pilots and crew would be supplied to keep the commitment up to strength. Enemy strength in aircraft was unknown and given their nature difficult to pin down. Estimates ranged from 200 aircraft up to 500. Most likely the enemy enjoyed an advantage in numbers at the beginning of the air campaign but as attrition began to take its toll, and Imperial Navy replacements began to arrive, by 278825.M41 most aircrews estimated that they had achieved a rough parity in forces. From then on the Imperial Navy would be gaining the upper hand, if only in numbers alone.

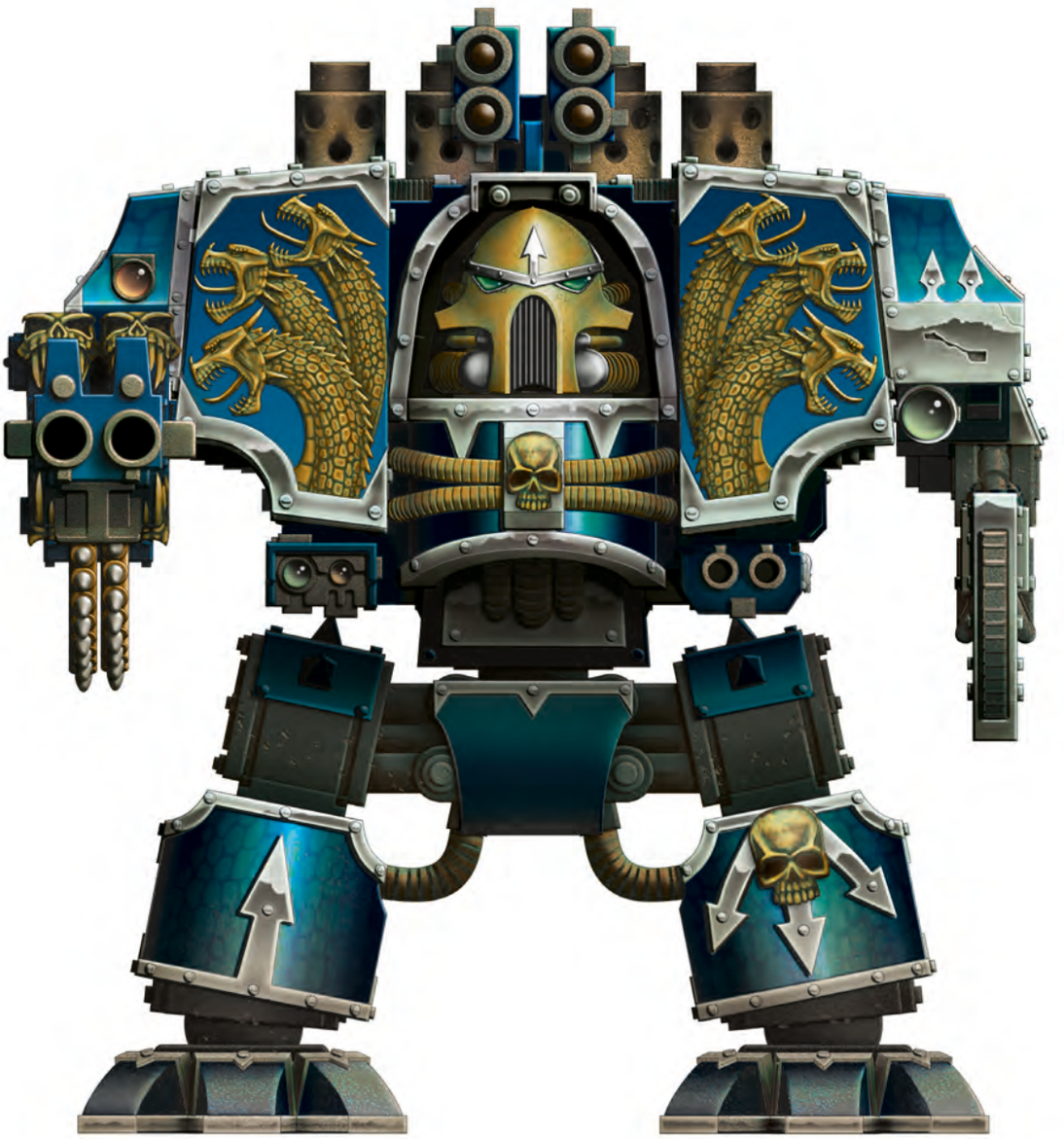
The aircraft that faced each other over Vraks were very different. The vast bulk of the fighter wing was made up of Thunderbolts, the workhorse of the Imperial Navy, well-armoured and armed, with good speed and manoeuvrability. The fighter squadrons could also field a few Lightnings – smaller, faster and lighter than the Thunderbolts they lacked the heavy fighter's firepower, but could compete with the enemy's better manoeuvrability in a dogfight. The real striking power came from the Marauder bombers. A medium bomber with excellent range and a large payload of bombs but slow and heavy, the Marauder was very vulnerable to enemy fighters and could not operate without a strong fighter escort. These would be supported by the Marauder's Vigilant variant. These aircraft sacrificed bomb payload for technical equipment, scanners and high-powered imagers. Used for aerial reconnaissance of targets before an attack, or to study the effects after a raid, they were specialised aircraft and had to be carefully husbanded.

The Imperial Navy faced the Hell Blade and larger Hell Talon. The Hell Blade was small, very fast and agile in a dogfight. They operated in large numbers, swarming the Imperial Navy's formations. The Hell Talon was a heavier aircraft operating in the fighter/bomber role, carrying a payload of bombs as well as its defensive weapons. Despite its size it was still a mobile aircraft and match for the Thunderbolt in a dogfight. So far on Vraks none of the much feared Harbinger super-heavy bombers had been encountered.

88th Siege Army Imperial Navy Assets

717th Fighter wing
10 squadrons – 200 aircraft (approx)

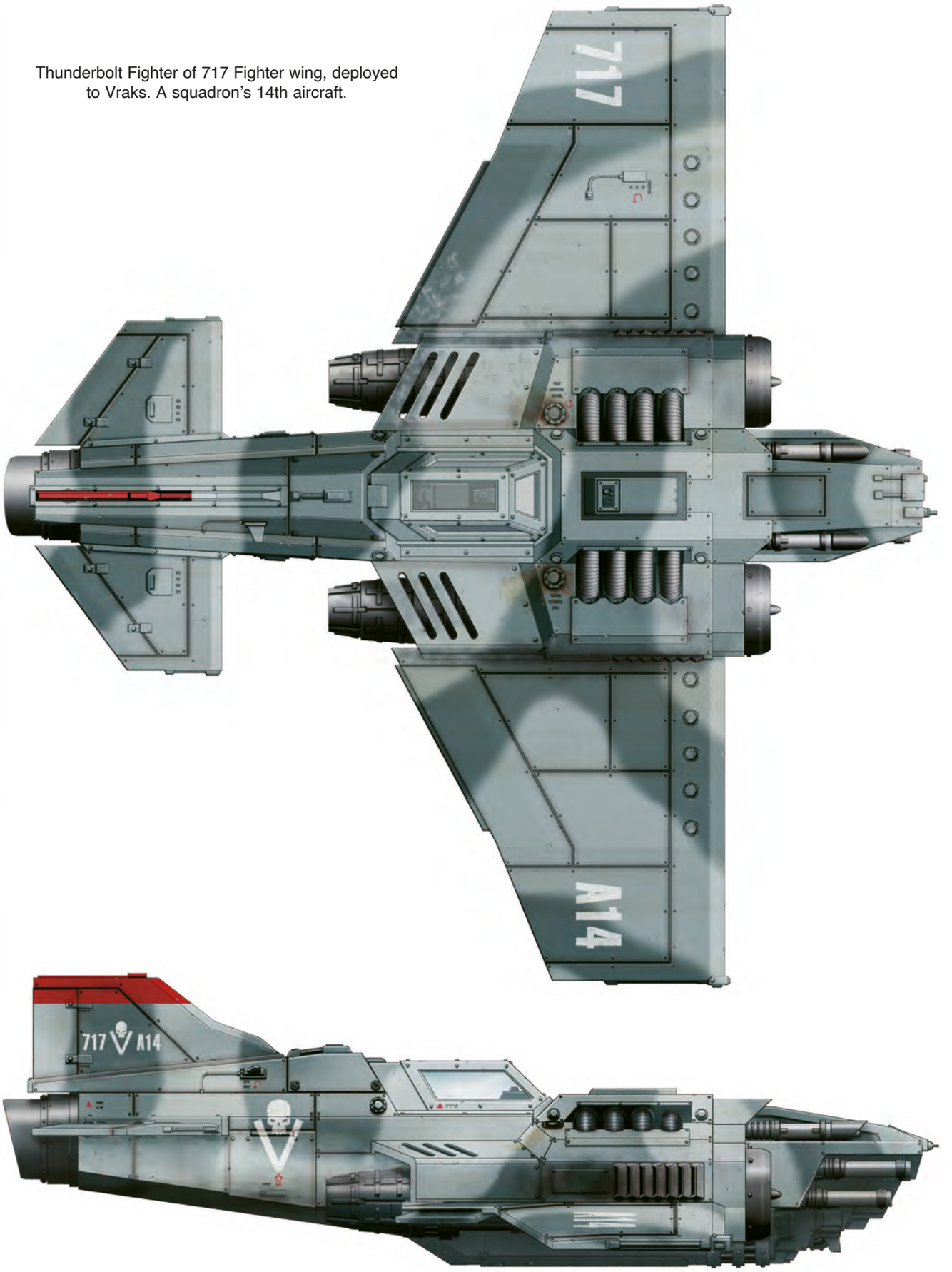
1099th Bomber wing
7 squadrons – 88 aircraft (approx)



Alpha Legion Dreadnought. Since their initial deployment ‘incognito’ onto Vraks, Arkos the Faithless’ Alpha Legion warband have now reverted to their Chapter colours.

Traitor Warhound of Legio Vulcanum. This war machine was reported destroyed by Legio Astorum Titans during the 'Kagori' offensive.

Thunderbolt Fighter of 717 Fighter wing, deployed to Vraks. A squadron's 14th aircraft.



CHAPTER ELEVEN
INTO THE BREACH

"With every death on Vraks our victory comes closer. There is no army in the galaxy that can stop the forces we began to invoke so many years ago. Soon they shall be unleashed at our bidding! "

Deacon Mamon – declared Extremis Diabolus
by the Conclave of Scarus 2059826.M41

Gorgon Assault

The assault would be led by Gorgons, with two companies fully equipped to ride into battle inside 30 Gorgon transports, supported by Leman Russ, Baneblades and Macharius heavy tanks. Once at the breach the Gorgons would disgorge a tidal wave of infantry to overrun the defenders. Behind them would follow more infantry on foot and grenadiers in Centaur carriers. The artillery was already firing overhead, to box-off the battlefield from reinforcements and the aircraft would join the attack, striking at reinforcements before they could reach the breach and help stop-up the gap.

The curtain wall itself was an imposing structure. Completely encircling the citadel, it was six stories high, 30 meters thick at its base and topped by a reinforced parapet. There were hundreds of towers, each armed or providing firing slits for heavy weapons that had clear lines of fire and plunging fire down onto any enemy below. Within the walls were many bunkers, armouries, shelters and corridors. It also mounted automated sentry guns as well as the heavy weapons positioned along the parapet. If this wasn't enough, the defences were supplemented by more trenches, pillboxes and defence lines in front, with mines, razorwire, tank traps and anti-tank ditches ringing them. The one compensation for the attackers faced with the daunting prospect of breaching it, was that it lacked the depth of the other defensive rings. It was a single line of reinforced ferrocrete that once destroyed could be quickly swamped.

Before the dust from the great mine had settled, the Gorgons' engines roared into life and their drivers released the brakes. The massive transports began to grind forwards, slowly at first but gathering pace as the air turned blue with thick exhaust fumes. Like a flotilla of boats on a stormy sea, the Gorgon formations set out across the pitted and cratered landscape towards no-man's land. Within, crowded shoulder-to-shoulder, stood ranks of Krieg guardsmen, jostled and shaken by the Gorgons' rough passage towards the objective. The guardsmen could see nothing of events beyond the armoured walls, they could only hear the shriek of out-going shells as they awaited the critical moment when the ramps fell and the order to charge was given. All was proceeding as planned, each Gorgon's huge plough carving a path across the rough ground, steadily closing on the breach.

For the watching defenders it seemed like a the wall of heavy armour was grinding towards them. Many were still dazed or injured from the huge explosion that had just annihilated this section of the wall. The groggy survivors roused themselves and manned their pillboxes and trenches.

As the Gorgons advanced, counter-fire from the renegade's artillery started to land, just a few mortar shells at first, bursting amongst the Gorgon formations, lashing them with dirt and shrapnel but doing little harm. Heavier shells followed as more batteries received the co-ordinates and orders to open fire. Soon the intensity of the bombardment was growing, mortar bombs and Earthshaker shells mingling with the deep booming detonations of massive Bombard impacts. Through the thunderous explosions the Gorgons rode onwards. One unlucky vehicle took a direct hit, a shell falling directly into the open troop compartment. Trapped within its confines the explosion wrought carnage amongst the densely loaded guardsmen and the Gorgon slued to a smoking halt, its deck a scene of horror, awash with blood.

From the curtain wall the enemy gunners opened fire. Lascannon blasts scorched the air as they smashed into the first assault wave. Impacts whined and ricocheted off the Gorgons' heavy frontal armour, designed to absorb just such punishment. The supporting Leman Russes returned fire, their battle cannons firing and recoiling, their shells smashing into the wall and sending masonry tumbling as each shell gouged rends in the thick defences. As the two sides traded blows, a second Gorgon was hit and burst into flames, its fuel igniting. The guardsmen within tumbled out, many already on fire, human torches stumbling in the mud until they fell and lay still. A third Gorgon was immobilised. A fourth exploded in a fireball.

The leading assault transports were close now. The order was given to fix bayonets and inside each Gorgon 50 gleaming blades flashed from their scabbards as one and snapped into place. The first ramps began to fall, smashing down into the mud as the Gorgons crawled to a halt. Within, the watchmasters and officers issued the order to charge. The Krieg squads surged forward, hob-nailed boots ringing over the metal ramps as they plunged out into the thickening maelstrom of fire.

The first officer out of his transport, leading 15th platoon, 7th company, died before he cleared the ramp. Shot through the head he fell dead as his men leapt over his body. More were cut down by streams of heavy stubber and heavy bolter rounds as eager gunners clamped down hard on their triggers. All along the sector the defenders hurled fire into the attackers. As platoon after platoon charged forward they were met with accurate grazing fire, cutting down whole squads as they scrambled to get to grips with the enemy.

At the crater's rim the Krieg guardsmen found themselves scrambling over a wall of earth and rock. Huge chunks of masonry, all that remained of the wall and its foundations, lay scattered about, providing cover but preventing the tanks and Gorgons from advancing any further. The Gorgons' job complete, the drivers snatched them into reverse and began to back away, their own weapons blazing a stream of suppressing fire over the heads of the infantry in front. From hereon in, deeper into the breach, it would be an infantry battle, man against man. More artillery fire was landing, adjusting its target to the point of the attack. The Krieg infantry were pushing forwards through the dense rubble under plunging fire from the walls and towers. The 19th company commander, Captain Naler, was already on the ground,

Above: The backbone of the enemy's armoured forces, plundered from Vraks' armoury, was made up of captured Imperial Guard vehicles. Many of them were older 'second-line' armoured vehicles, mothballed as war reserves. Here, renegade forces are using a Leman Russ Conqueror and a Medusa siege gun.

urging his men onwards when a mortar bomb impacted at his feet, lacerating him with shrapnel wounds and severing his left leg below the knee. Critically wounded, the Captain fell. Closeby, Commissar Moroth saw the Captain fall and immediately took command. Powersword in hand, he ordered the squads in his vicinity to follow him over the rim and down into the deep crater below. Charging through plunging fire, his peaked cap plucked from his head by a passing bullet, the Commissar reached the far embankment, dropping prone as the squads around caught up and followed his example. They were now the furthest forward of any of the attacking platoons. The breached wall's ruined ends towered above them, swept clear of defenders by withering fire from the tanks. The Commissar started to climb the steep rise, the rocks below him still steaming from the heat of the explosion. He had almost reached the top when the enemy counter-attacked.

Knowing the attack against the breach must come, the enemy had raced to bring up any forces it could to block the breach, dragging in troops from neighbouring sectors through the hail of artillery now descending upon them. Awaiting at the top of the crater lip, hidden amongst the masonry rumble, were the Ogryns. Waiting until the last moment before being spurred into action by their surgically fitted chemical injectors, the brutish creatures rushed down to meet the Krieg guardsmen as they climbed upwards. The Ogryns' momentum carried them through the first squads, hacking indiscriminately as they went. Krieg guardsmen, caught by surprise and already at a disadvantage due to the slope, stood little chance. Each Ogryn was a ten foot monster, psychopathically insane due to the combat drugs coursing through its blood. Hacking and slashing, roaring in drug-induced pain, the Ogryns bludgeoned their way into the depths of the crater. Commissar Moroth was thrown aside by the first charge, wounded and loosing his powersword from his grip. He emptied his laspistol into one beast, which shrugged off the wounds as if they were no more than insect stings. As he reloaded, a second Ogryn rushed him, wielding a huge rock cutting drill. Unable to defend himself, the blade's spinning teeth chopped into the Commissar, dissecting his torso from his legs in a spray of blood and entrails. Still more Krieg squads were climbing down into the crater and a swirling mêlèe had formed in the bottom as the Ogryns fought with a reckless fury. It was a bloodbath. Ogryns fell, each taking ten or more Guardsmen until the crater floor was carpeted with the dead and dying of both sides.

More artillery was landing, directly hitting the crater itself, mangling and flipping bodies and killing both sides indiscriminately.

As the guardsmen fought hand-to-hand in the breach, the Krieg tanks were unable to push on, the way forward was too heavily blocked by rubble. Without them in close support the Krieg guardsmen struggled to fight their way forward in the face of fanatical enemy resistance.

Behind the fighting a second wave of attackers was now on the move, Centaur carriers loaded down with heavily armoured grenadiers leading the way as more infantry platoons joined the attack. The enemy fought with a zeal and divinely inspired courage that belied their numbers. Losses from both sides had been heavy. Of the first two Krieg companies into the breach, most had become casualties. Many platoons had been wiped out altogether. The second wave fared no better as the fighting lasted on into darkness. The breach could not be captured and held, time and again the infantry scrambled on into the killing zone of the mine crater, only to be cut down as the enemy re-positioned guns to sweep it clear, or counter-charged. In darkness the attackers withdrew, back to their own trenches, most dragging wounded comrades with them. The dead lay thick, in places piled on top of each other, three or four deep. The hulks of tanks and Gorgon hulls littered the sector. Under cover of darkness, the Quartermaster and their servitor aides emerged to count the cost and scoured the battlefield, like carrion birds stripping the dead.

The 308th regiment's commanders conceded that the first attempt to capture the breach had failed. Colonel Tolan agreed to a second attempt, given time to properly prepare for another set piece attack. Next time he would lead it personally and face death rather than a second defeat.

Second Assault

On 820826.M41, the 308th regiment got its second chance to seize the breach and take a vital step closer to ending the siege of Vraks. It was meticulously planned. The first attack had only failed because no armour had been able to force its way through the rubble, so the 4th siege artillery regiment, positioned south of the Darro Rift, was given the task of shelling the breach, day and night with heavy bombard shells in an attempt to break up the rubble enough to allow tanks to cross it. The rest of the regiment was to shell the surrounding walls and towers, further smashing their firing parapets and the automated weapons mounted upon them. This softening up was to go on for two weeks – a huge drain on the artillery shell resources of 34th line korps.

Meanwhile, Colonel Tolan prepared his new assault units. The Gorgons had been a success and they would once again carry his men to the target with the full support of more tank and heavy tank companies.

The post-mortem on the failed first assault had also decided that it had been too narrow – a single dagger thrust with just two companies in the lead. The next attack would be wider, storming the walls all along the regiment's front. This might seem like a futile gesture, but the enemy had been able to hold the breach by using the wall itself to move troops down the line in relative safety from the heavy artillery fire falling all around. This time those troops would be pinned in place defending their wall section. These attacks would be reinforced by more super heavy tanks that would attempt to use their firepower to blast new breaches. With a single location to defend, the enemy had been able to mass enough forces to blunt the attack. With multiple breaches its forces would be stretched thinner and less likely to withstand the hammer blow when it landed.

This time the 308th regiment's assault was met by a better prepared defence. The Gorgons encountered a fusillade of krak missiles and lascannons as they closed on the objective, many were knocked out, joining the other rusting hulks in no-man's land. The enemy artillery had had time to zero-in, and responded quickly with overwhelming force. Colonel Tolan led his men into the crater again, but once more found the enemy defending it with fanatical zeal. The Colonel himself was killed in the assault, cut down with the regimental standard bearer at his side as he fought hand-to-hand with the traitors holding the breach. His body lay unidentified under a pile of dead men who had followed his lead and were also killed.

The attacks further along the walls to the north and south gained some success. Two new smaller breaches were blasted in the walls, widening the possible targets, but again they could

not be captured and held. In one fight the breach changed hands eight times before the Krieg attack was forced to withdraw. The second assault had been repulsed just as the first. A third would be needed…

Third Assault and Onwards

This time the 8th assault korps were brought into the line to lead the attack on the walls. Again the tides of Krieg infantry swarmed up the breaches, and again they were repulsed. The enemy was fighting back with everything it had. Over the course of the next year four more assaults were attempted and all ended in bloody retreats. Titans joined the battle, and the area around sector 57-44 became the bloodiest, hardest fought of the entire siege so far. The battle was a meat-grinder that drew in both sides' men and massacred them. The fourth assault ended when the enemy detonated their own massive mine under the original crater, in the process destroying hundreds of Krieg soldiers caught in the crater at the time. The explosion deepened the area further and scattered more rubble, but it effectively ended the attack.

How was the breach to be captured? Marshall Kagori was concerned that it was taking up too many resources. Request for more aid from the Titans had to be turned down. The fighting here might be intense, but there was still a war to conduct. The entire region was still one big battleground. Attacks and counter-attacks, raids and counter-raids, both sides constantly flung themselves at the enemy's positions in a bid to break them. Sector after sector was consumed in the all out war. The Chaos Spaces Marines continued their devastating attacks. Alpha Legion troops were identified conducting raids deep behind the front line, destroying artillery positions and ammunition storage dumps. The 1st line korps was fully engaged against the forces of Nurgle, faced by the horrors of continued chemical warfare. The Legio Vulcanum were still out there, lending its strength wherever a major attack went over the top. The Legio Astorum Titans were needed to counter their threat, and became scattered across the Van Meersland Waste. Daily, the frontline was ablaze with furious battles. More reports of engagements and losses streamed across the Marshall's desk. The tunnelling war also continued. Maybe it could provide another breakthrough, perhaps even a second breach? It did not happen, the enemy had learned a lesson and was counter-mining with better effect. Underground the war had become a stalemate just like above ground. The two sides were evenly matched. Like great pugilists, each bruising attack was met with a counter strike, but neither seemed to have the strength to knock the other out. After the furious battles and over a 1,000,000 more Krieg guardsmen consigned to the Emperor's Peace by Vraks, the war's tempo slackened. The Marshall's great plans for a new impetus had run its course. The enemy had matched it and, with herculean efforts, held it. In places the gains saw Krieg regiments within sight of the curtain wall. In others they remained trapped at the inner defence lines.

No longer surrounded the enemy could launch flanking attacks and raids far to the east. Out here, far from the trenches, the Krieg Death Rider companies saw their own hard fighting – riding long distances to scout out any enemy moves. Running skirmishes with enemy reconnaissance units were common.

And so another year of the siege of Vraks had passed, with heavy losses and small gains in ground and no end in sight for the battle-weary guardsmen who must endure it. One piece of good news reported to Marshall Kagori was that patrol sweeps of the Vraks system had found no trace of the lurking battleship *Anarchy's Heart.* She must have fled the system, too badly damaged to risk another battle. The supply lines into Vraks were secure once again.

The Long War Continues

After the latest surge in fighting, the long war of attrition resumed. Both sides husbanded their forces, re-organised, and re-equipped. The daily artillery duel continued, but both sides were a spent force for now. Marshall Kagori accepted the gains his offensive had made and drew up new plans for the recapture of the lost ground, but he realised now that the attrition would have to go on, indefinitely if needs be. The enemy, reinforced by the most fervent of Chaos worshippers and now fully embracing the power that the dark gods were offering, would not break or surrender. They would have to be wiped out, annihilated to the last man. In all it had been estimated that 8,000,000 men had started out defending Vraks and their self proclaimed messiah. Now how many were left? If the 88th siege army had killed the enemy at the projected rate of one for every two casualties borne by its regiments, then over 3,000,000 heretic souls had been purged from the galaxy since the start of the war. That meant the 88th siege army wasn't even halfway through the Apostate Cardinal's manpower reserves, and he had been reinforced.

Where once the enemy had been mere militiamen, labourers and a rabble of untrained workers, all were now veterans, hardened in the crucible of this bitter siege into excellent soldiers. They believed their gods were supporting them and believed victory could ultimately be theirs, regardless of defeats in the field. Cardinal Xaphan had not been seen or mentioned for a long time. Was he still alive, hidden within his lair? Perhaps a servant of the Officio Assassinorum should be dispatched to Vraks to eliminate him? Ultimately it would serve little purpose. It was more likely that the Chaos Space Marine Warmasters had taken direct command. This war was now being fought to their plans and their desires.

So the two armies were once again at deadlock. The long war must continue. The projected date for the end of the siege of Vraks had passed almost two years ago. The Administratum had accepted the extension and found the extra resources but the Departmento Munitorum was now conducting another of its long reviews of the campaign. The twelve year plan had run its cycle and more, but it had not brought the projected victory.

Marshall Kagori argued against it but the commitment of resources that Vraks had demanded could no longer be maintained. The Adeptus Administratum's planning required Krieg guardsmen for other warzones and the high priority the campaign on Vraks had enjoyed must be downgraded. The siege was not to be abandoned, the heretic forces must still be fought and defeated and Vraks returned to the Emperor's rule. This new policy just meant that it would take longer and cost more in the long run. The Marshall and his advisors argued in council with the Departmento's delegates sent to inform him of the decision. It didn't help his cause. The revised plans had already been stamped on Terra by the Office of the Master of the Departmento Munitorum. Marshall Kagori must make do with fewer replacements and fewer supplies. He should revise his plans accordingly. He had another five years before the next review would be undertaken.

In response to this bitter blow the Marshall dispatched a delegation of his own staff officers, with a mission

to enlist more aid quickly, before the Departmento Munitorum's new policy started to take effect.

Strike Force Ainea

Marshall Kagori's delegates rendezvoused with the strike cruiser *Arx Fidelis* in the Cantus system. The Adeptus Astartes vessel was returning from a patrol sweep through the dangerous Fydae nebula and was using the Imperial Navy victualling station at Cantus IX to re-supply before returning to base.

On board was a combined strike force of elements of four companies of the Red Scorpion's Chapter, led by Commander Ainea of 3rd company. He had with him approximately 100 battle brothers from the 1st, 3rd, 6th and 8th companies who had attacked and destroyed an Ork pirate stronghold. It had been a routine mission and the engagement had seen the aliens crushed. More anti-pirate operations were to be prosecuted before they returned to their Chapter fortress.

Kagori's delegation was met with due ceremony and Commander Ainea listened to their request. The Marshall needed assistance in prosecuting the war on Vraks. His Imperial Guard regiments were locked in a stalemate and he needed to get his campaign started again. Many attempts had failed. Now he was turning to the Emperor's finest warriors for assistance. The Commander agreed to review the situation and put the request to his Lord High Commander. He would not authorise the deployment himself, even though as a trusted officer he was perfectly at liberty to do so.

After several months delay, Marshall Kagori finally got his answer at his Thracian Prime headquarters. The Lord High Commander of the Red Scorpions had agreed to the deployment. It seemed that the opportunity to rid the galaxy of a dangerous heretic and the Traitors Legionnaires that had allied themselves with him was a blessing from the Emperor. Strike Force Ainea would proceed to the Vraks system and assess the campaign on the ground before deciding where best to deploy themselves. This would only occur under the proviso that Ainea was to remain at all times under his own offices. No Red Scorpion was to be placed under any other commander, Ainea had sole discretion and free rein in the use of his forces.

The Marshall agreed, happy that the elite strike force was willing to help even as the Departmento Munitorum was reducing its support. He had the Space Marine officers briefed and they held their own planning council to decide where to commit their forces. They chose the breach at sector 57-44. Here their small force could best effect the outcome of the campaign. They would plan and launch a fresh attempt to seize the breach and crack the curtain wall. It would be codenamed Operation Execution Place.

The Execution Place

The mission took careful planning and would involve all the resources Commander Ainea had at his disposal, including the *Arx Fidelis*. It would be a lightning assault, conducted in darkness and requiring superb timing. The spearhead of his attack was the 1st company's squads – veteran battle brothers in Terminator armour. Ainea and Codicier Yaec would lead them personally, utilising the *Arx Fidelis* teleport chamber to deliver this potent assault team directly into the breach. For this attack he would need to be incredibly accurate, this involved getting his teleporter as close to the target as possible and having a teleport homer beacon in place – nothing could be left to chance.

The mission of placing the teleport homer at the breach would require a small volunteer team to drop in via Thunderhawk, seconds before the Terminators were in position. This team would use jump packs to land, then set-up the beacon so that the *Arx Fidelis'* surveyors could lock onto it. The Terminators would then teleport in and begin the actual attack. Meanwhile, as the spearhead was engaging, a second ground assault team would be ready to race to the Terminators' position in the strike force's armoured vehicles, using specialist siege equipment such as Vindicators. As the Terminators seized the breach, so the ground forces would arrive to hold it against the inevitable counter-attacks. When the Space Marines had secured the breach, they would signal the mission complete codeword and a special battle group from 11th assault korps, picked for the job, would be the first through the breach to begin the exploitation. This exploitation force would include support from the Titans of *Legio Astorum*. High Princeps Drauca agreed to the plan and would personally join the force in his Reaver battle Titan *Praetorian*. If all went to plan. the Red Scorpions could then hand over security of the breach to the Krieg forces and withdraw back to their strike cruiser. The heretics were about to face a true army of the Imperium for the first time, an all arms attack. Zero-hour was set at 989826. M41.

Aboard the *Arx Fidelis* the battle brothers were preparing for combat. The Chaplains were blessing weapons and armour. Commander Ainea spent a day in prayer, knelt before the Emperor's altar in the cruiser's shrine before donning his Terminator armour suit, along with Codicier Yaec and the veteran brothers of 1st company. He had already hand-picked five volunteers for the mission of placing the homer beacon, all were assault troops of 8th company, led by Sergeant Culln. The ground forces were preparing to deploy via Thunderhawks to the surface. These were placed under the command of Ainea's most trusted deputy, Veteran Sergeant Zhyr of 6th company, assisted by the company's most experienced battle brothers, three Dreadnoughts, former Chaplain Nalr, venerable brother Rzasa and brother Daeres who would be equipped for siege warfare with a rock-crushing assault drill and inferno cannon.

The *Arx Fidelis'* captain was briefed. He would be taking his ship into range of Vraks' remaining defence laser silos, they would no doubt detect his approach and quickly open fire. The cruiser was taking a risk, but it only had to weather the enemy defences long enough for Ainea's force to teleport into the battle. Then the captain should make evasive manoeuvres and head for safety with all speed, his role in the mission complete.

Zero-hour approached as the *Arx Fidelis* came under fire. Defence laser blasts streaked skyward as the strike cruiser blasted into low orbit, her bombardment cannons returning fire as she approached. Several defence laser blasts smashed into the vessel's thick armour as her void shields failed under repeated impacts.

Deep in the bowels of the strike cruiser ancient energies, barely contained by archaic machinery, were thrumming with power. Within the teleport chamber lightning flashed and arced unpredictably as the Techpriest scurried to and fro, adjusting dials and muttering incantations to appease the archaic machine's spirit. In the centre stood Commander Ainea, resplendent in his huge armoured suit, draped in purity seals and honour badges, the powersword of his rank in his left hand, storm bolter loaded in his right. Behind him stood Codicer Yaec and ten men, all similarly equipped, each carrying

RED SCORPIONS VETERAN SERGEANT

1. POWER ARMOUR
This Space Marine's powered armour has been heavily adapted by the Chapter's artificers. It combines features from a common Mk VII suit and an ancient Mk IV suit. The majority of the upper suit is from the Mk IV 'Maximus' armour, mostly notable in the helmet design. This style of armour was developed at the end of the Great Crusades, incorporating technical secrets learned from the many newly conquered worlds. The suit is marginal lighter than the early Mk III armour due to the newly available alloys. At the time many Chapters were entirely or partial re-equipped with the new armour, but today these suits are seen as relics of a former age and most have been incorporated into later marks. Indeed, few Chapters can now boast a complete original suit from so long ago. Those Chapters that can hold them as relics only to be worn for ceremonial duties.

This suit's leg armour is taken directly from Mk VII armour, and little adaptation is required to make the two patterns operate together. Although Mk VII is regarded as standard issue, Space Marine armour is regarded as a personal item and most sets will be embellished and modified by its owner. Upon his death, the armour will be returned to the armoury and be reissued to a new recruit.

2. POWER SWORD
The Sergeant's main weapon is his powersword, carried as a weapon and as a mark of seniority amongst his men. Crafted by the Chapter's artificers, it is a hand-and-half broadsword (wielded in one or two hands) containing a small powerfield generator in the pommel. When activated it wreaths the blade in a crackling energy field that disrupts the molecular composition of anything it hits, greatly assisting armour penetration. Like his armour, Seric's sword is also treated as an artefact of the Chapter, and retained as such in 2nd company's shrine until needed. Upon the sergeant's death the sword will be handed on to a newly promoted sergeant, who will be expected to live up to the example set by the sword's former bearers.

3. BOLT PISTOL
The sergeant's sidearm is a Mark VIII Ultra pattern bolt pistol, a common sidearm amongst Space Marines. Just like the larger bolt gun, it fires self-propelled bolts with a mass-fused, armour-piercing, high explosive warhead that penetrates a target before detonating – literally blowing it apart from inside. Other specialised rounds are also available for the pistol. The pistol incorporates many other advanced features, like palm-print genetic identification coding, which is read by the power armour's autosenses before activating the weapon. Targeting information and an ammunition counter are also fed via the autosenses to the Space Marine's helmet display.

Its magazine holds just ten bolts, and the weapon fires single shots or pre-selected three round bursts. The pistol is regarded as a potent weapon for troops expected to engage the enemy in hand-to-hand combat, and acts as a back-up weapon for officers and those equipped with cumbersome heavy weapons.

4. CYBERNETIC ARM
Whilst a Space Marine's enhanced physique allows him to recover from wounds that would kill lesser mortals, it is not uncommon for those with serious injuries to replace the damaged limbs or organs with cybernetics. Each cybernetic enhancement is designed and built to specification in the Chapter's apothecary. This adamantium arm will be able to replicate all arm movements and actions with very little loss of dexterity due to its sensitive neural pick-ups and cognitive-actuation enhancers. It will require careful maintenance between deployments.

Some Chapter's hide cybernetics under a synthetic skin but others prefer to wear them openly, showing off their old battle wounds as a mark of honour. In this case Sergeant Zhyr lost his arm to a plasma impact whilst serving as a Terminator in the 1st company. After being stabilised and recovered, he was transferred to the Chapter's Apothecarion where his ruined arm was removed and replaced. As a result of his injury Zhyr was transferred back to the 2nd company as a Veteran Sergeant, where his battlefield experience could be put to best use.

5. INSIGNIA
The Red Scorpion's Chapter badge is worn on the left shoulder pad by all battle brothers. Zhyr also carries purity seals. Awarded by his company Chaplain, these seals prove a Space Marine's loyalty and faith in the face of the corrupting power of Chaos. They offer his soul additional protection against daemonic attack and improve his resolve when faced by foes that might shake a lesser man's faith in the divine power of the Emperor as the protector of Mankind.

Although no longer a Terminator, Zhyr still bears the Crux Terminatus (also known as Terminator Honours). This golden cross marks the Veteran Sergeant as having once served the Chapter as a Terminator in the 1st company, earning him the right to display the highly regarded Crux Terminatus for the duration of his service. The Crux also indicates that having completed the required training, the Chapter could recall him to the 1st company if required.

The white helmet is a traditional badge of a veteran. In the Red Scorpions Chapter, any battle-brother who has completed 50 missions is considered a veteran and granted the honour of wearing a white helmet.

The Sergeant's squad number is worn on his kneepad – in this case 6th – a Tactical squad. The Tactical squad markings (a large arrow) will be worn on his right shoulder pad (but is not visible here).

This is Veteran Sergeant Zhyr, commander of 6th Tactical squad, 6th company, seen here during Operation Execution Place.

tall thunderhammers and stormshields or the long glittering blades of lightning claws protruding from their powergloves.

Whilst the *Arx Fidelis* was buffeted and smashed by the defence laser salvoes, a single Thunderhawk gunship was racing low over the dark surface of Vraks, approaching the breach from the south at no more than 100 feet above ground, skimming the contours below as it approached the target. At the rear ramp stood five Space Marines, Sergeant Culln's assault squad. The sergeant clasped the homing beacon as the pilot warned them to stand-by – drop zone approaching. In response the Space Marines' jump packs turbines whined into life, the ramp slowly descending to reveal the slate-dark sky beyond.

On command Culln's men jumped, plunging out through the darkness and into the violent current of the Thunderhawk's slip stream. With jump packs straining at full power to break the short fall, the five assault Space Marines aimed directly for the centre of the breach crater. In seconds they had landed, smashing into the ground with an impact that would have killed lesser men. Each Space Marine rolled with the impact and sprang back to their feet, bolt pistols levelled, alert and seeking targets.

The enemy had been forewarned of the Thunderhawk's approach by the sound of its three great rocket engines. It passed directly overhead flying flat out. It was a swift black shadow, a roar of engines, and then it was gone – quickly receding into the distance. But enemy sentries were alert now and started scouring the area. Flashlights and searchlights beams criss-crossed the breach as Sergeant Culln set up the beacon, his men surrounding him, covering every direction. Then, suddenly the team was spotted. At first a few shots pierced the darkness, whining overhead as Culln hurried to direct the beacon's signal back to the *Arx Fidelis*. More shots whizzed past. The enemy was coming.

The beacon bleeped into life as the *Arx Fidelis'* surveyors locked on. Sergeant Culln immediately gave the order to open fire. Bolt pistols barked their distinctive sound as each bolt ignited before the sudden thunder-clad explosion of its warhead on impact. Sentries on the crater's rim burst apart with the force of the bolts, torn limb from limb. The battle had begun.

Just five Space Marines stood before hundreds of enemies. Undaunted, Culln's squad ignited their jump packs again and launched themselves up the crater's slope, straight at the enemy. Chainswords slashed and hacked and bolt rounds roared in the night in their furious assault. Squad Culln cut down the first sentries, but the alarm had already been raised. More traitors were now rushing to man the defences. A missile's fiery trail streaked from the darkness, smashing one battle brother clean in the chest, the blast of its krak warhead piercing his armour and severing his torso. Another Space Marine was wounded, his helmet punctured, leaving his face a bloody ruin of flesh and blood. Outnumbered and outgunned, even the Emperor's finest could not hope to stand for long. Culln needed reinforcements.

The teleport chamber of the *Arx Fidelis* exploded in light as the blue lightning arcs streamed about Ainea and his men. The air was alive, fizzing and sparking with raw power. As the blinding brightness faded to darkness, the chamber was left empty.

Ainea's Terminators appeared in a flash of light and a halo of sizzling power,

Above: A Vindicator finds a hull-down firing position, close to the curtain wall, as a Reaver Titan moves forward to engage the enemy.

directly on target. They appeared out of nowhere, cast through the warp the short distance from their strike cruiser to Vraks' surface. Now they began the slaughter. Ainea's stormbolter hammered a stream of bolts as the veterans advanced, the defender's fire pattering off their Terminator armour and storm shields like mere hail stones. Their Thunderhammers and Lightning Claws cut a swathe through the traitors. In darkness all was confusion, but the Space Marines knew their plan and retained their discipline, working together to systematically clear the breach. Power wreathed Codicier Yaec's force weapon as he stood shoulder-to-shoulder with his commander, lightning leapt from his fingers, smiting down any who stood before him with the power of the warp tamed and at his command. Those enemies who did not run were slaughtered without mercy.

As the Terminator armoured battle brothers began their attack, so veteran Sergeant Zhyr's strike force was racing across no-man's land, deploying squads into battlelines to complete their advance on foot. Amongst their ranks stalked the three lumbering Dreadnoughts. The darkness did not shroud their attack for long. Searchlight beams played across no-man's land, locked on to the Space Marine vehicles, and the enemy firing began.

Zhyr's battle brothers advanced through the fire, bolt guns returning shots in a steady, accurate stream. From behind the advancing squads missiles and lascannon blasts raced overhead, impacting against the wall's parapets. Heavy bolters were blazing, rocket-powered shells shrieking as they tried to suppress the enemy's strongpoints. Pre-ranged artillery fire began to land. Zhyr himself was flung through the air by a close impact, landing unharmed in a rain of rock and hot shrapnel. The veteran sergeant struggled to his feet and urged his brothers onwards. Their commander was ahead of them, fighting for the breach, they must reach him. Somewhere in the darkness a Vindicator's cannon opened fire, scoring a direct hit on the remains of a pillbox that had been rebuilt with sandbags and boulders. The small bunker exploded apart, its heavy weapons obliterated.

Zhyr's leading tactical squad reached the edge of the crater. Under heavy fire they paused to regroup and reload, laying down a suppressing volley of bolt gun fire. Dreadnought Chaplain Nalr was with them, his lascannon barrels glowing red-hot. They were soon joined by Brothers Rzasa and Daeres, whose rock-cutting power drill was smashing the largest boulders to clear a route for the following vehicles. Behind him came the first Vindicator. Another of its huge shells launched, looping a high trajectory onto the wall parapet above, its shattering detonation gouging into the rock and sending masonry crashing to the ground.

Zhyr's main force had reached the mine crater. With Chaplain Nalr at the fore they now plunged down into the crater-bottom where so many Krieg guardsmen had fought and died before them. Racing through the plunging fire and thickening artillery barrage they climbed the far slope. Driven forward by their power armour, they never broke stride as they raced to their commander's aid.

Just ahead of them Commander Ainea's brothers met a counter-charge by the Ogryns head on. The commander's powersword was slicing left and right, severing the leg of one enraged beast, which stumbled and fell, still swinging wildly with its heavy club. The Ogryns' attack was quickly cut to pieces, they were no longer facing mere Imperial guardsmen. Thunderhammers sent the creatures reeling, their drug induced nervous system overloaded by the weapon's fearsome impact. Lightning claws slashed and thrust, raking through crude plasteel armour like paper to dice Ogryns in gory hunks of meat. Alongside Aineas stood the sole survivor of Culln's assault squad, the Sergeant himself, wielding his chainsword in both hands, his bolt pistol discarded, empty of ammunition. For his heroic efforts in the breach that bloody night, Sergenat Culln would later be elevated to the Chapter's 1st company.

Zhyr and Chaplain Nalr rendezvoused with their commander. Both were battle-scarred, their armour dented and scorched but the Red Scorpions had captured the breach. Enemy bodies lay scattered across the ground, adding to the mouldering bones of the long dead. The Red Scorpions' lightning attack had succeeded where all the Krieg attacks had failed. The enemy had been unable to stop the Terminators' sudden teleport assault, the fury of their attack or the psychic-fuelled power of Codifier Yaec. Commander Ainea formed his newly arriving reinforcements into a defensive perimeter. They had taken the breach. The mission complete signal was transmitted. Now they must hold until the Krieg battle group and Drauca's Titans arrived. Ainea and his battle brothers knew this battle had not been won yet.

Here We Stand...

The enemy had emergency plans in place to counter the breaching of the curtain wall. A rapid response force of tanks and Chimera-borne infantry was stationed to move quickly to meet any breakthrough. As news of the defeat reached their commanders, this force was sent into the counter-attack to blunt any exploitation and drive on to retake the breach. With it would follow the Titans.

Before dawn the two opposing forces were on a collision course. Commander Ainea's battle brothers occupied the blasted wreckage of the curtain walls and the rubble strewn ground. Devastator squads were positioned at the breach, with the Terminators withdrawn, ready to rush in and block any breakthrough should the enemy attack get too close. Here the Red Scorpions would stand, unbreakable in their defiance. Enemy shelling was still landing accurately and Ainea's men had to dig in and erect hastily-built barricades. Behind his strike force reinforcements were on the way.

The 11th assault korps' battle group had been preceded by engineer squads. These set about demolishing the remaining obstacles around the breach. Following them came tanks, the spearhead of the breakthrough force, each company again accompanied by a super-heavy tank. Behind them came infantry and field artillery, which were soon deployed and supplied, ready for immediate action.

In the first glimmer of a pale dawn light the enemy counter-attack began. Titan weapons opened fire at long range, raking the breach with earth shattering impacts, causing more of the wall to collapse. A Razorback took a direct hit and was vaporized by the high-energy beam of a volcano cannon, leaving only black scorched rocks to mark the machine spirit's passing. Chaplain Nalr lost an arm, torn away by a large white-hot piece of shrapnel. The Krieg artillery returned fire. From far to the rear the siege guns sent shells rumbling and whining over the Space Marines' heads, impacting about the Titan's feet. Ainea watched the blossoming explosions through his magnocular scanner. He could see enemy vehicles racing forward, heavy tanks with infantry carriers behind. Several carriers were already burning, caught in the artillery strikes and belching acrid smoke. More incoming Titan fire blasted his positions, leaving craters and shattered rocks. Where was Drauca? He needed to be

able to respond to the heavy firepower before it was too late. These massive guns could would make short work of even mighty Space Marines. He turned to scan back towards the Krieg lines and, through the lingering smoke, he saw the lumbering form of a Reaver Titan appear.

High Princeps Drauca's Reaver strode towards the breach, stepping over and around the tanks and light vehicles still ploughing forwards. At full striding speed the Titan raced ahead. Drauca's augurs had already detected the enemy Titans. His weapons Moderatii was busy calculating long range firing solutions for all weapons. In the Reaver's wake followed two Warhounds. *Praetorian* was first through the breach as its void shields flared and crackled under the first impacts. Ainea looked up as the towering war machine stepped directly over him, its Princeps riding far above, eight stories high. He had a god-like view of the battlefield, fitting for the god-like powers of the machine at his control. Ainea smelt ozone and felt the air vibrate and buzz as the Reaver's three turbo-laser destructors powered up and suddenly burst into life, blindingly-bright triple beams flashing. He tracked the bolt's flight and saw the void shields of the enemy Titan flare brightly from the impact. Pistons whined as the great war machine strode clear of his men, two smaller Warhounds behind, almost nimble by comparison with the Reaver's earthshattering footfalls. The Warhounds also opened fire. Satisfied Ainea snapped his helmet back into place. With the Titans locked in their own duel, his men could concentrate on the approaching enemy tanks. Firing was intensifying as the enemy closed in. Lascannons and krak missiles shrieked. A Chimera exploded into an expanding orange fireball. Ainea withdrew. This time he would keep an overview of the battle, this was not the time for his personal involvement – that would come later. For now it was a long range duel of firepower. Looking back again he could see the first Shadowsword Titan-hunter slowly crawling its way across the crater, cresting the slope and gunning its engine hard as it forced aside the remaining rubble. Soon it too would be engaging the enemy Titans.

The enemy counter-attack pressed hard all day, but more Krieg forces poured through the breach and out into the wider battlefield beyond. Several times enemy infantry reached the breach, only to be repulsed by the charge of Ainea and his Terminators. Ainea himself was wounded in the fighting by a direct hit from a plasma blast. His Terminator armour had saved his life, but the thick breastplate had been punctured, the searing heat of the violent impact burning away the armour and the Commander's chest, exposing the black carapace implant within. When an apothecary dragged Ainea from field, assisted by Sergeant Culln, the commander was barely conscious but still issuing orders despite the pain of his wound. It was a grievous injury but once the apothecary had administered stabilising drugs he declared the commander would live, with the aid of extensive cybernetic rebuilding.

Command on the ground now passed to Veteran Sergeant Zhyr and brother Nalr as they orchestrated the stoic defence. All day the Red Scorpions fought until their ammunition was expended. By then the Krieg forces had fought the enemy to a stalemate. Princeps Drauca's battle group had duelled with the enemy Titans. One Warhound had been destroyed by a volcano cannon strike, leaving just two great legs jutting skyward, the scout Titan's torso and head obliterated in a catastrophic plasma reactor explosion that had illuminated the battlefield like a second sun bursting into life. But the enemy had been heavily damaged in the exchange of fire and had withdrawn rather than be destroyed. Rand Drauca could list another victory over the despised *Legio Vulcanum* traitors on Praetorian's honour banner.

When Zhyr determined that the Imperial Guard forces were now in position in such strength that no enemy attack would move them, he ordered his own survivors to withdraw. The Red Scorpions fell back, mostly on foot or clambering onto the hulls of the few surviving vehicles. Ninety six battle brothers had begun Operation Execution Place. Just 34 returned, many of them also bearing horrible wounds. Commander Ainea was badly wounded and venerable brother Nalr had lost his lascannon right arm. Brother Daeres had been destroyed, lost to a tank's armour piercing shell that had punched through the Dreadnought's armoured sarcophagus. The wreckage was towed away to be rebuilt and one day fight for Emperor again.

The apothecaries searched the battlefield and collected the all-important progenoid glands of the slain, then survivors loaded the bodies into Rhinos for transport back to the Chapter's fortress. Upon their return, the correct burial rites would be performed before the Chapter's Lord High Commander. Sergeant Culln was still alive, his jump pack now discarded, he trudged back, his armour was rent and pitted, his left shoulder pad torn away and his helmet shattered and lost. Soon the Thunderhawks would arrive to lift them back to orbit. High above the *Arx Fidelis* had survived its exchange with Vraks' defence lasers, it had been damaged in the approach but escaped without further harm.

Their mission was complete. The Red Scorpions' sacrifice to the Emperor's cause on Vraks had been made. The price for victory had been paid in the loss of many brave battle brothers and the spirits of vehicles vanquished forever. But the Chapter's role in the siege had been a vital one. Few other forces in the Emperor's service could have done it. Thanks to the Red Scorpions' sacrifices, in sector 57-44 the Krieg guardsmen were finally through the curtain wall.

Only the fortress of Vraks lay before them.

Above Right: 88th Siege army's positions after Operation Execution Place.

Harbingers and Portents

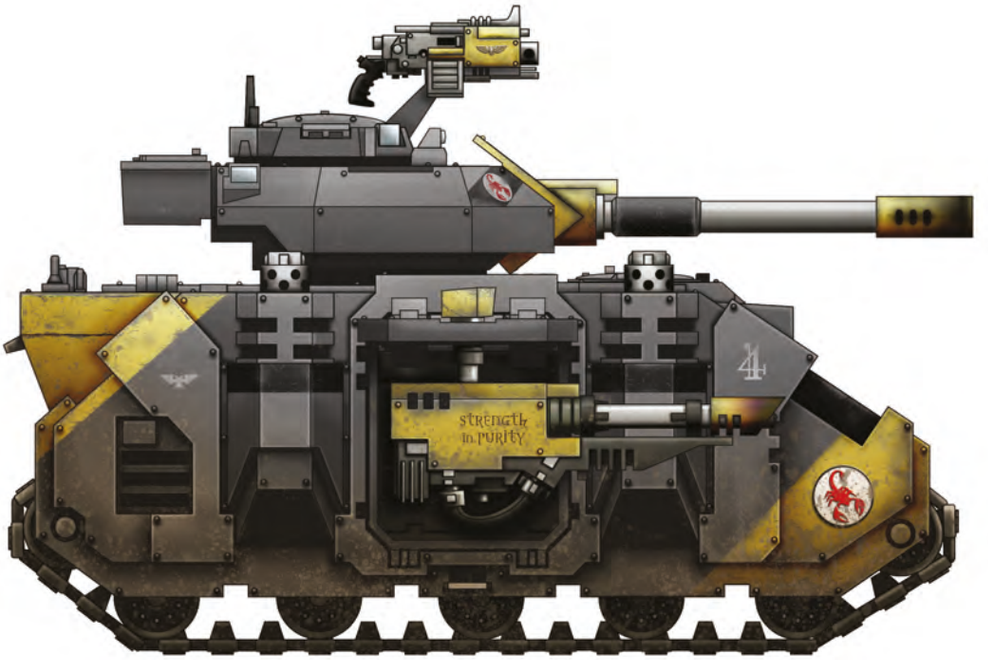
On Thracian Prime Marshall Kagori was interrupted in his routine round of briefings and reports from Vraks. News of the breakthrough in sector 57-44 was being reviewed and, given the changing situation, new supply calculations were needed. The Marshall's plan to employ a Space Marine Chapter had worked and it seemed that the 88th siege army was finally within sight of the ultimate objective. The crisis since the defeat at the First Battle of Vraks had been contained.

Then a servitor-cipher arrived carrying an automated message for the Marshall. An important visitor had arrived at his headquarters, claiming to be a representative of the Emperor's Inquisition. It was urgent.

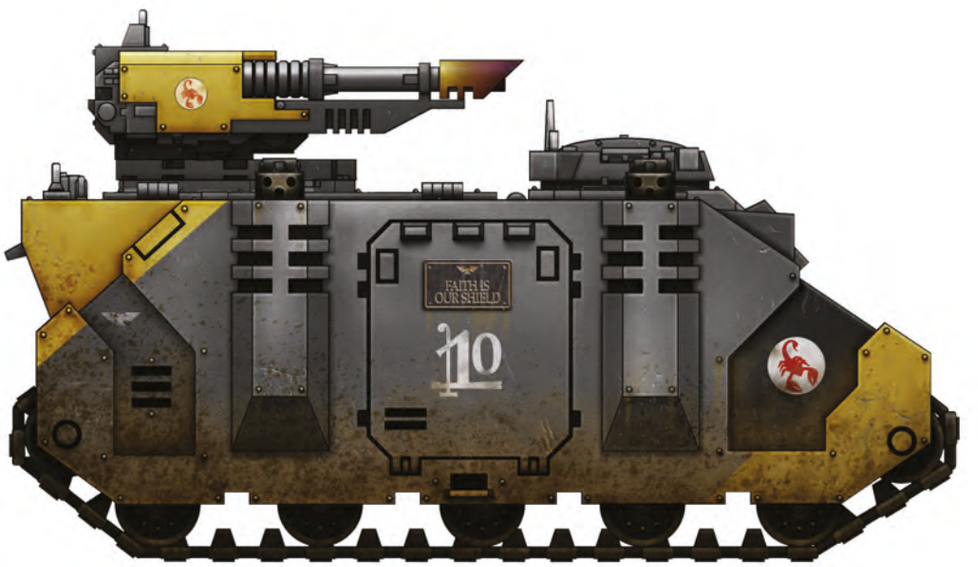
The Marshall put his briefing on hold to meet with the stranger. Not even a high ranking Marshall of the Imperium, with millions of men at his command would keep an Inquisitor waiting. Under his heavy, thick robes the visitor was tall, almost unnaturally so, and built like a Space Marine, wide in the chest and shoulders, all muscle. His rich attire was trimmed in exotic furs. His face bore the scars of battle, his eyes were piercing and otherworldly, inhuman one might say. Around his neck he wore a heavy chain, from it a heavy golden 'I' of the Inquisition hung as a badge of office. Behind him stood a retinue of equally strange individuals. Servitor-scribes whirred and hummed. Ritually-scarred feral warriors glared. A small cherubim creature hovered on feathered wings at its master's shoulder. One pale, thin, dark-robed figure was blind, his eyes milky white orbs – an astropath. He was branded with the sign of Imperial conditioning – a mark of a survivor of the fabled 'soul-binding'.

The Inquisitor addressed the Marshall sternly but with respect. He introduced himself as Lord Hector Rex, bearer of the Inquisitorial Mandate and Proctor-General of the Scarus Conclave. The war of Vraks was in danger, he explained. The Inquisitor had taken many readings from the Emperor's Tarot. His seers had been meditating on the subject, using their clairvoyance to search the probable future. All the signs were grim. Vraks was a world ready to explode. As an Inquisitor Lord, Hector Rex knew what he was talking about – this was no mere warning, it was the truth. The future of Vraks was grim, far bloodier than anything the war had yet seen. The rebels might have been pushed back, but in the wider scheme of the dark gods the work of mere mortals was almost complete. Rex already knew that the traiors were openly worshipping the unnameable powers and had made allies of Traitor Legionnaires. Soon they would be offering themselves as hosts for possession and attempting to summon daemonic creatures. If they succeeded, Vraks might be beyond saving. All around the system the warp was already in ferment. The 88th siege army was in peril… peril that all the Marshall's maps, reports and battle plans could not predict, and all his guns and tanks would not stop. The dark gods were ready to unleash their blasphemous legions – the ritual was almost at its climax. Urgent action must be taken. Lord Rex was forced to invoke his Inquisitorial mandate and indenture the entire of 88th siege army into the Ordo Malleus' service…

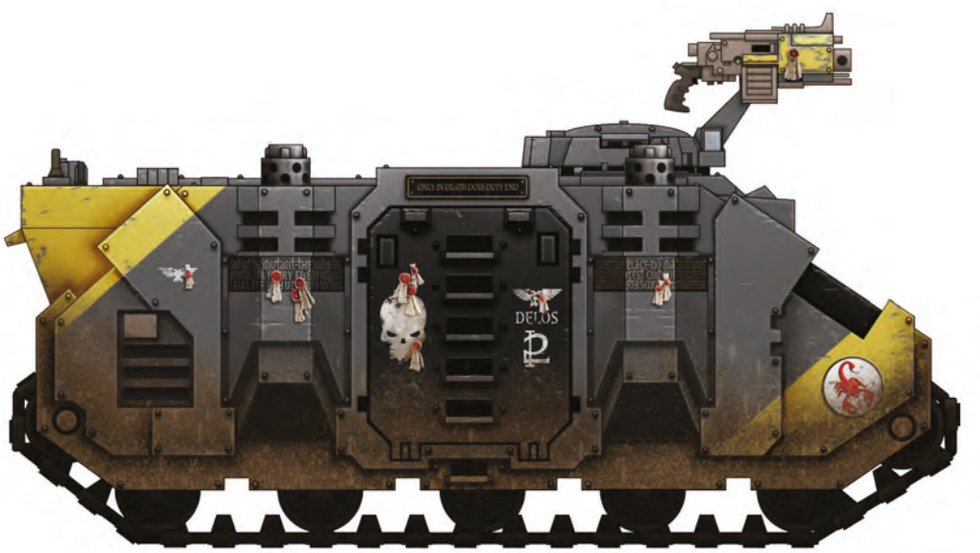
…meanwhile on Vraks itself the signs and portents were ill, but there was none present who understood the changing nature of the war. A second sun had been reported by pilots over the Van Meersland Wastes. The planet's naturally volatile atmosphere was becoming more so, lightning storms flickered constantly in the upper atmosphere. Clouds darkened. Some sentries even claimed to have seen the dead of previous battles rise from the mud of no-man's land and walk again. Little attention was paid to these strange portents – but soon a new enemy would threaten the Emperor's soldiers on Vraks…



Red Scorpions Predator. Destroyed during Operation Execution Place.



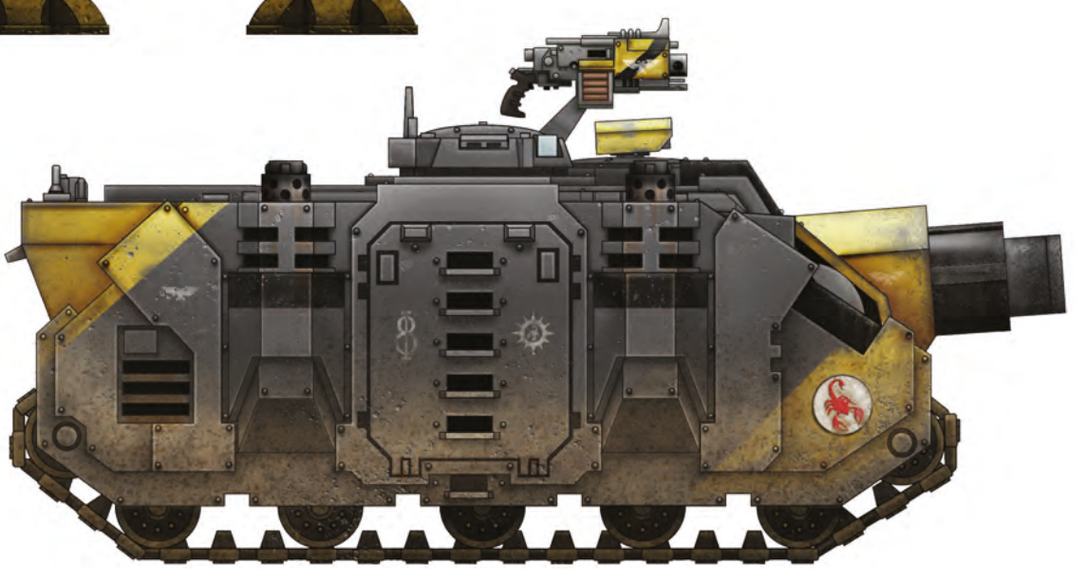
Red Scorpions Razorback. Destroyed during Operation Execution Place.



Red Scorpions Rhino. Destroyed during Operation Execution Place.

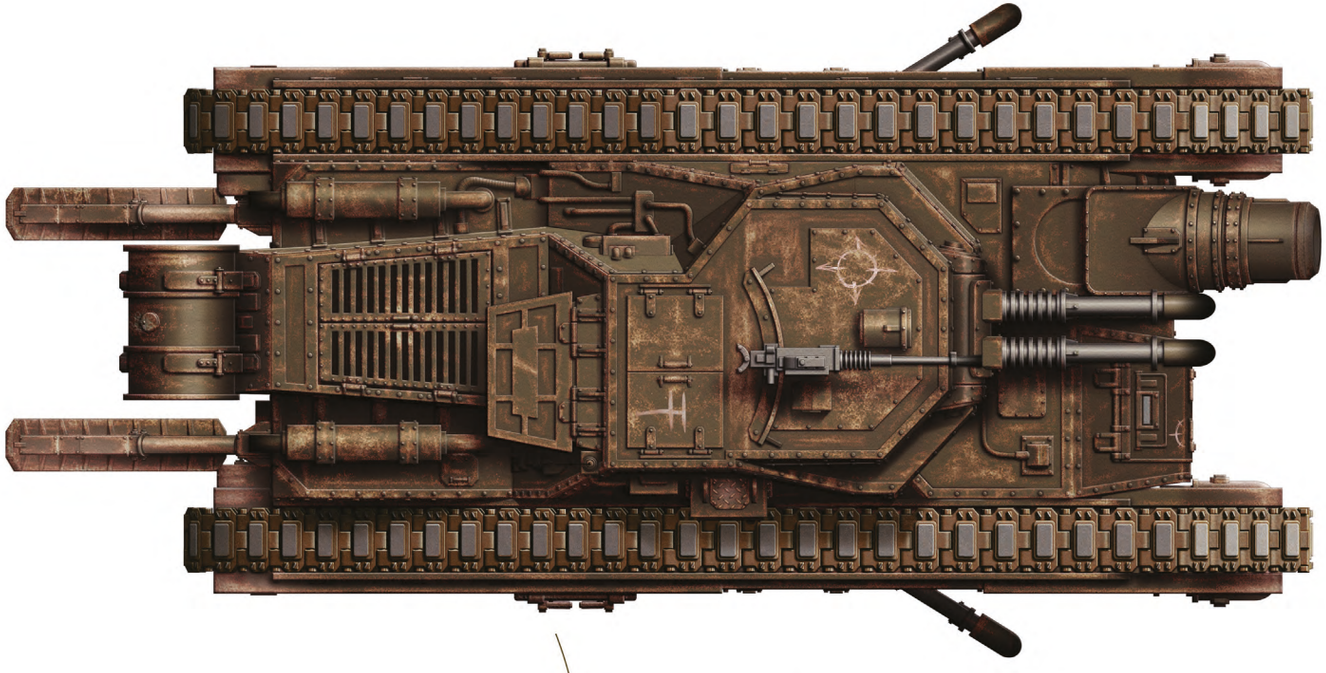
Red Scorpions Land Raider. This is the armoury's honoured first vehicle, sometimes used as the personal transport of the Chapter's Master of the Apothecary.

Red Scorpions Siege Dreadnought, Brother Daeres. Daeres' assualt drill proved decisive during the attack on the curtain wall breach.

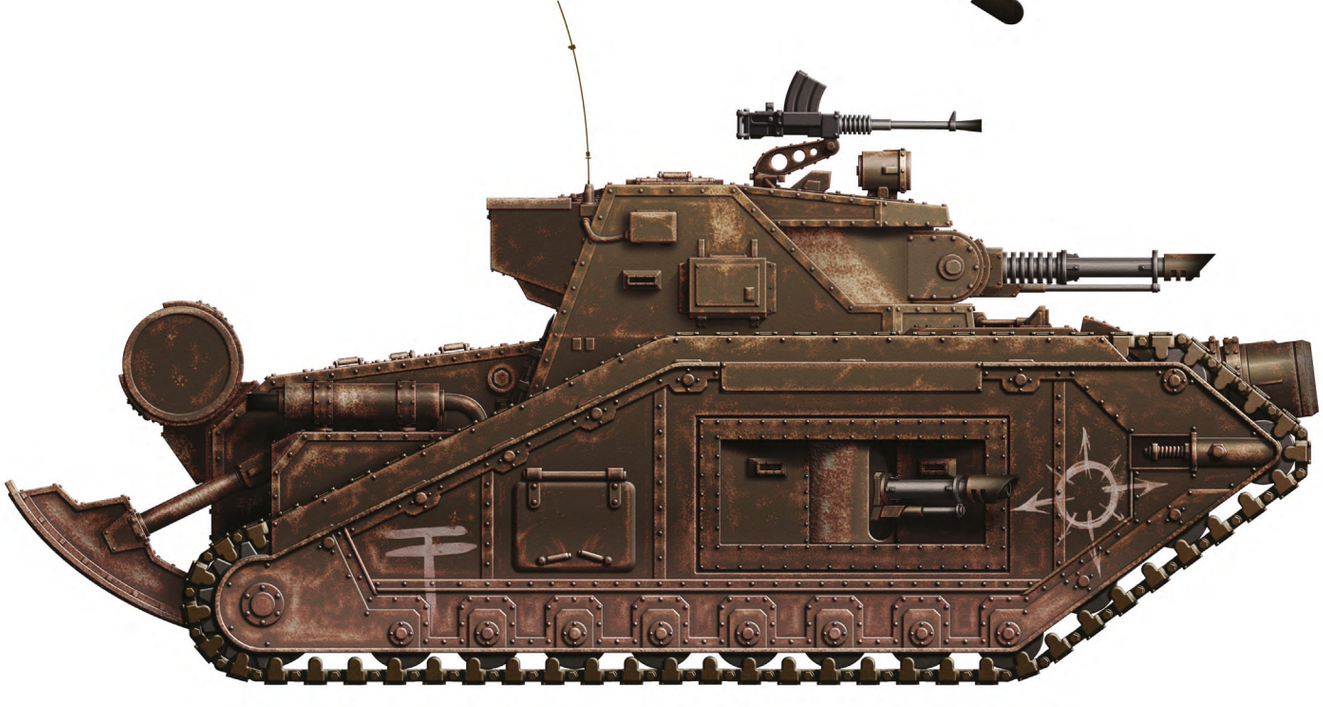


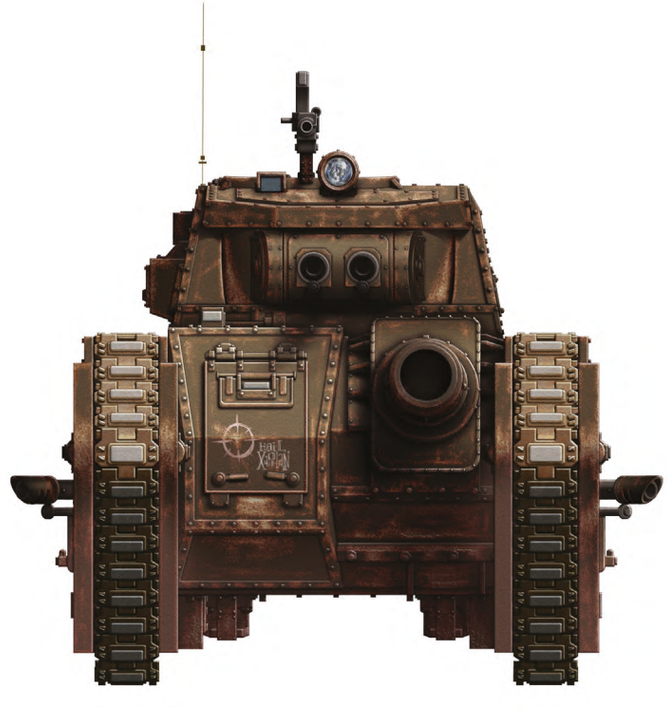
Red Scorpions Vindicator, one of three deployed for the attack. This vehicle was destroyed during the battle.

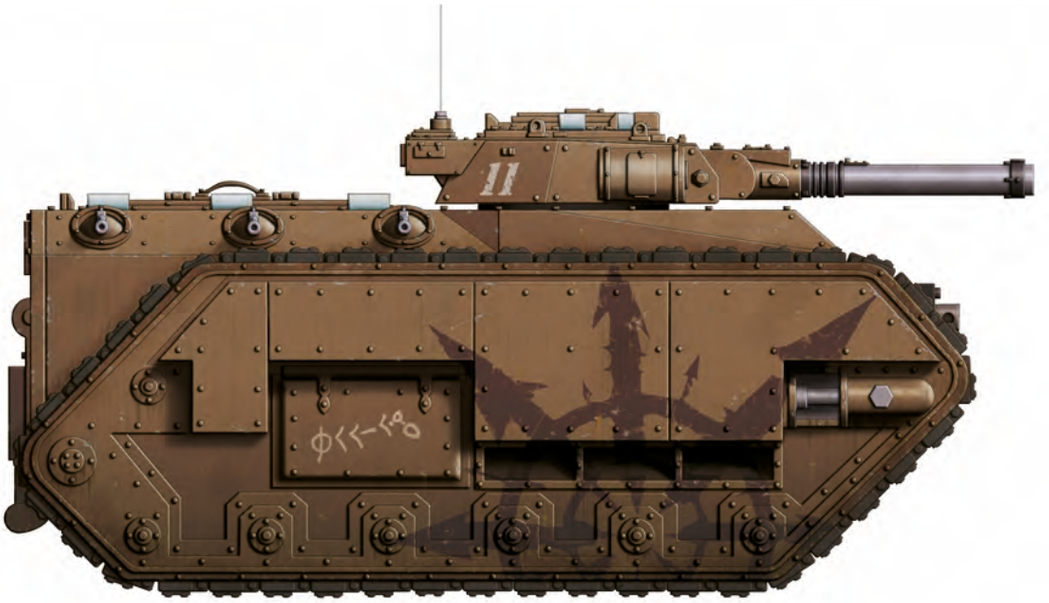
Warhound Titan of Legio Vulcanum. Note this possessed war machine is bleeding from its ‘wounds’,



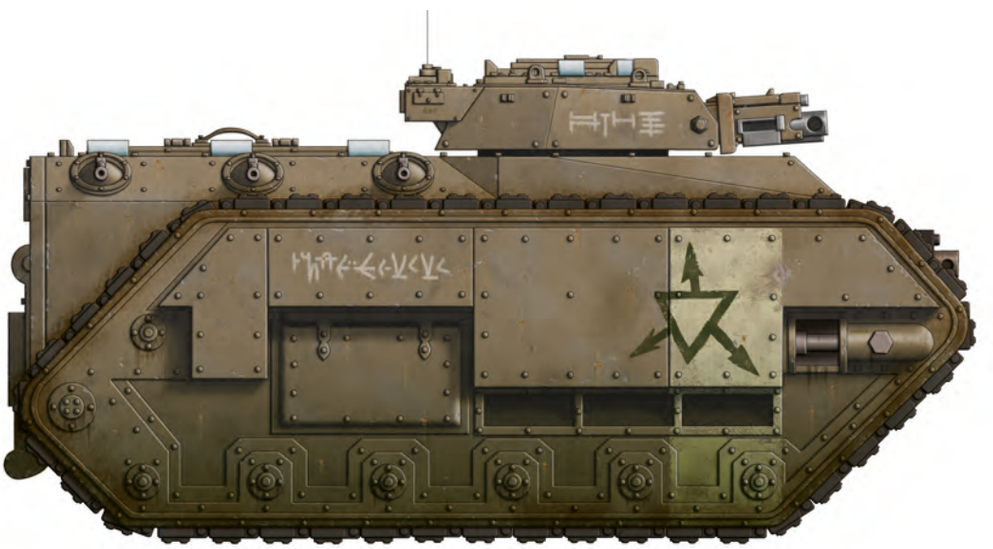
Malcador Annihilator, destroyed during the renegade counter-attack against the Krieg forces' 'bridgehead' through the curtain wall.



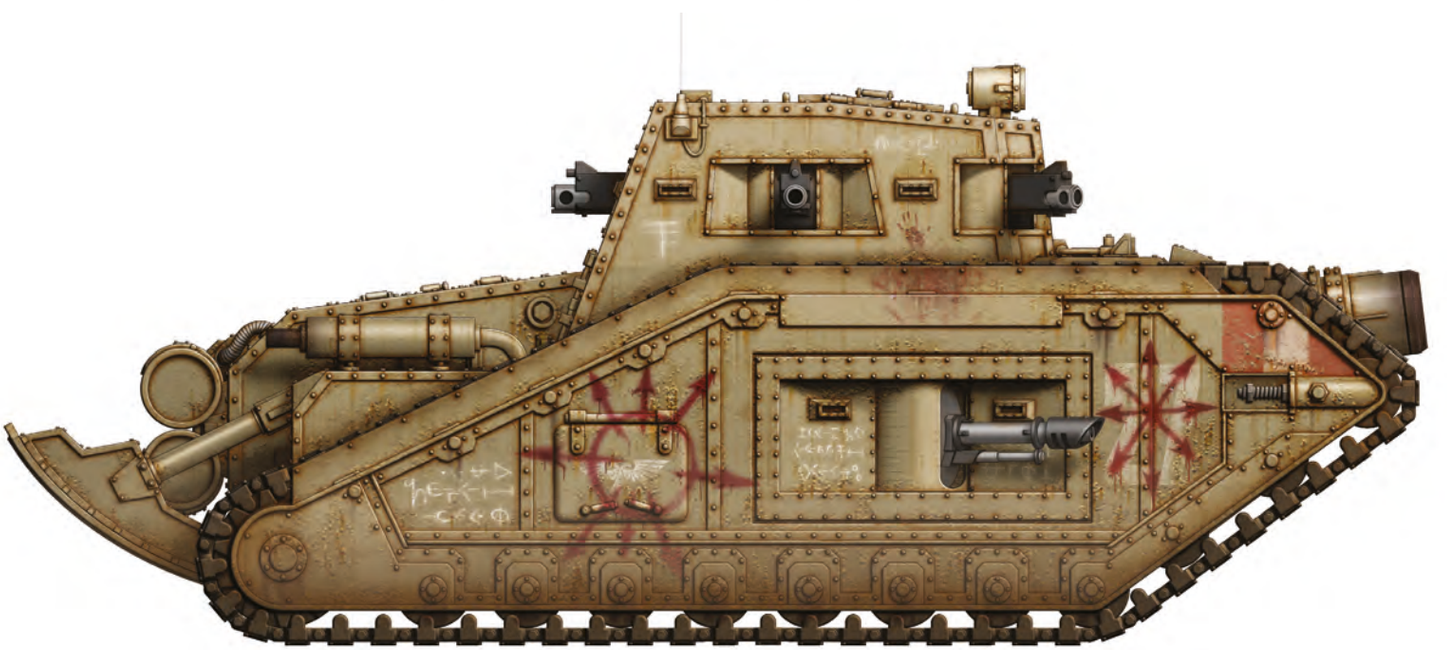




Renegade Chimera encountered during fighting at the curtain wall breach.



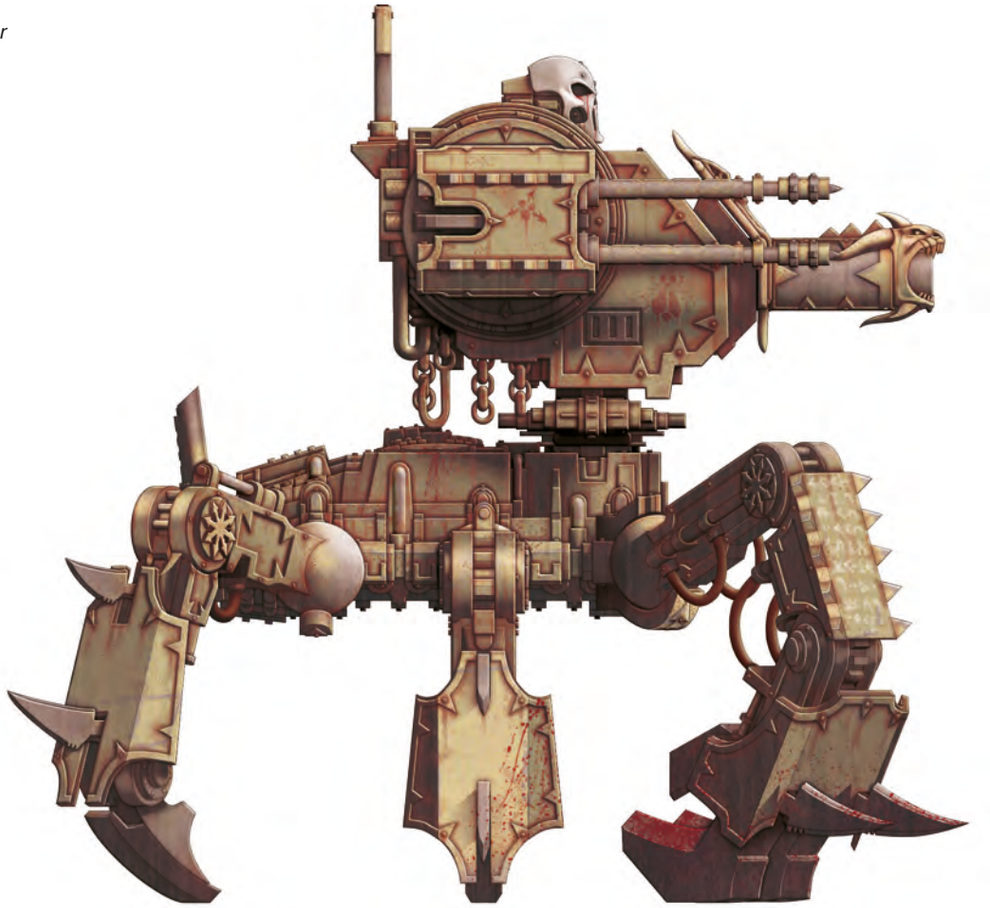
Renegade Chimera encountered during fighting at the curtain wall breach.



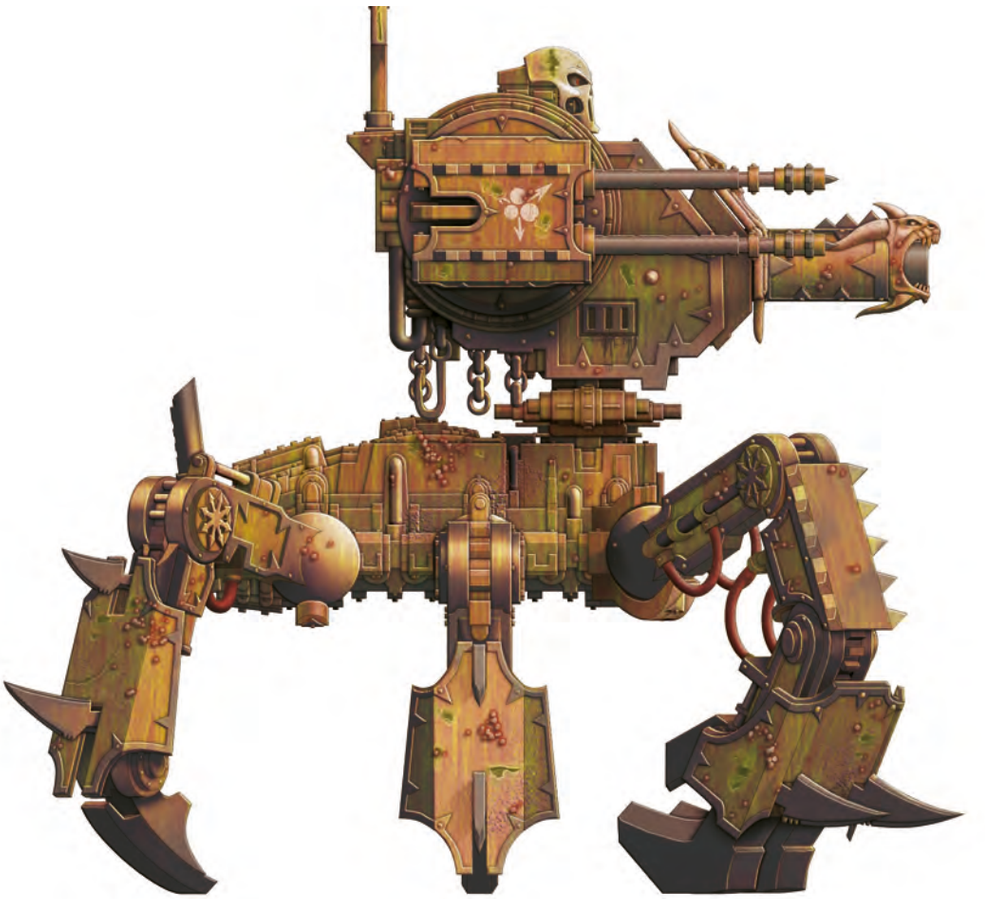
Malcador Defender with its original markings over-painted with Chaos runes.

Chaos Defiler encountered leading an attack by the Berserkers of Skallathrax warband.

Chaos Defiler, although rarely encountered, reports of battles involving such heretical war machines are becoming more frequent.

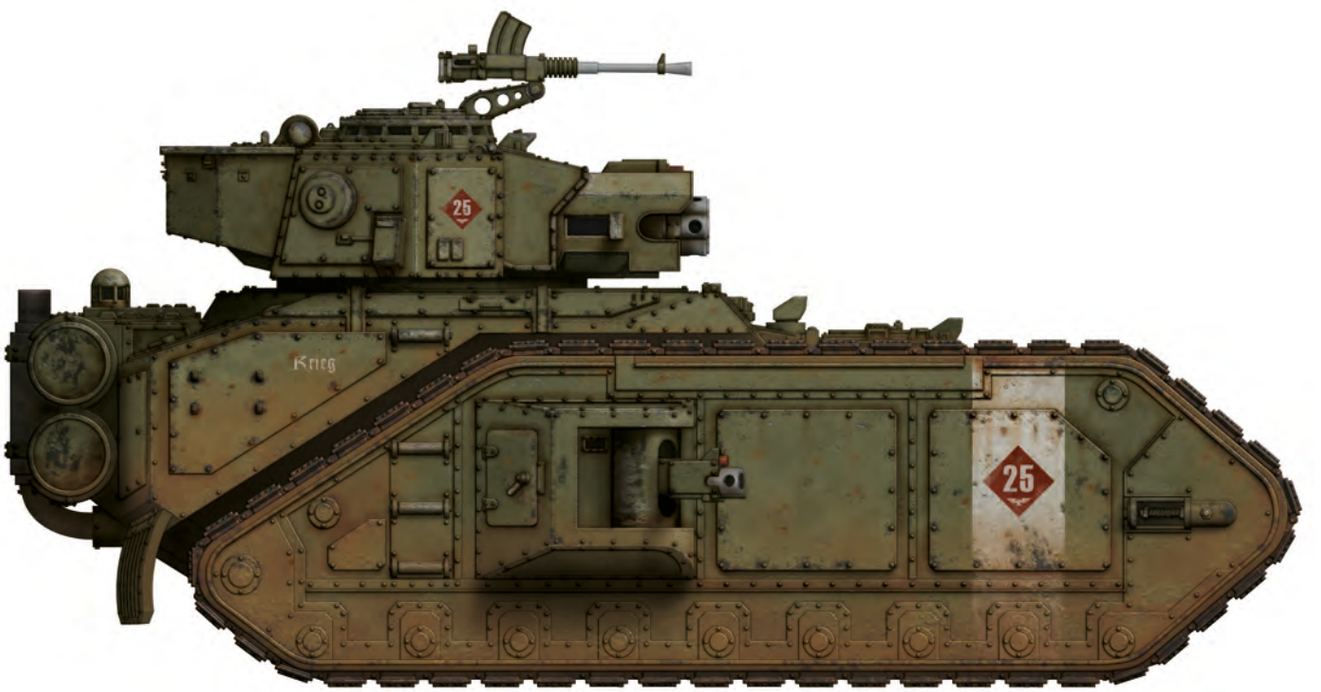


Chaos Defiler encountered by the 19th Siege regiment.



Chaos Defiler of the Disciples of Contagion warband

FORCES OF THE IMPERIUM



Macharius Vulcan super-heavy tank of 11th regiment, 6th heavy tank company. This vehicle was disabled by enemy artillery fire and later destroyed and abandoned by its crew.

THE DEATH KORPS OF KRIEG
ENGINEERS

The Death Korps of Krieg are infamous across Segmentum Obscuras for their stoic and hardy infantry. They are men recruited and trained to brave the worst warzones, using a doctrine of trench warfare to wear down their enemies in long campaigns of attrition. Whilst the infantry are the backbone of these tactics, the Death Korps utilise many other arms in support. The artillery (especially heavy artillery) have a major role to play in softening up the enemy, as do supporting tanks and the Death Rider cavalry. Another of these arms of the Death Korps are the Engineers.

Like Grenadiers, Engineers are infantry who support Krieg campaigns in a specialist role. Krieg operations often require large amounts of engineering work and, whilst all infantry can dig trenches, deep dug-outs and mining requires expert knowledge. The Engineer Korps provides this knowledge, specialising in subterranean warfare, digging shafts, tunnels and saps to undermine the enemy's strong points and launch surprise raids behind enemy lines.

Krieg Engineer squads carry a lot of technical equipment like geo-thermic auspex, surveyors, breaching torpedoes and melta-charges, as well as hand digging equipment. They also have access to heavier cutting equipment and mole launchers. As well as soldiers they are miners, digging forward from the frontlines with deep shafts to bypass enemy defences, set large explosive mines below positions or dig sap trenches. Saps are shallow tunnels which are dug to just below the surface, allowing a squad to blow an entrance to the surface and quickly assault an enemy position without crossing no-man's land.

Warfare underground is brutal and merciless, with each soldier facing the possibility of a slow lingering death trapped underground by an enemy counter-mine or a furious and bloody close assault when tunnels collide. In the confined conditions of tunnels, casualties are always very high.

Engineers are also trained and authorised to use gas weaponry. If required they carry small gas canisters grenades, which are used during assaults to shroud the enemy in highly corrosive gas. These are weapons of last resort, but have helped to give Krieg regiments their ruthless reputation.

Engineers use a specialised form of explosive charge known as a breaching torpedo or, to the common soldier, as a 'mole launcher'. The breaching torpedo is carried inside a shoulder-mounted launch tube which clamps into the ground or the side of a tunnel. Once locked into place the torpedo is launched and burrows through the rock and earth. The torpedo itself is an advanced piece of equipment, carrying a powerful drill in its nose. It also contains a small powerfield generator, helping it slice through rock very quickly, and a guidance system, linked to the team's control panel which they use to guide the torpedo onto its target.

Once the torpedo is under its target, it burrows up to the surface and then explodes, allowing attacks from the less well defended underneath of a bunker or building.

The breaching torpedo's main use is for blasting into enemy tunnels. Once an enemy mine or shaft has been located, a torpedo can be launched and guided to the target then exploded, causing a sudden catastrophic collapse.

DEATH KORPS OF KRIEG ENGINEER SQUAD

Watchmaster
(squad leader)

Guardsman No.1

Guardsman No.2

Guardsman No.3

Guardsman No.4

Shotgun

Shotgun

Shotgun

Shotgun

Shotgun

1 Frag Grenade

1 Frag Grenade

2 Frag Grenades

Detonator Unit

3 Krak Grenades

3 Krak Grenades

2 Krak Grenades

3 Melta Charges

Pickaxe

Heavy duty clippers

Detonator cable

Pickaxe

Folding shovel

Folding shovel

Folding shovel

Detonator cable

SQUAD EQUIPMENT

This example shows a 'typical' issue of equipment but extra ammunition, fragmentation grenades and krak grenades will be issued for major attacks. All squad members will carry explosives and additional melta-charges and demolition charges can also be issued. Heavier cutting equipment and 'mole' torpedo launchers may also be issued to some squads, dependant upon operational requirements. Also, small five man work squads are often combined into ten man units for larger operations.

This example is taken from the 150th engineer squad, attached to the 143rd siege regiment.

SQUAD TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT

1

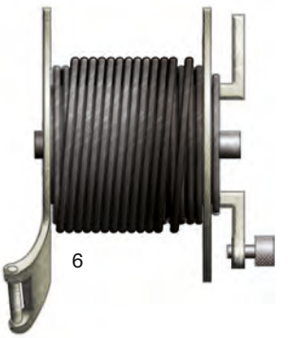
3

2

1. Heavy duty clippers.
2. Folding shovel. Reduces encumberance.
3. Pickaxe. Can be replaced with a mattock.

4

5



6

4. Melta Charge.
This is a shaped-charge with a magnetic clamp. It has a hand set fuse or can be triggered remotely via detonator cable.
5. Detonator Unit, model 605.
6. Detonator cable drum. 200m length.

7

7. Lucius pattern, Mk 22c combat shotgun with eight round revolving magazine.

ENGINEER UNIFORMS

Engineer Squad 238 – 179th Siege Regiment

Engineer Squad 198 – 19th Siege Regiment

Engineer Squad 52 – 5th Siege Regiment

HADES
BREACHING DRILL

In order to fulfil their role, Krieg Engineers have access to many pieces of specialised equipment for working underground. As well as all carrying handheld digging equipment, they also have larger machines for heavy cutting and boring. One such machine is the fearsome Hades breaching drill. Its powerful cutting-head is equipped with a melta-cutter for blasting rock into liquid slag and four large, diamantine-tipped, rotary powercutters which can quickly smash and pound rock into rubble. The blades are shaped to help drag the machine forward as more rock is fed into the head. For additional mobility, this heavy cutting-head is mounted via two powerful piston arms to a tracked chassis. Through the chassis runs a conveyor belt to carry the rubble and debris away from the rock face.

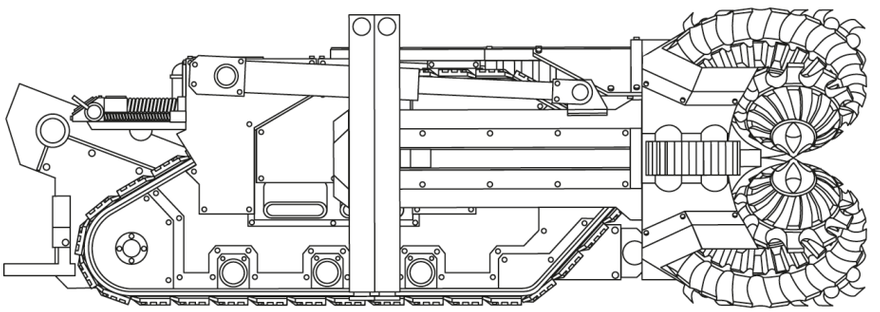
The breaching drill is only used to cut the last few yards of a tunnel, to rapidly create a hole through which the following engineers can attack. Typically the engineers will have spent weeks or months digging a sap tunnel into position ahead of a carefully planned attack. The breaching drill is then secretly moved into place and, on command, set in motion, quickly smashing the last ten or twenty yards of rock through to the target. In its wake Engineer squads emerge from the tunnel in a hail of dust, rock, debris and spinning blades which can quickly mangle anything on the surface that blocks the breach.

Although slow and cumbersome to move, once on the surface the Hades drill's cutting-head can still be an improvised weapon. It is capable of cutting through just about any material with its powerblades and melta-cutter, smashing bunkers, buildings, defences or vehicles, and just about anything else that gets in its way (including troops).

The Hades is not really a battlefield weapon but a piece of engineering equipment. In the past it has been pressed into service on the surface when attacking heavy fortified positions or fortress walls, but high rates of loss mean it is a weapon of last resort, and a poor replacement for a demolisher cannon.

As a cutting tool, it should not be confused with the Termite or Mole, which are rare subterranean transport vehicles sometimes fielded by the Adeptus Mechanicus for similar tunnelling assaults. These utilise advanced phase-field generator technology to 'dig' under the enemy rather than the brute force of the Hades.

Hades Breaching Drill



DEATH RIDER UNIFORMS

5th Siege Regiment

19th Siege Regiment

261st Siege Regiment

143rd Siege Regiment

DEATH RIDER COMPANY

Command Squadron

TO & E	
1 Lieutenant	65 Mounts
7 Ridemasters	65 Lances
57 Other ranks	65 Laspistols
65 Men in total	65 Sabres

1st Squadron

2nd Squadron

3rd Squadron

4th Squadron

5th Squadron

6th Squadron

224th ARTILLERY COMPANY

Company Headquarters

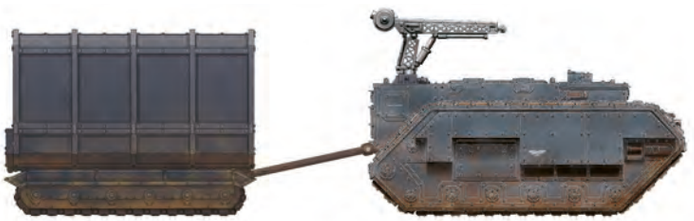
Company CO + Staff and Centaur

Company 2iC + Staff and Centaur

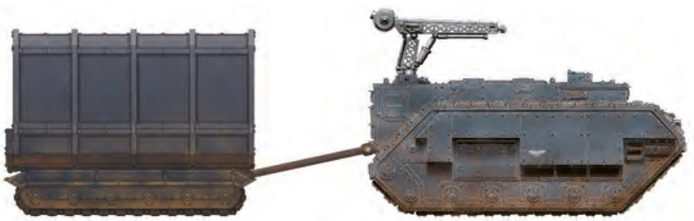
Centaur Communications vehicle

Atlas Engineering and Recovery vehicle

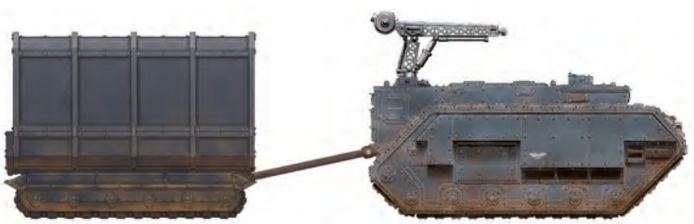
Supply Column



Trojan Ammunition Carrier and Trailer

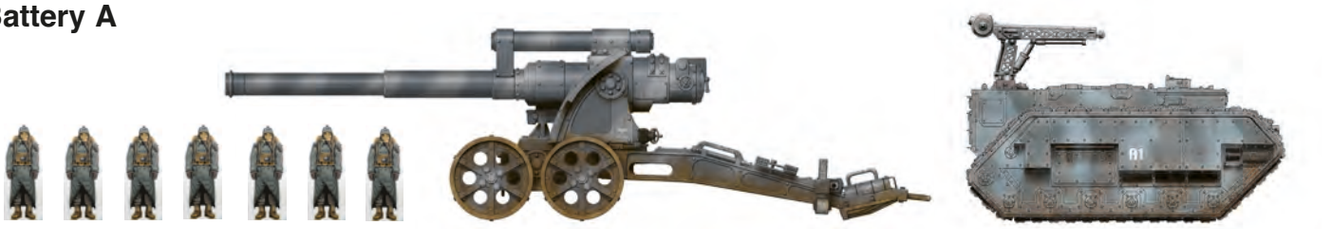


Trojan Ammunition Carrier and Trailer

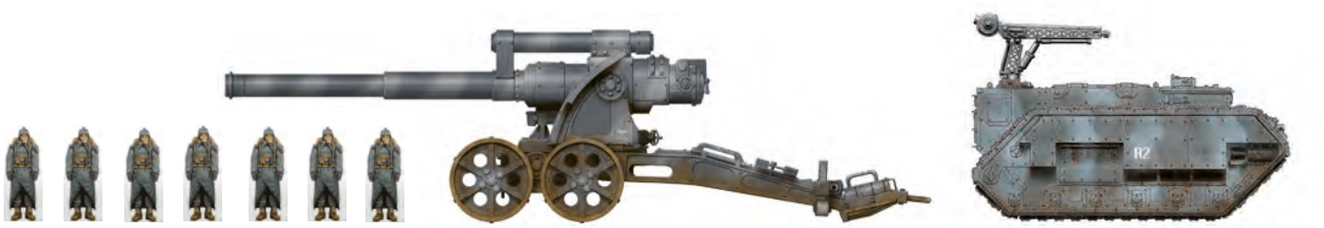


Trojan Supplies Carrier and Trailer

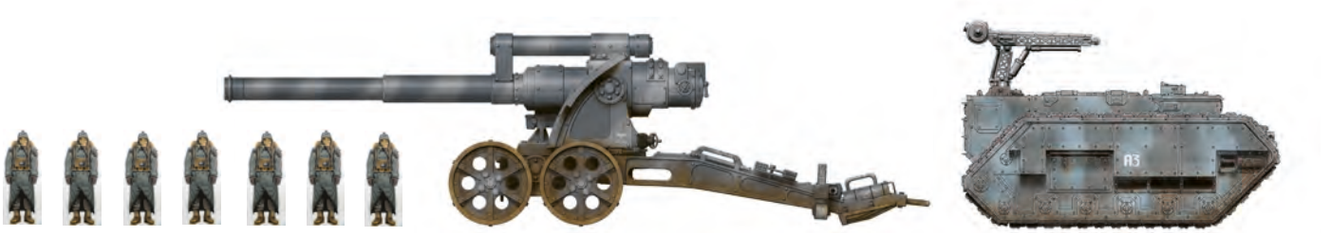
Battery A



Earthshaker Cannon and Trojan Tractor

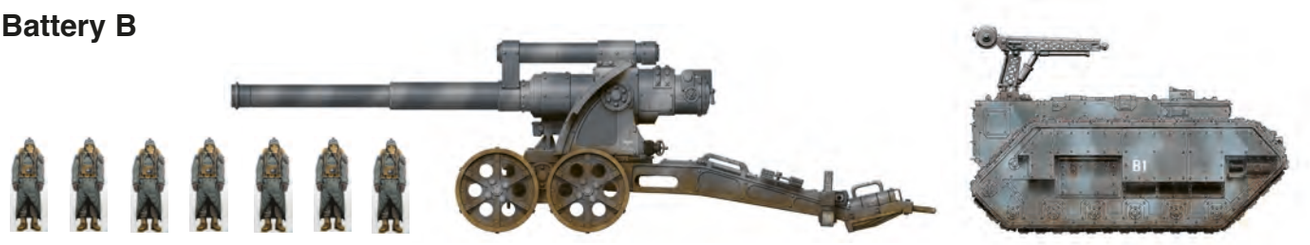


Earthshaker Cannon and Trojan Tractor

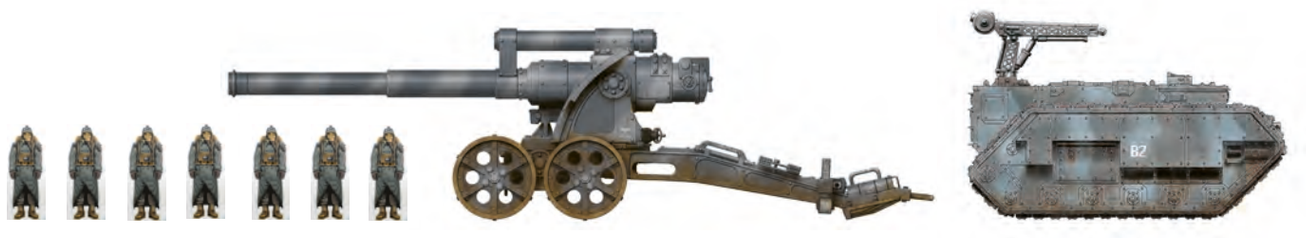


Earthshaker Cannon and Trojan Tractor

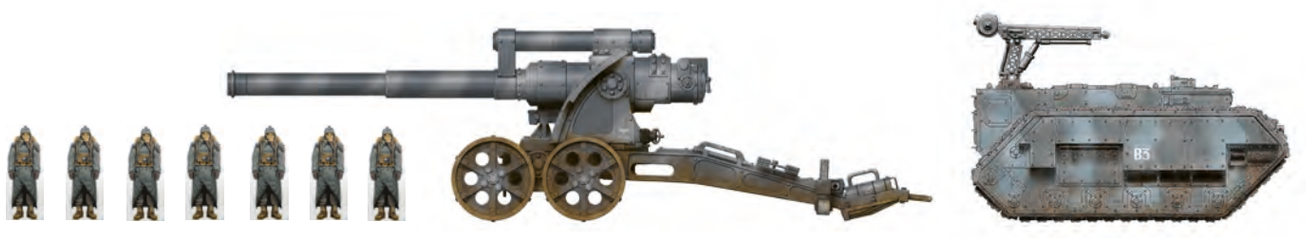
Battery B



Earthshaker Cannon and Trojan Tractor



Earthshaker Cannon and Trojan Tractor



Earthshaker Cannon and Trojan Tractor

Battery C

Medusa Siege Gun and Trojan Tractor

Medusa Siege Gun and Trojan Tractor

Medusa Siege Gun and Trojan Tractor

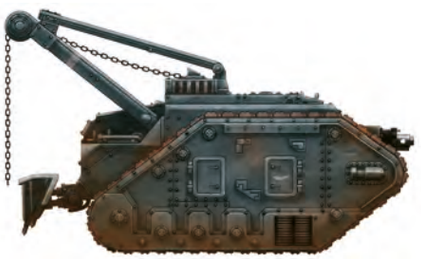
3rd HEAVY ARTILLERY COMPANY

Company Headquarters

Company CO + Staff and Centaur

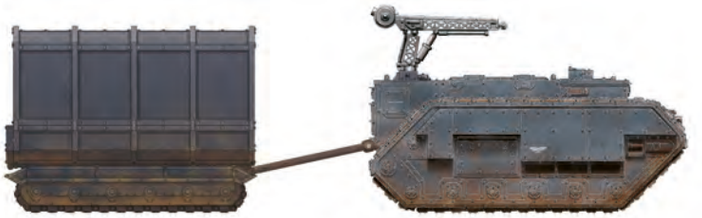
Company 2iC + Staff and Centaur

Centaur Communications vehicle

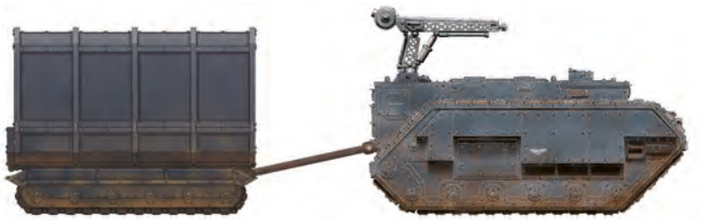


Atlas Engineering and Recovery vehicle

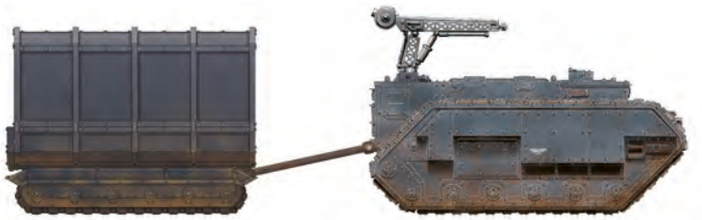
Supply Column



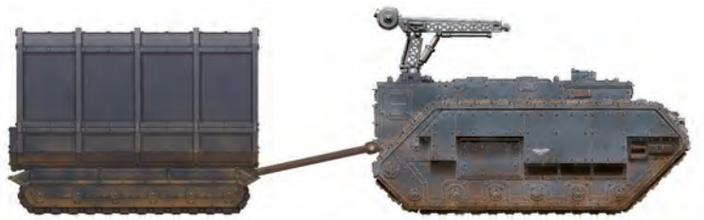
Trojan Ammunition Carrier and Trailer



Trojan Ammunition Carrier and Trailer



Trojan Ammunition Carrier and Trailer



Trojan Supplies Carrier and Trailer

Battery 1

Bombard and Centaur crew transport

Bombard and Centaur crew transport

Bombard and Centaur crew transport

Battery 2

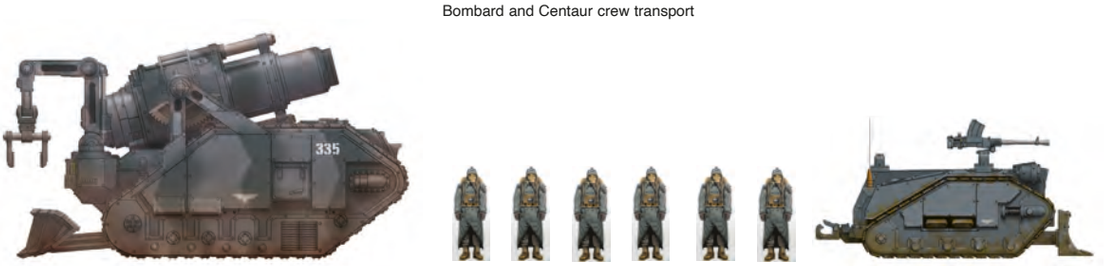
Bombard and Centaur crew transport

Bombard and Centaur crew transport

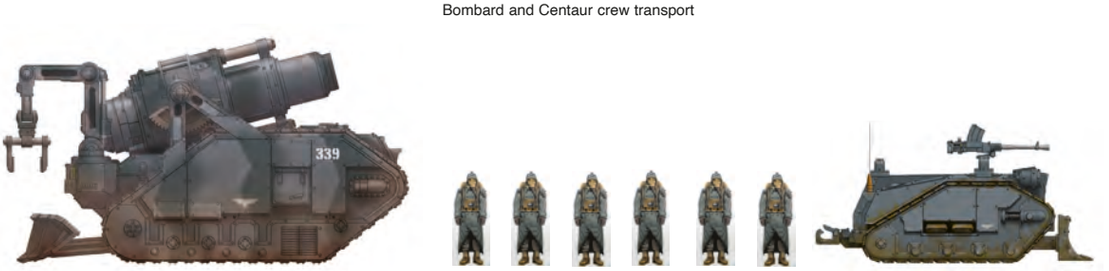
Bombard and Centaur crew transport

Battery 3

Bombard and Centaur crew transport



Bombard and Centaur crew transport



Bombard and Centaur crew transport

7th TANK REGIMENT, 2nd COMPANY

Company Headquarters

Centaur utility vehicle

Company CO Leman Russ

Squadron 1

Squadron Command Leman Russ

Leman Russ

Leman Russ

Squadron 2

Squadron Command Leman Russ

Leman Russ

Leman Russ

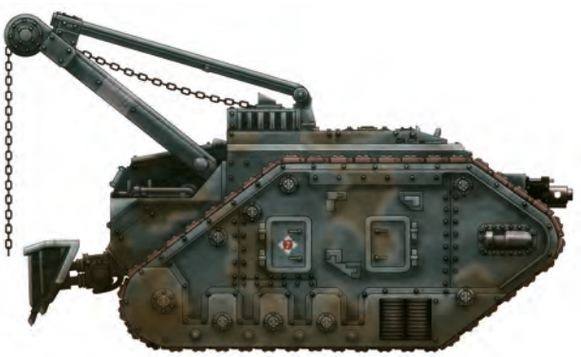
Squadron 3

Squadron Command Leman Russ

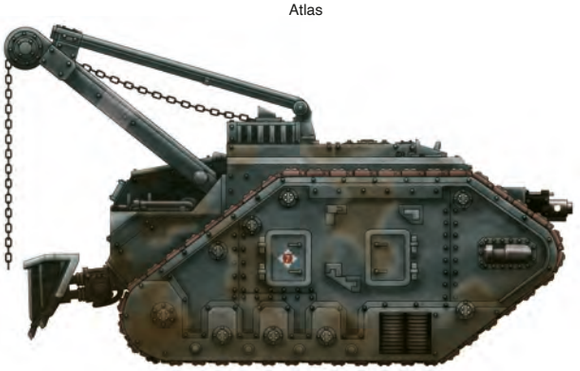
Leman Russ Exterminator

Leman Russ Exterminator

Maintenance and Recovery



Atlas



Atlas

Supply Column

Trojan Ammunition Carrier

Trojan Ammunition Carrier

Trojan Ammunition Carrier

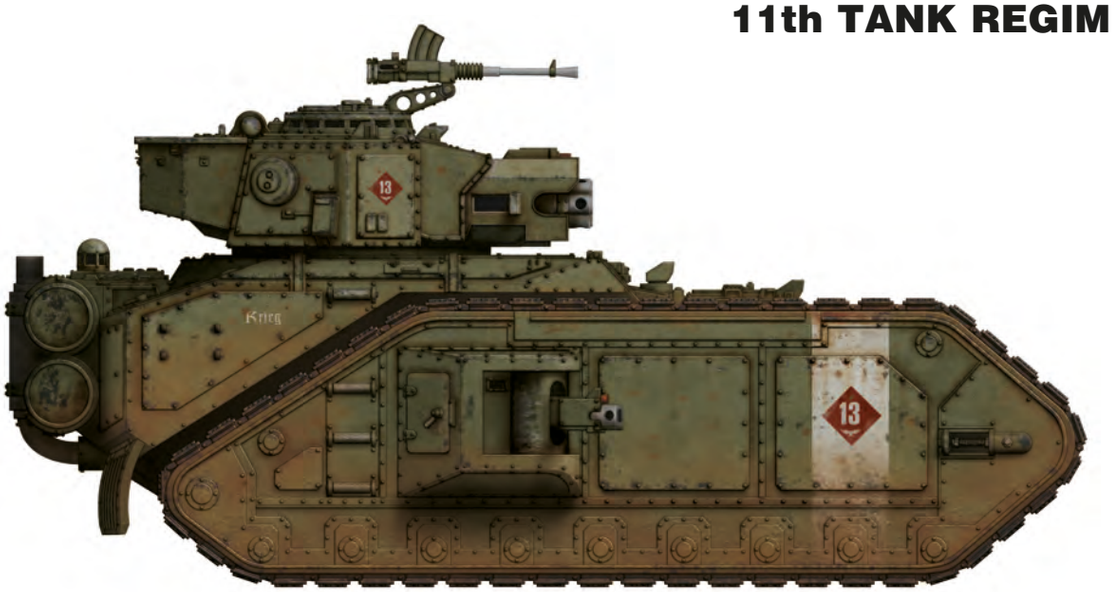
ADVANCE OF 143rd REGIMENT

This picture shows the Krieg 143rd siege regiment, 12th line korps, 88th siege army, advancing in sector 541-455 after the breaching of the inner defence line of Vraks' citadel. Colonel Thyran observes the troop movements accompanied by Commissar-General Maugh, whilst receiving a report from an Engineer Watchmaster. Behind the Colonel stands a small security detachment and his Ensign carrying the honoured regimental banner.

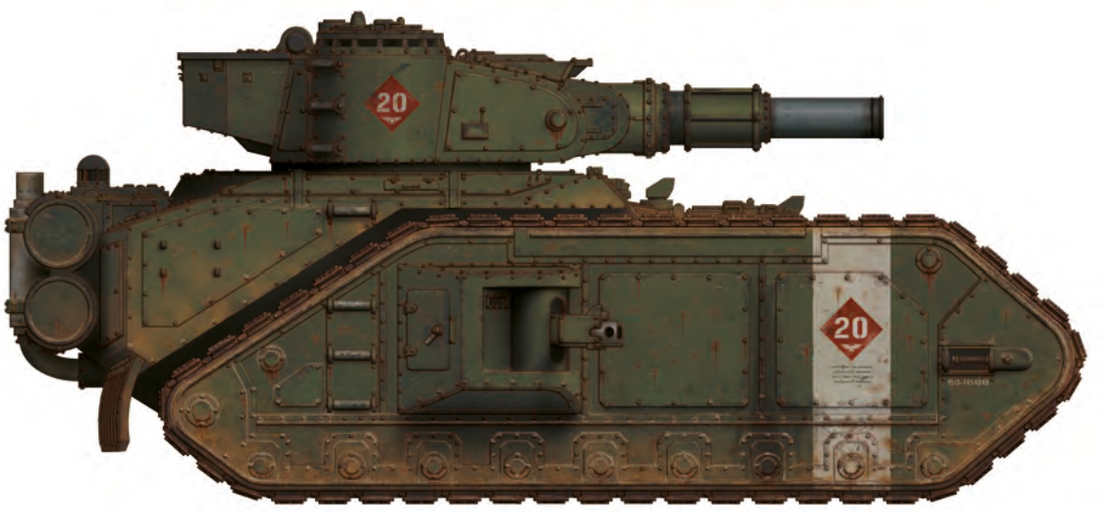
Men of the 20th company are passing-by in marching columns, whilst heavier equipment in the form of a heavy mortar towed by a Centaur, a Leman Russ tank and a Gorgon heavy assault transport move forward alongside. Behind these advance the imposing forms of two Reaver Battle titans from Lucius forge world's Titan Legion, Legio Astorum – *the Warp Runners*. The deployment of a Reaver battlegroup provided the Death Korps with its heaviest support and proved decisive in breaking through the renegade force's defences.

6th HEAVY TANK COMPANY

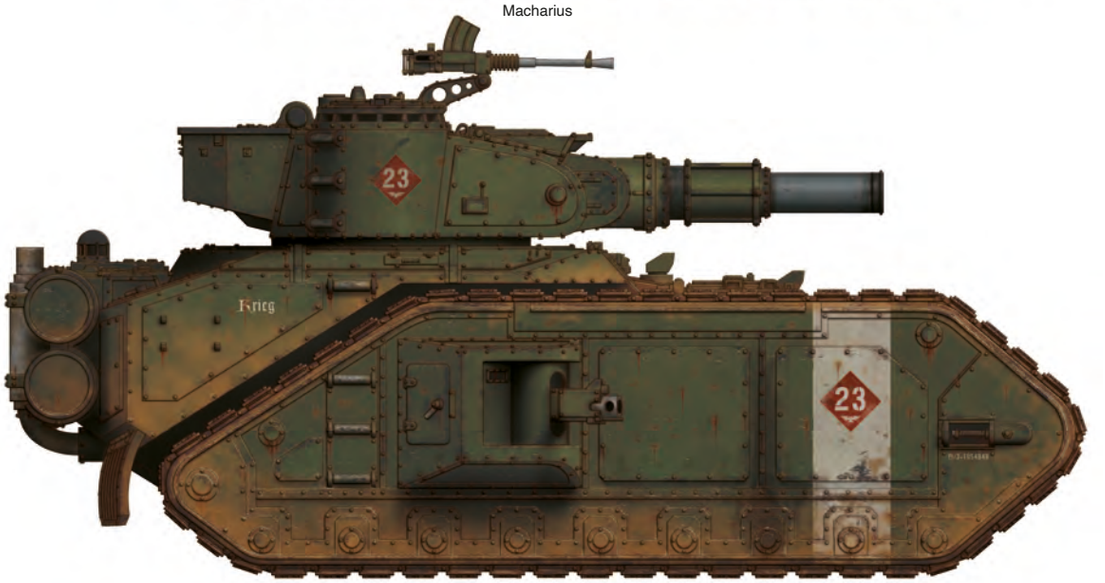
11th TANK REGIMENT



Company Command Macharius Vulcan



Macharius

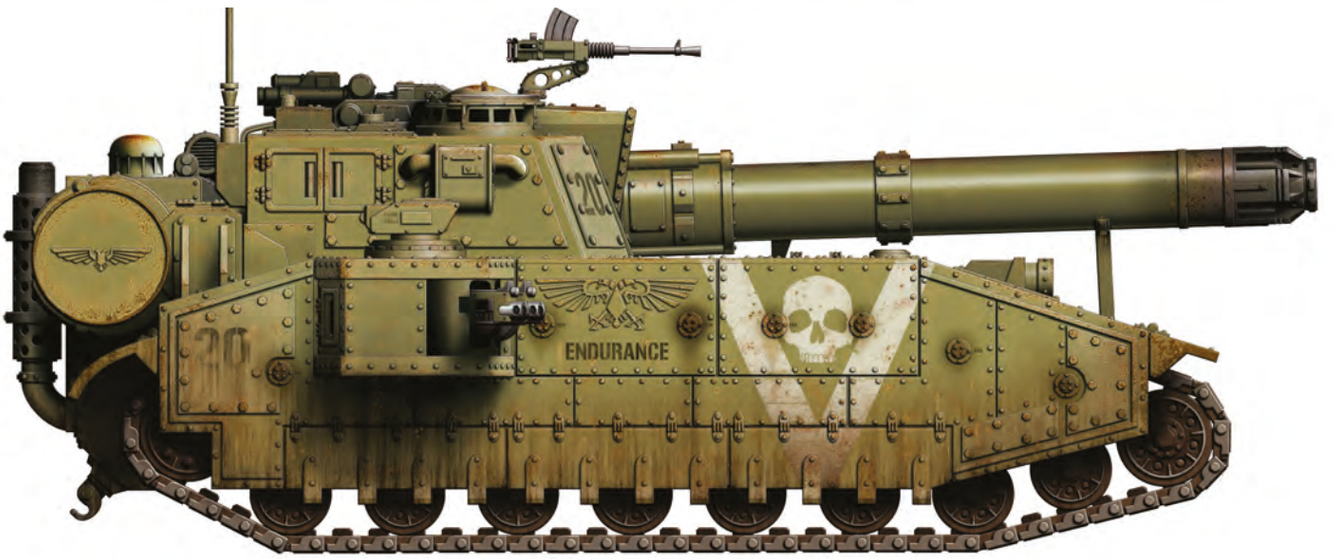


Macharius

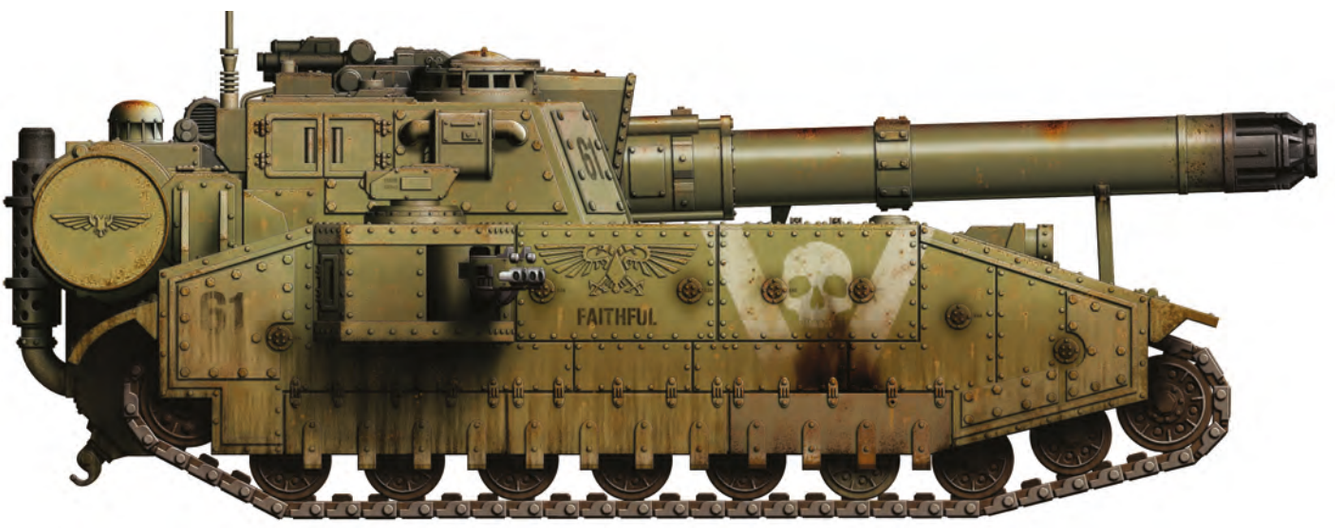
14th TITAN-HUNTER COMPANY – HEAVY

11th TANK REGIMENT

Company Command Shadowsword



Shadowsword



Shadowsword

LEGIO ASTORUM

– WARP RUNNERS –

REAVER BATTLEGROUP: VRAKS

Legio Astorum *(Warp Runners)* are the Titan legion based upon the forge world of Lucius. They are an ancient and honoured legion that, even during the darkest days of the Great Betrayal, remained loyal to the Emperor. Legend has it that a battlegroup of Legio Astorum Titans was present at the defence of the Emperor's Palace and ever since then Warp Runners' battlegroups have been dispatched to the most deadly warzones across the Imperium to fight the Emperor's wars.

On Vraks the legion deployed 22 Titans of Reaver and Warhound class. Led by High Princeps Rand Drauca, the battlegroup was first engaged during the 'Kagori' offensive and was credited with breaking the inner defence line.

Praetorian

Tritus

Invigila Alpha

Invigila Beta

Canis Primus

Canis Secundus

Avernus Ultra

Avernus Maxima

Canis Tertius

Canis Quartus

Triarii-Sinister

Triarii-Dexter

Honorum

Invictorus

Astor Tyrannis

Incaeduus Prime

Aeacus Ultra

Questor Tyrannis

Pyladii Alpha

Pyladii Beta

Lupus Prime

Lupus Secundus

TITAN BANNERS

Each Titan carries its own honour banner, kill banners, dedicational seals and personal heraldry. These record the war machine's history and dedicate its machine-spirit to the Emperor. The Titan Legions use a complex and archaic system of heraldry, icons and insignia to record past Princeps, enemies vanquished, battles won and honours gained.

Princeps honour banner (left) and Moderatii kill banner (above).

MACHARIUS
VULCAN

The Macharius super-heavy tank is a 'second' generation Baneblade – a tank that lacks the advanced STC technology of the Baneblade but fulfils the same battlefield role. Whilst lacking the Baneblade's massive size and multiple weapon systems, its extra armour bracing, engine performance and advanced logic engine, the Macharius still has the thick frontal armour and heavy firepower needed by a heavy tank.

First re-discovered by Magos Nalax whilst working in the vast archives of Lucius forge world, the Macharius has gradually re-entered service with Imperial Guard regiments as the plans have been distributed from Mars and more forge worlds have begun production. The Macharius is becoming an increasing common sight. The Macharius helps to fill the short fall in Baneblade production and is deployed alongside other super heavy tanks in the Imperial Guard's heavy tank companies. Magos Nalax's life's work also produced variants of the twin battlecannon armed Macharius, including the rare Vanquisher cannon armed variant and the Vulcan variant, a super heavy tank equipped with the fearsome Vulcan mega bolter.

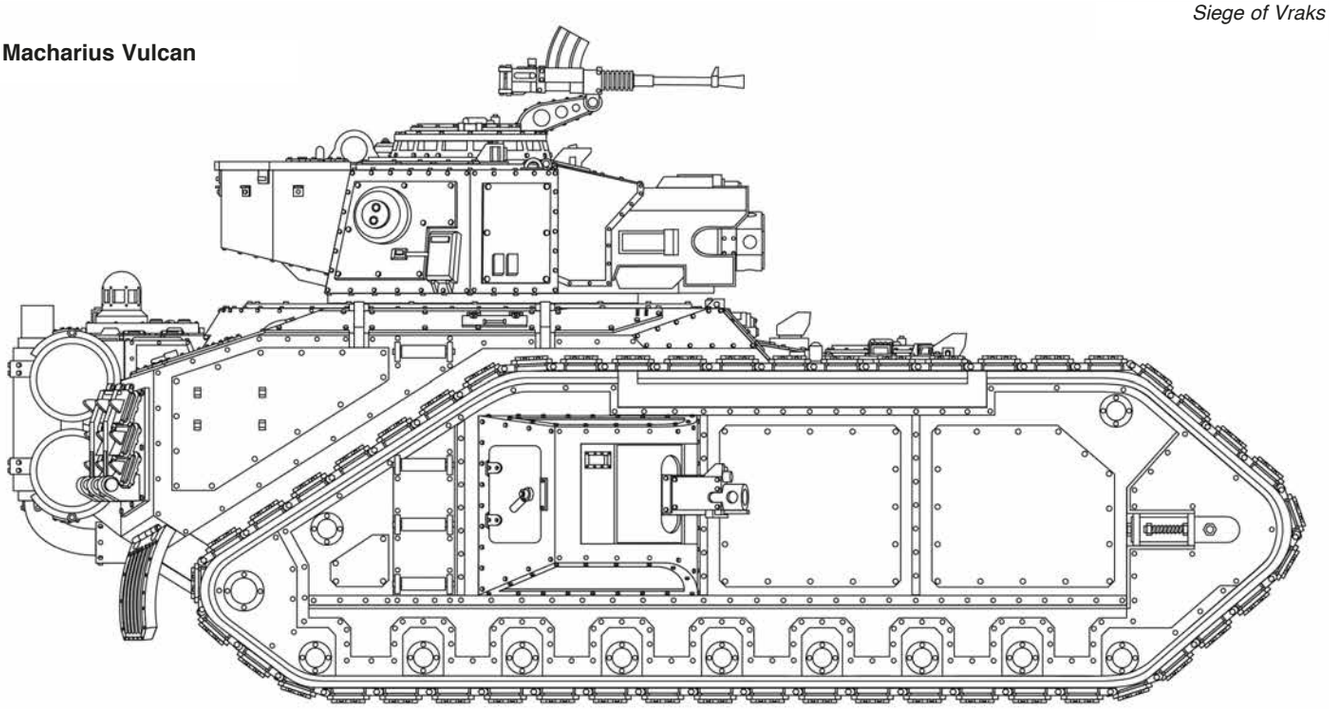
The Vulcan mega bolter is a weapon usually carried by Titans. It is a multiple-barrelled gatling autocannon, firing thousands of rounds per minute in a destructive torrent, turning the standard Macharius into a highly effective anti-personnel weapon. Due to the weapon's and the tank's size, ammunition storage is restricted and this is the tank's main drawback, carrying only enough ammunition for 20 seconds continuous firing. It is not unusual for the crew to fill the tank's stowage bins with extra ammunition and carry more ammunition crates as external stowage.

The tank has a crew of just six men, consisting of a commander, driver, gunner, comms-operator (who also doubles as the heavy stubber gunner) and two sponson gunners. The space saved by the loss of the standard Macharius' two loaders is turned over to additional ammunition storage. The mega-bolter is fed by a high-speed autoloader.

On Vraks, the Krieg siege regiments were often supported by heavy tank companies, and these freely mixed many super heavy tanks – Baneblades fought alongside Shadowswords, Stormblades and when these could not be replaced like-for-like, Macharius were used as stand-ins. Lacking the penetrating power to smash the bunkers and pillboxes occupied by the enemy, the Vulcan was never used in great numbers, but was effective in sweeping trench lines clear or suppressing enemy heavy weapons teams.

As the spearpoint of many offensives, super heavy tanks took heavy losses on Vraks and many were also disabled and then captured by enemy counter-attacks. After 14 years of warfare, the renegade forces were also deploying some captured Macharius in their own ranks.

Macharius Vulcan



DVLA 6724930

ADEPTUS MECHANICUS DEPARTMENTO MANUFACTURUM

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Vehicle Designation 8769-128-8734-MA14

Vehicle Name MACHARIUS VULCAN

Forge World of Origin LUCIUS

Known Patterns I-II

Crew COMMANDER, DRIVER, GUNNER, 2X SPONSON GUNNERS, COMMS-OPERATOR

Powerplant LC400 V18 P2 MULTI-FUEL

Weight 172 TONNES

Length 10.9 M

Width 7 M

Height 4.8 M

Ground Clearance .45 M

Max Speed - On Road 26 KPH

Max Speed - Off Road 18 KPH

Main Armament VULCAN MEGA-BOLTER

Secondary Armament 2 X HEAVY BOLTERS

Traverse 360°

Elevation -2° TO +28°

Main Ammunition 8,000 ROUNDS

Secondary Ammunition 1000 ROUNDS AND 600 ROUNDS

Armour

- Turret 220 MM
- Superstructure 200 MM
- Hull 190 MM
- Gun Mantlet 150 MM

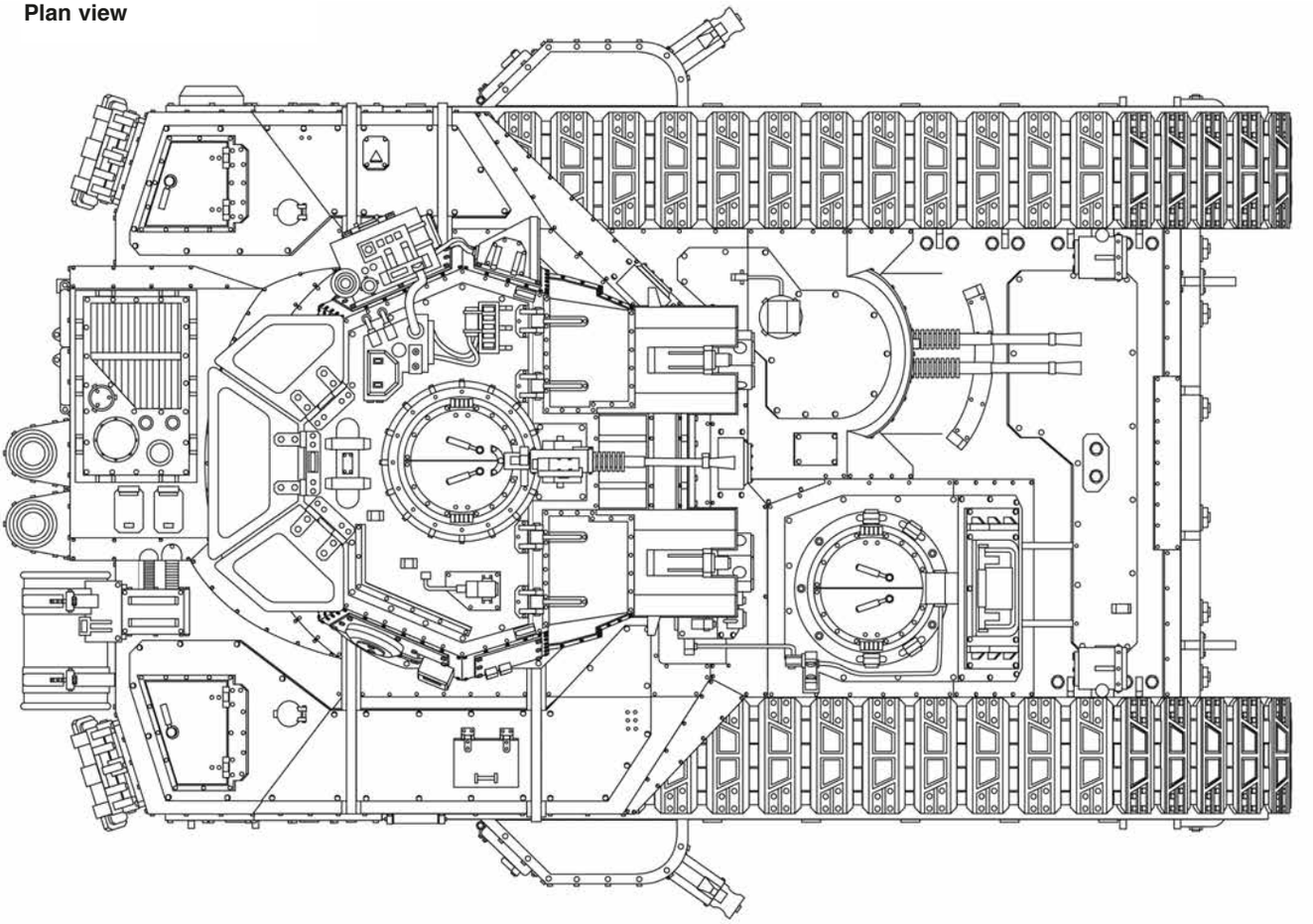
Date 1887345.M40

signature

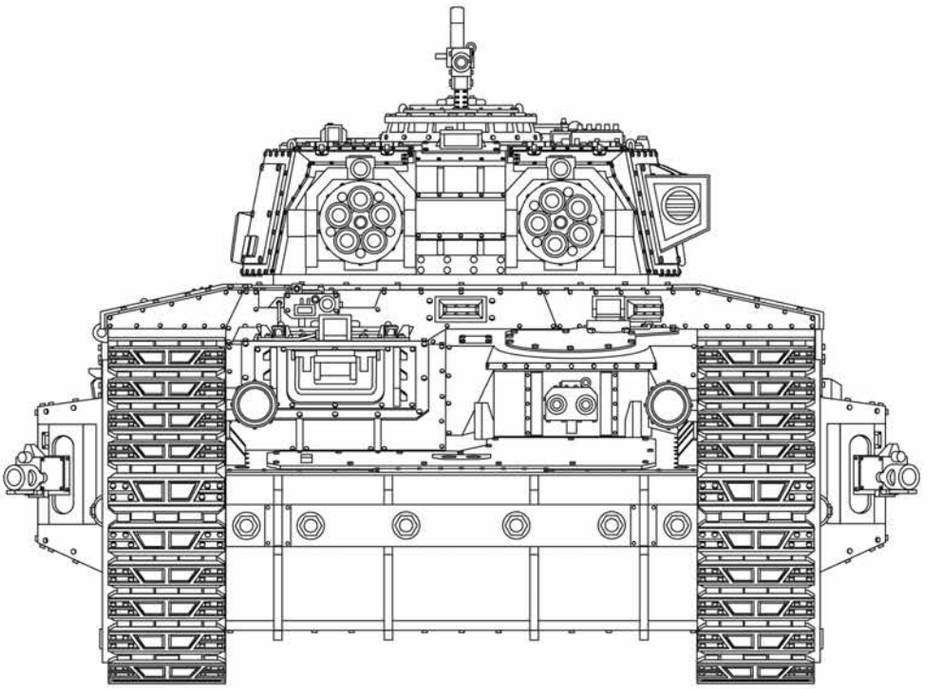
Magos Fabricator

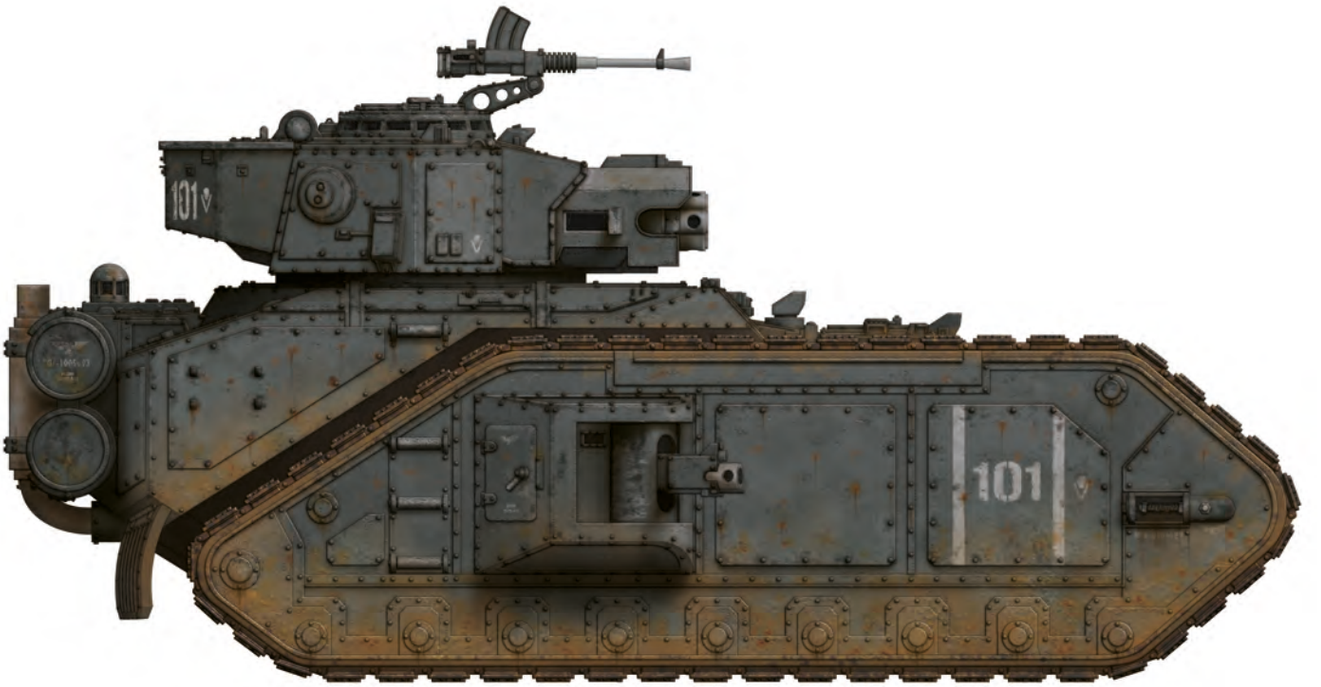
Dominus Ex Machina

Plan view



Front view

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REAVER
BATTLE TITAN

Titans are huge walking war machines, protected by powerful void shields and mounting massive weapons of awesome destructive power – they are the Imperium's greatest planet-based fighting machines. There are three main Titan types: the smallest is the Warhound, the most common is the Warlord, and between the two stands the Reaver. Reavers are a very old design of Titan, never as heavily armed as the Warlord (which forms the mainstay of the Titan Legion's battle titans), or as fast and agile as the Warhound, the Reaver is still a potent war machine in its own right.

All Titans are organised into units called Titan Legions. The Titan Legions are each based on forge worlds and remain under the direct control of the Adeptus Mechanicus, who jealously guard these mighty vehicles and have the power to sanction which war zones they will commit their forces to. It is this power that gives the rulers of the Adeptus Mechanicus much of their influence when it comes to determining where or when the armies of the Imperium will fight. It is a power which is coveted by other factions on Terra – especially the Ecclesiarchy who would dearly love the reliable support of Titans for their wars of faith.

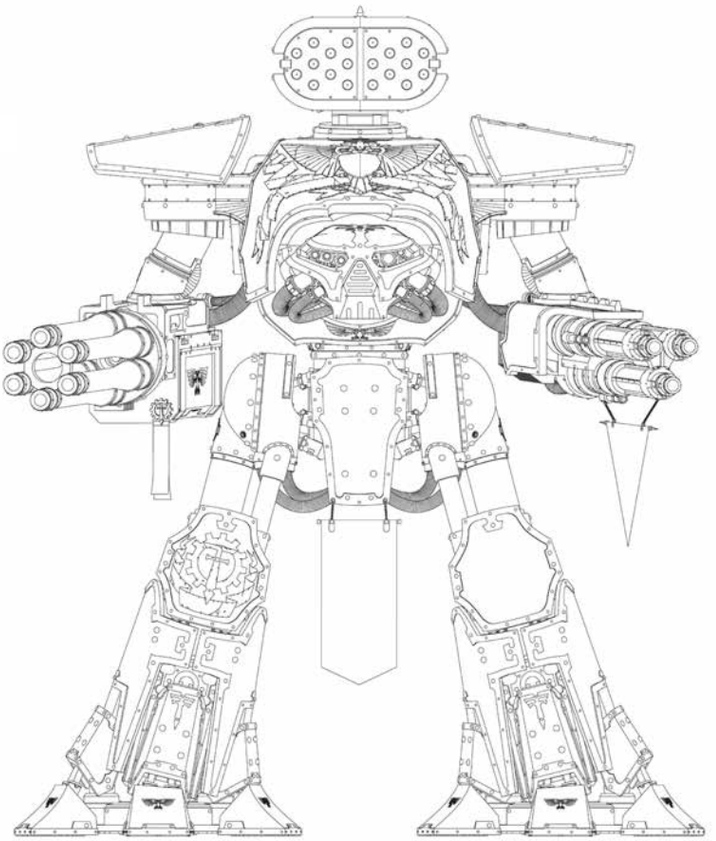
Amongst the ranks of the honoured Titan Legions stands the Reaver, protected by thick adamantium armour plates and carrying devastating firepower. Like its larger cousin, a Reaver is regarded as a holy engine of destruction, an incarnation of the power of the Machine God, thrice-blessed by the Techpriest of the Adeptus Mechanicus before striding into battle.

Each Reaver is commanded by a Princeps, who is connected directly to the Titan's mind-impulse unit. He is assisted by two crew, bearing the rank of Moderatii, who control the Titan's movement and weapons. The Reaver's power source is its plasma reactor, which is tended by a Techpriest who carefully husbands the Titan's available power supply and is in turn assisted in his complex task by servitors wired directly into the Titan's systems.

The Reaver carries three weapons. Its single carapace weapon is the equivalent of a smaller Warhound sized weapon, whilst its arms carry the heavier weapons – up to the size of Warlord weapons. The largest Titan weapons, such as Quake cannons, are still beyond even a Reaver's load capacity.

On Vraks the Legio Astramors (Warp Runners) battlegroup was led by High Princeps Rand Drauca, and provided 88th siege army with its heaviest armour and firepower. The commitment of the battle group in support of the 12th line korps was the decisive factor in breaking through the inner defence lines. Drauca and his fellow Princeps would continue to support the campaign on Vraks on numerous occasions, and were heavily engaged again when Red Scorpions Space Marines captured a breach in the curtain wall, matching weapons and armour with traitor Titans of the Legio Vulcanum.

Reaver - Mars pattern



DVLA 6724930

ADEPTUS MECHANICUS DEPARTMENTO MANUFACTURUM

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Vehicle Designation 0550-4332-982-RV 011

Vehicle Name REAVER TITAN

Forge World of Origin MARS

Known Patterns I-XIV

Crew PRINCEPS, 2 X MODERATII, TECHPRIEST

Powerplant TYPE XXII PLASMA REACTOR

Weight 738 TONNES

Length 15.4 M

Width 18.1 M

Height 22.3 M

Ground Clearance 8.25 M

Max Speed - On Road 27 KPH (12.5 M STRIDE LENGTH)

Max Speed - Off Road 19 KPH

Main Armament LASER BLASTER / GATLING BLASTER

Secondary Armament APOCALYPSE MISSILE LAUNCHER

Traverse 100°

Elevation -33° TO +28°

Main Ammunition 30 SHOTS FROM POWERPACK / 90 ROUNDS

Secondary Ammunition 40 MISSILES

Armour

Turret NA

Superstructure 120 MM

Hull 120 MM

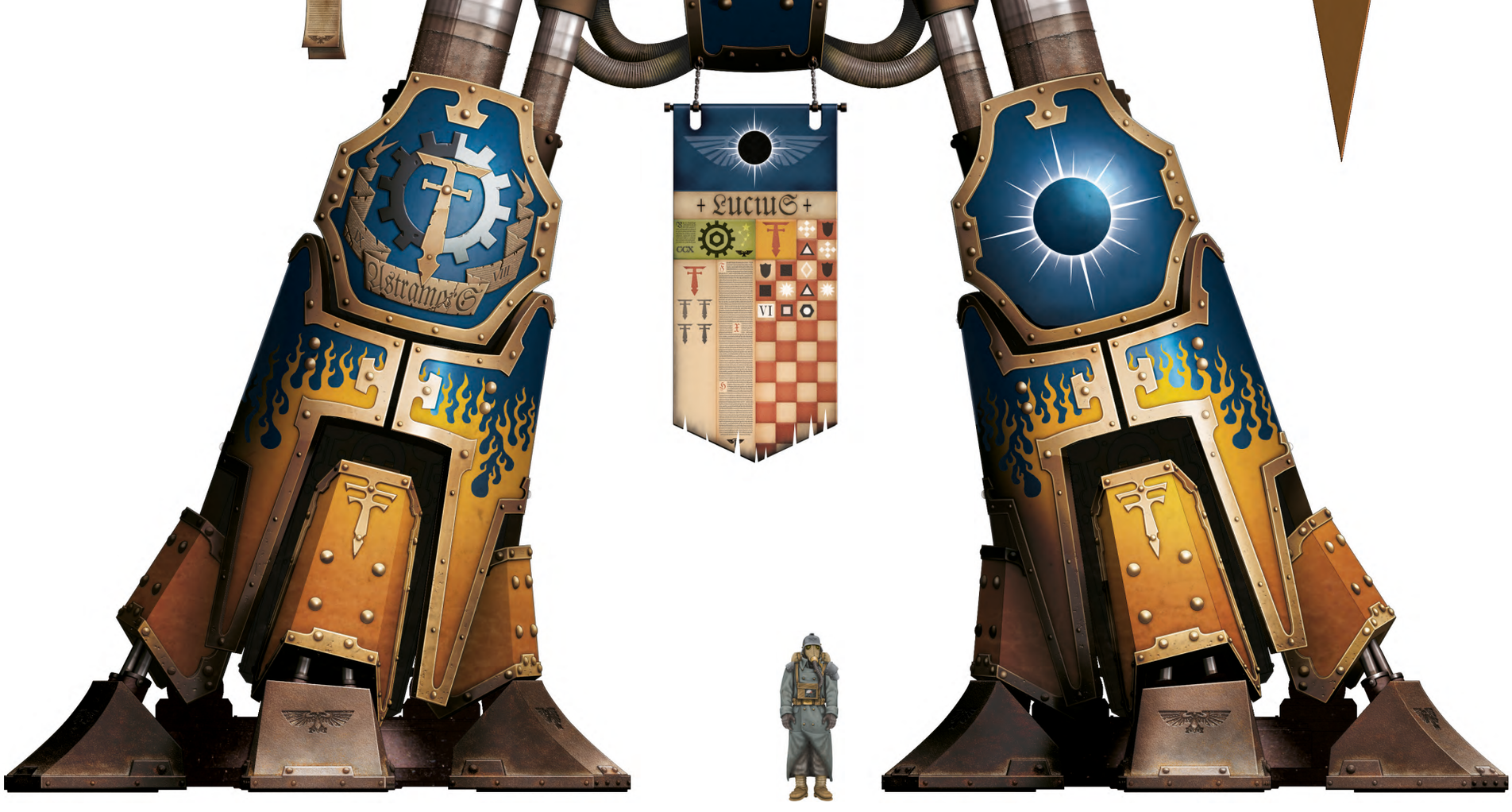
Gun Mantlet NA

Date 226099.M39

signature

Magos Fabricator

Dominus Ex Machina



Reaver *Invigila Alpha,* destroyed by a catastrophic hit to its cockpit in Sector 54-46.

THE RED SCORPIONS

"Our minds are pure. Our strength is unbreakable. Our valour is undaunted. The blood of the Emperor is within us."
Chaplain Nalr – from the *Gesta Sacramentus Astartes*

The Red Scorpions are a Chapter shrouded in secrecy. Like many Space Marine Chapters they zealously retain their autonomy from the vast bureaucracy of the Adeptus Administratum, regarding themselves as their own masters, answerable only to the Emperor himself – an attitude that is disliked by many of the High Lords of Terra.

When or where the Chapter was founded is now unknown. It is likely that in the 5,000 years or so since the Chapter was created that the information has been lost, or is stored in some long-forgotten sealed data-chamber. Where the Chapter's geneseed originally came from is also unknown and a matter of some interest as it has remained remarkably uncorrupted.

Of all the loyal Chapters of the Adeptus Astartes, the Red Scorpions claim to have the purest geneseed. Whilst this claim has never been independently substantiated, the Chapter is fanatical about maintaining its purity, constantly screening for mutation and corruption. Protecting the geneseed is the Chapter's core belief and fuels the Chapter's isolationism.

Their Chapter fortress is hidden away at a top secret location and only a few high-ranking officials of the Administratum know where it is or how the Red Scorpions recruit their battle brothers. From their hidden base the Chapter send out strike forces to all corners of the galaxy, travelling massive distances to seek out and destroy the Emperor's enemies.

All this secrecy and independence means that the Red Scorpions are regarded by some officials as having a dubious loyalty to the Imperium, even though their record of service is unblemished. The Chapter has consistently refused to assist any Inquisitorial investigations or requests by the Adeptus Mechanicus Biologis for samples of their geneseed for monitoring purposes.

The Chapter is organised using the standard Codex Astartes pattern of ten companies. The Captains of each company are known by the honorary title of 'Commander'. The Chapter Master is called the 'Lord High Commander'.

Purity Above All
The Red Scorpions Chapter believes its geneseed to be pure and untainted, and regards any genetic deviation as dangerous heresy. Every Red Scorpions battle brother is constantly screened for mutation and corruption. The Chapter's Apothecary enforce this screening to the point of fanaticism and regularly deploy its members to monitor the troops in battle and is immediately on hand to recover the Chapter's valuable progenoid glands. Any Red Scorpions Tactical squad may upgrade its Sergeant to an Apothecary for +25 pts.

Have Pride in your Colours
The Red Scorpions shun the use of camouflage and its attendant tactics such as covert operations, stealth and infiltration – these are the tactics of cowardice and have no place amongst the honoured ranks of the Red Scorpions. No Red Scorpions units may use the Infiltrators or Scouts special rule. Red Scorpion Scouts must deploy just like any other unit.

RED SCORPIONS
TACTICAL COMBAT SQUAD ZHYR
6th Tactical Squad, 6th Company

Veteran Sergeant Zhyr
102 missions.

Powersword

Bolt pistol

4 x Bolt guns

Brother Banis
20 missions. KIA on Vraks

Brother Taag
8 mission. WIA on Vraks

Brother Dras
39 missions. WIA on Vraks

Brother Iema
33 missions

RED SCORPIONS
TACTICAL COMBAT SQUAD DAML
6th Tactical Squad, 6th Company

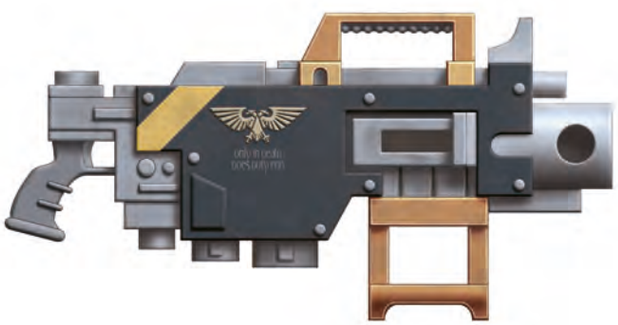
Veteran Brother Daml
62 missions. KIA on Vraks

6th Tactical squad of 6th company was nominally under the command of Veteran Sergeant Zhyr. With Zhyr appointed to command a significant detachment of the Vraks strike force, his squad was deployed as two five man 'combat' squads.

During Operation Execution Place the first half of the squad acted as a command and control unit and bodyguard to Zhyr, being held as a small tactical reserve. Meanwhile, the second combat squad was equipped with a heavy weapon and placed under Veteran Brother Daml in the main assault force.

Left Shoulder Pad.
Chapter Badge variant

Right Shoulder Pad.
Squad number and designation marking



Heavy Bolter

4 x Bolt guns

Brother Tasc
13 mission. WIA on Vraks

Brother Gez
14 missions

Brother Ranh
37 missions. WIA on Vraks

Brother Utsz
21 missions. KIA on Vraks

RED SCORPIONS STRIKE FORCE AINEAS

Operation Execution Place, Siege of Vraks

Fleet

Strike Cruiser – Arx Fidelis

Thunderhawk gunship

Thunderhawk transporter

Headquarters

Commander Ainea

Librarium

Codicer Yaec

Apothecarion

Apothecary x3

1st Company

Terminator x5

Terminator x5

Chaplain Nalr

3rd Company

Tactical x10

Tactical x10

Devastator x10

Rhino x3

6th Company

Tactical x10

Tactical x10

Devastator x5

Brother Daeres

Venerable Brother Rzasa

Rhino x2

Armoury

Techmarine x1

Land Raider

Razorback x2

Vindicator x3

Predator

8th Company

Assault x10

Assault x10

DREADNOUGHT VARIANTS

Dreadnoughts are massive armoured fighting machines, containing the spirits of former Space Marine heroes. They are revered as relics of the Chapter and kept securely, deep in the Chapter's stasis-crypts, preserved from the ravages of time until they are needed on the battlefield again.

Each Dreadnought retains some of its former character and much of its former skill, although this will become dulled by time, but they are each fearsome opponents, towering tall over their battle brothers, wielding heavy weapons and massive close combat weapons. It is the highest honour a Chapter can bestow on a battle brother to grant them the right to live on, despite mortal wounds, as a Dreadnought.

Chaplains are a Chapter's spiritual leaders. They lead each company in prayers and battle rituals and on the battlefield command squads, inspiring them to ever greater heroics in the name of their Emperor or their Primarch. Chaplains are always veteran brothers who have risen to high office by dint of long service. The loss of a Chaplain in battle is a cause for great mourning amongst a Chapter, but should the Chaplain be mortally wounded then the life-preserving power of a Dreadnought sarcophagus may be his only chance to continue to serve.

A Chaplain who is given the honour of being interred within a Dreadnought will still be regarded as a spiritual leader and his sarcophagus will be suitably adorned with the symbols and icons of his former rank. Within the Dreadnought, the Chaplain will remember his former duties and continue to emulate them, at least for a while, until any memory of his former life begins to fade as his eternal life within his metallic tomb takes over.

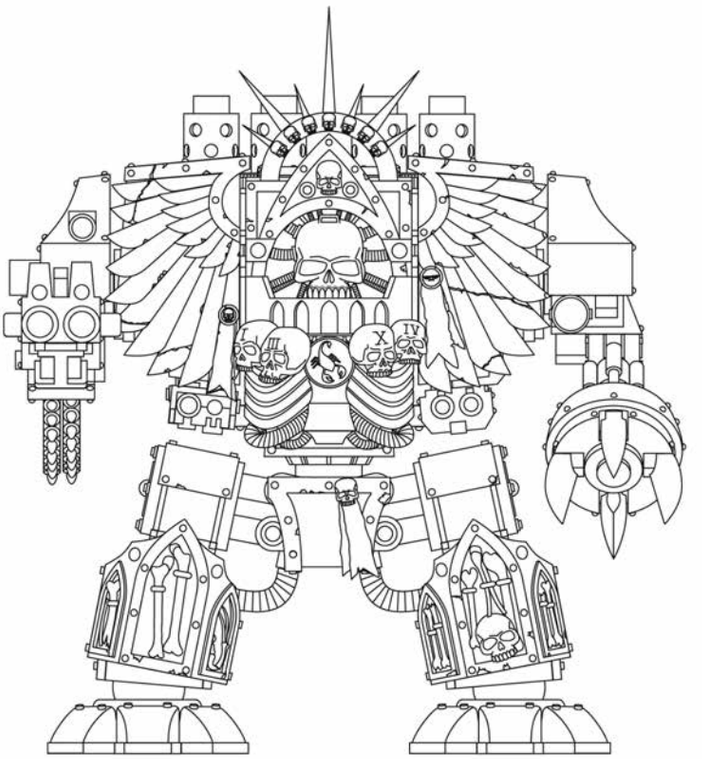
Ranking alongside the Chaplain are other ancient Dreadnoughts, referred to by the title 'Venerable'. These are the oldest and wisest Dreadnoughts in a Chapter, and many are thousands of years old. Most of the time they are left to sleep, but when need or duty calls, they can be re-awakened and will march into battle again. As with the Chaplain Dreadnought, they will retain much of their former skills, and as ancient heroes, Chaptermasters, Captains and former Masters, they are amongst a Chapter's most potent weapons.

Some Space Marine Chapters have equipped their Dreadnought armoured battle brothers specifically to take part in sieges and to lead assaults on fortified positions. These Dreadnoughts are equipped with flamer weapons for clearing bunkers and an assault drill for grinding through ferrocrete in a matter of seconds. The assault drill arm also includes an in-built heavy flamer so that once a hole has been created, the Dreadnought can pour super-heated promethium into a bunker or pillbox.

Siege Dreadnoughts are specialist troops and are only deployed when the Chapter needs to break through a static defence line or during close quarter street-to-street fighting.

On Vraks, Commander Aineas' strike force was well supported by Dreadnoughts. Three venerable battle brothers accompanied the assault on the breach, with Chaplian Nalr acting as second-in-command to Veteran Sergeant Zhyr and Brother Daeres using his rock-grinding drill to great effect, clearing a path for following Vindicators.

MkIV Chaplain Dreadnought



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ADEPTUS MECHANICUS DEPARTMENTO MANUFACTURUM

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Vehicle Designation 8681-756-0115-DR 040

Vehicle Name DREADNOUGHT - CHAPLAIN

Forge World of Origin MARS

Known Patterns I-IV

Crew PILOT

Powerplant THERMIC REACTORS

Weight 12 TONNES

Length 2.2 M

Width 3.4 M

Height 3.7 M

Ground Clearance N/A

Max Speed - On Road 10 KPH

Max Speed - Off Road 5 KPH

Main Armament TWIN-LINKED HEAVY BOLTERS

CLOSE COMBAT WEAPON

Secondary Armament STORM BOLTER

Traverse 360°

Elevation -90° TO +90°

Main Ammunition 2000 ROUNDS

Secondary Ammunition 1000 ROUNDS

Armour

Turret N/A

Superstructure 75 MM

Hull 75 MM

Gun Mantlet N/A

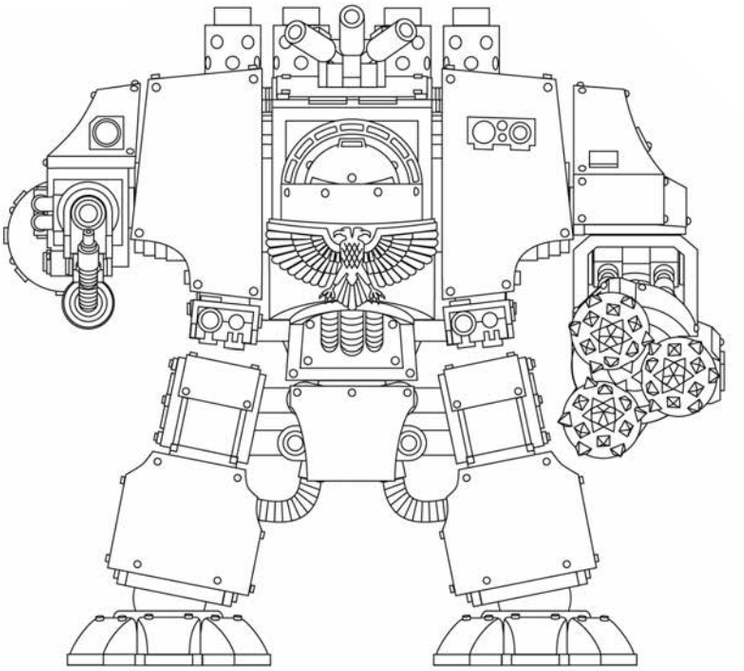
Date 1436052.M40

signature

Magos Fabricator

Dominus Ex Machina

MkIV Siege Dreadnought



DVLA 6724930

ADEPTUS MECHANICUS DEPARTMENTO MANUFACTURUM

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Vehicle Designation 8681-756-0115-DR 040

Vehicle Name DREADNOUGHT - SIEGE

Forge World of Origin INCALADION

Known Patterns I-V

Crew PILOT

Powerplant THERMIC REACTORS

Weight 11.5 TONNES

Length 2.2 M

Width 3.4 M

Height 3.7 M

Ground Clearance N/A

Max Speed - On Road 8 KPH

Max Speed - Off Road 5 KPH

Main Armament INFERNO CANNON

Secondary Armament CLOSE COMBAT WEAPON
STORM BOLTER

Traverse 360°

Elevation -90° TO +90°

Main Ammunition 12 SHOTS

Secondary Ammunition 1000 ROUNDS

Armour

Turret N/A

Superstructure 75 MM

Hull 75 MM

Gun Mantlet N/A

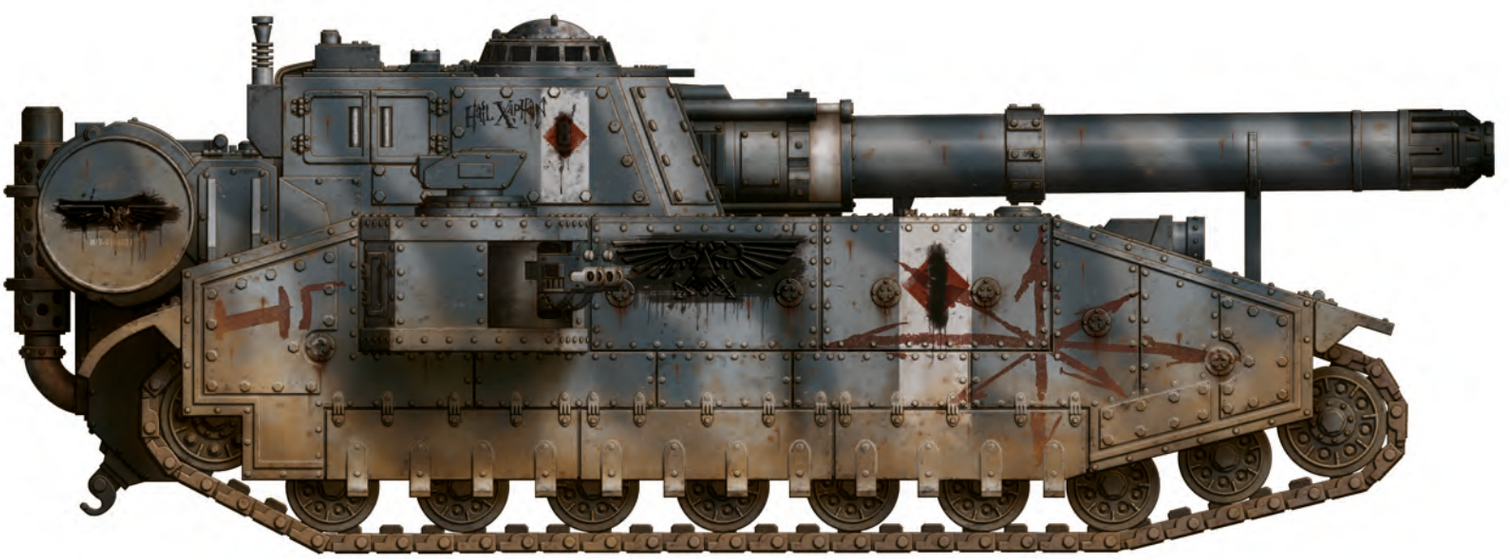
Date 1436052.M40

signature

Magos Fabricator

Dominus Ex Machina

FORCES OF CHAOS



Shadowsword super-heavy titan-hunter, formerly of the 61st Tank regiment. This vehicle has been salvaged from the battlefield by renegade forces and pressed back into service. It is likely that the main weapon is no longer functional.
All loyalist markings have been crudely removed and replaced with blasphemous grafitti.

VRAKSIAN RENEGADE ENFORCER

1. UNIFORM
As a former member of the Vraks militia, the Enforcer's uniform is the remains of his standard issue fatigues. The basic tunic, work trousers and boots are made of hardwearing materials and remain largely unmodified (except for the removal of the tunic's sleeves).

2. ARMOUR
The Enforcer's armour is similar to that worn by all Vraksian renegades, being a combination of crudely manufactured plates and scavenged pieces from other armour. Here the breastplate is a piece of carapace armour, heavily embellished. The shoulder pad, vambrace, groin guard and knee pads have all been created on Vraks from scrap metal.

Attached to his armour is a small parchment. This scroll carries Chaos runes, inscribed in Hakon's own blood, which shows that the Enforcer has entered into a pact with the Chaos gods. The runes have been repeated as tattoos on the heretic's arms, with a preacher carving his upper arm with the eight-pointed star of Chaos Undivided. Dedicating his soul to the dark gods, this traitor has called upon their aid directly and as a result is now completely in their power.

The cast skull mask has been carefully manufactured, and it is not uncommon for those that have sworn oaths of loyalty to the Chaos gods to find that (as well as the irreversible psychopathic traits 'gifted' to the heretic), armour, weapons and flesh begin to fuse. Here this process has just begun, all part of the heretic's path towards becoming a full champion of Chaos, and a sure sign that he has the favour of his chosen deity.

The armour has been decorated with the skulls of former victims. Head taking is a common practice on many feral worlds across the Imperium (and amongst the followers of the Blood God), believing that the head is the centre of a victim's power, and that by possessing the head, the victor retains part of that power. It may be that this Enforcer has reverted to his feral world origins – but it is more likely that he has starting dedicating each of his victims to the god Khorne.

3. WEAPONS
This heretic is well-armed for combat at close quarters. His main weapon is his chainsword, which has been personalized with the addition of extra spikes on the rear of the blade (for backswings) and in the pommel. It has also had its power supply modified, rather than having an internal powercell, it has been linked to an external unit (worn on the belt but not visible) attached via a cable to the pommel. This modification may be to correct some previous malfunction or an attempt to over-power the weapon, although such a modification is likely to cause additional problems with the motor burning out. The weapon can be used one or two handed, although this Enforcer's chemically-enhanced strength means he can easily wield it single handed.

His back-up close combat weapons are a large hand-made knife or cleaver and his whip. The whip is more a tool of his trade and not generally used in battle, instead being used to drive undisciplined rabble into battle and to administer punishments beatings.

As a favoured Enforcer, Hakon would have a free choice of plundered weapons. He has chosen an Accatran pattern, Mk XI combat shotgun – highly effective at close quarters and within the confines of trench fighting. Similar shotguns are commonly issued to police and security units and are used by Imperial Navy personnel for boarding actions. This particular version has an eight round internal magazine and is operated using a pump-action. He has discarded the weapon's shoulder stock.

4. OTHER EQUIPMENT
The Enforcer carries an oxygen tank, much like that carried by all Vraksian renegades. He has a bandolier of extra shotgun ammunition and during an operation would also carry at least two fragmentation grenades.

This Enforcer is Hakon the Butcher, seen here assisting the defence of sector 59-47, where it is claimed he killed 29 enemy in three days of fighting. His current location is unknown.

VRAKSIAN RENEGADE WEAPONS

Examples taken from captured weapons

AUTOPISTOL

Length: 33 cm
Barrel: 17 cm
Weight: 1.6 kg
Calibre: 4.10
Feed: 30 round box
Cyclic rate of fire: 900 rpm
Muzzle velocity: 255 m/sec

The autopistol is a common weapon amongst renegades, gang members and lowly criminals, but not generally considered a military issue weapon. Like the larger autogun, it is easily produced and available in large numbers. This is a Voss pattern, Mk 11 model, probably manufactured on Vraks itself. Used for close quarters combat, the 'pistol' has a high rate of fire but only uses a small calibre round. It is lightweight, but lacks accuracy beyond the closest of ranges due to its low velocity when compared to larger weapons. The pistol's magazine holds 30 rounds. It has a folding skeletal stock, which is not often used as the increase in accuracy for aimed fire is not generally required and the only sight is a small iron sight. The weapon can be used single handed in conjunction with a close combat weapon. This model has a flash suppressor and a moulded fore-grip.

MODIFIED AUTOPISTOL

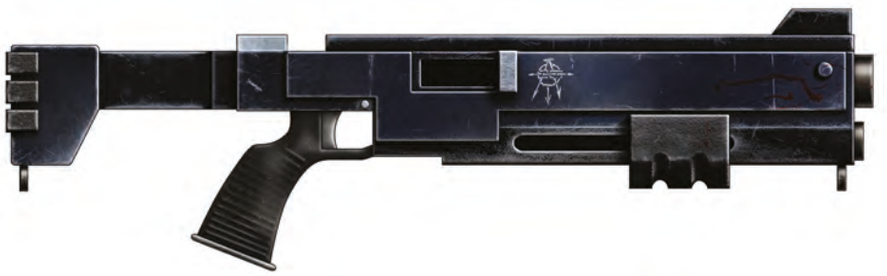
This Voss pattern Mk 10 autopistol has been heavily modified for night-fighting and tunnel-fighting. Removing the original flash suppressor, it has had a home-made silencer fitted. It also has a wrist loop added and has been blackened for camouflage by heating the metal and tempering it in oil. This weapon was captured during tunnel fighting and provides a good example of the sort of battlefield modifications made to weapons for specific conditions.

AUTOGUN

Length: 109 cm
Barrel: 54 cm
Weight: 6.2 kg
Calibre: long 8.25
Feed: 20 or 30 round box
Cyclic rate of fire: 625 rpm
Muzzle velocity: 820 m/sec

This is an Agripinaa pattern type II autogun. Autoguns are not as common as the lasgun amongst Imperial Guard regiments, but they are still issued in substantial numbers, especially by second or third line planetary defence forces or militias. There are many different patterns and models of autogun produced across the Imperium. The simple technology needed to manufacture autoguns make them common on frontier worlds and also with gang members on hive worlds.

Not as reliable as lasguns and generally heavier and less accurate, autoguns usually have a high rate of fire, although the oversized round fired gives this model an excessive recoil and muzzle flash, but also good stopping power. The barrel has had a counter-weight added to try to compensate for the weapon's tendency to rise off-target during automatic fire. It can fire a single shot, a three round burst or on fully automatic.



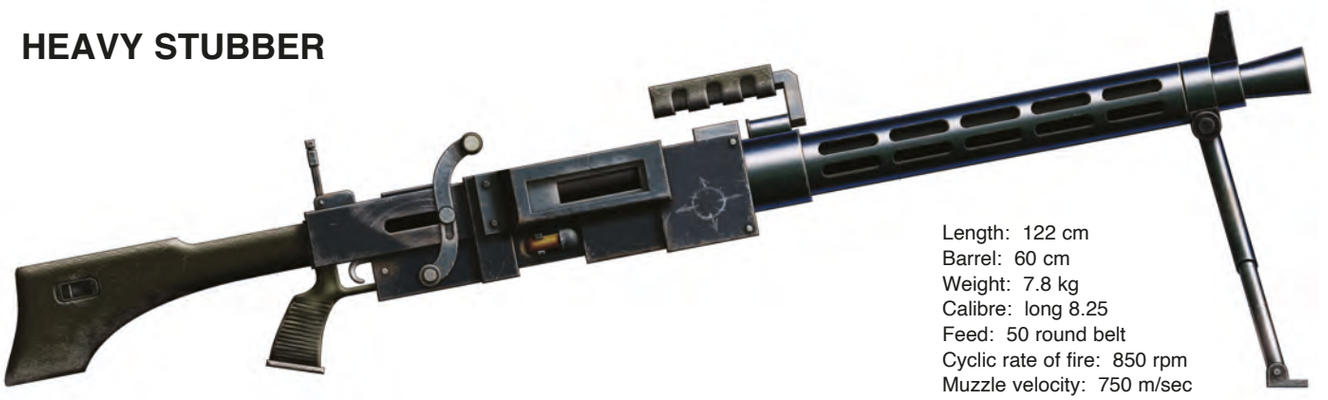
COMBAT SHOTGUN

Length: 92 cm
Barrel: 40 cm
Weight: 5.6 kg
Calibre: 12
Feed: 8 round tubular magazine.
Cyclic rate of fire: n/a
Muzzle velocity: 500 m/sec - approx

This is an Accatran pattern, Mk XI combat shotgun, highly effective at close quarters, for room clearance and during trench fighting. Similar shotguns are commonly issued to police and security units for anti-riot duties and are used by Imperial Navy personnel for boarding actions. This particular version of the many shotguns available throughout the Imperium has an eight round internal magazine and uses a manual pump action to fire a single shot then re-cock the weapon. It can fire a variety of ammunition, including non-lethal plastic baton rounds, solid slugs and pellet-filled cannister rounds.

The stock is removable and at close quarters many users prefer to discard it, shortening the weapon for extra manoeuvrability. The pistol grip allows the weapon to be fired single handed, although this makes it wildly inaccurate and requires a very strong firer.

HEAVY STUBBER



Length: 122 cm
Barrel: 60 cm
Weight: 7.8 kg
Calibre: long 8.25
Feed: 50 round belt
Cyclic rate of fire: 850 rpm
Muzzle velocity: 750 m/sec

This heavy stubber is of an unknown pattern and make, and again was probably manufactured on Vraks itself as a stop-gap measure, utilising other weapon parts. Heavy stubber is the name given to a a range of heavy-barrelled autoguns used for sustained fire. Like autoguns they are easily manufactured and maintained and commonly used by Imperial Guard forces across the Imperium. As stubbers they have the characteristic over-sized round, making them inaccurate over longer ranges, but their belt feed and high rates of fire make up for this short coming.

Due to their size and weight, most heavy stubbers include a bipod and are fired from a prone position. Others are mounted on a vehicle's pintle-mount. This weapon has been fitted with a backsight and foresight for aimed fire, a carrying handle and a perforated outer barrel casing to aid cooling.

Length: 26 cm
Barrel: 17 cm
Weight: 2.2 kg
Calibre: short 6.2mm
Feed: 6 round magazine
Cyclic rate of fire: n/a
Muzzle velocity: 220m/sec

STUB GUN

This is an unknown pattern of stub gun, a name which refers to a wide variety of low-velocity, high-calibre pistols common amongst hive gangs and other criminals. These weapons are generally locally manufactured or jury-rigged from the parts of other weapons. This particular version displays a superior finish to most, and was probably manufactured on Vraks itself. Infamous for their poor accuracy and unreliability, stub guns are not generally considered for military service but are sometimes carried as a secondary weapon.

MALCADOR

The Malcador is a venerable tank design, thought by many to predate the Leman Russ, but today is not widely used by Imperial forces, or even indeed, widely known about. In many regions of the Imperium, the Malcador has long since passed out of service entirely (or perhaps has simply never been present) leaving some to erroneously believe it to be a heretical or local pattern of manufacture. For the large part those relatively few Malcadors that remain in Imperial service have been either relegated to strategic reserves, planetary defence arsenals and other 'second line' forces, or are maintained in active service by a few Imperial Guard regiments as a matter of tradition.

Very few forge worlds continue to provide new Malcador hulls or replacement parts (although there are exceptions to this such as M'Khand Secundus in the Segmentum Pacificus), and the exact origin and provenance of the Malcador's basic design is a matter of some confusion and mystery even within the Adeptus Mechanicus. It is commonly held though that the design itself is named for Malcador the Sigilite – himself a mysterious and shadowy figure and close confident of the Emperor during the Imperium's early history. This attribution itself, according to some theorists, holds the key to the design's origins; pointing to a possible link to the dangerous and uncertain times immediately after the Horus Heresy. During this age there was a great need for new war materiels – with so much having been lost during the great battles of the Warmaster's revolt, not least in terms of knowledge and production capacity. For example, it was during this period that the valuable Land Raider design was reserved for the exclusive use of the Adeptus Astartes and that designs like the Malcador may have been recovered or put into mass-production to fill the void. However, like much from those strife-torn years, the truth has long since been lost to obscurity and myth.

The Malcador and its Variants

Although intended to fill the main battle tank role, the basic Malcador design is somewhat larger and heavier than the more familiar Leman Russ. The tank itself gains considerable durability from its bulk and its heavy layers of armour plating, and it is well-armed with a battle cannon mounted in a limited-traverse turret embrasure, supplemented by a hull and two additional sponson heavy weapons mounts capable of bearing either heavy stubbers, heavy bolters, lascannon or autocannon. The tank's design does have some limitations, particularly in comparison with the smaller but more versatile Leman Russ. The first is that of limited arcs of fire; the overall shape of the tank's hull with its heavy plating and re-enforced weapons mounts serves to reduce the traversing range of its sponson and hull weapons, while its immobile main turret can also prove a liability in a chaotic engagement where lines of battle become interpenetrated and enemy armour or infantry can exploit these vulnerabilities. Experienced commanders can overcome these problems by combining other armour variants and infantry support alongside their Malcador squadrons, however the tank's second known flaw – the vulnerability of its engine is not so easy to overcome.

The Malcador's main engine plant, a perfectly serviceable thermic combustor design (a variant of a common pattern used in various industrial and agricultural heavy machinery) is unfortunately somewhat underpowered in relation to the Malcador's size and mass. This reduces its overall performance and makes for very poor fuel efficiency. This problem in particular has persistently plagued the Malcador and its variants, and perhaps more than any other factor has relegated what is otherwise a very well-armed and durable war machine to 'secondary' status.

Much like the far more common Leman Russ, the Malcador has had numerous hull variants designed over its service history, created either to fulfil some specific battlefield role or in an attempt to overcome a particular shortcoming. These variants have included siege weapons platforms, self-propelled guns and other specialised vehicles but these are somewhat of a rarity, with the two most commonly encountered variants on the basic battle tank pattern being an 'Annihilator' tank hunter pattern and the 'Defender' breakthrough tank.

The Malcador Annihilator replaces the tank's usual limited-traverse battle cannon with a twin-linked lascannon, and its forward hull mount with a demolisher cannon. Thought to have been a field modification carried out on battle-damaged or incomplete hulls, and originally an attempt to 'up-gun' the tank and extend its battlefield use, the Malcador Annihilator's detractors maintain that the design falls somewhat between two roles, accomplishing neither with particular ability. The tank is simply too slow and too large to serve as a true 'tank hunter', while the Annihilator isn't actually large enough or formidably enough armed (a problem made worse by its limited supply of shells for its demolisher cannon) to be matched against a true super-heavy such as a Baneblade in open battle. Against other conventional armour however, particularly when supported as part of a wider attacking force, the Malcador Annihilator can still prove its worth in the hands of a skilled crew.

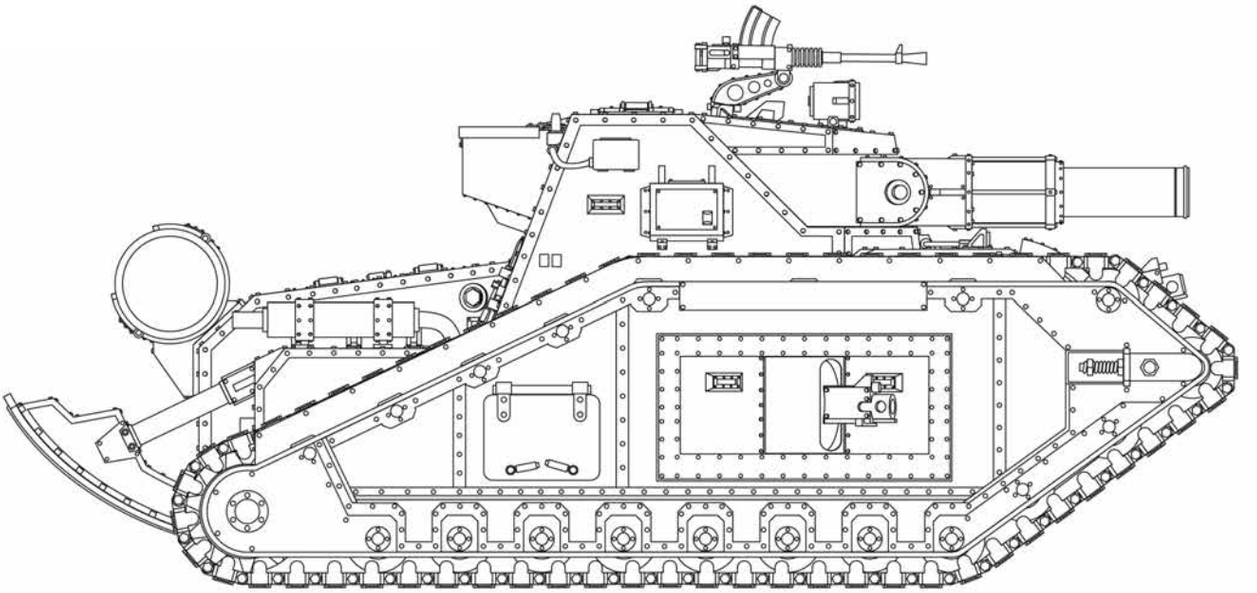
The Malcador Defender is perhaps the most unusual and arguably most effective of the Malcador sub-types, and despite being a variant on the basic chassis is more common in many armouries than the standard heavy battle tank on which it is based. As with the Annihilator, the hull weapon mount is replaced by a demolisher cannon, however the upper turret embrasure is heavily modified to mount five separate heavy bolters angled to give the tank all-round fire coverage. This in essence shifts the tank's battlefield role to that of a mobile fortress, referred to as a breakthrough tank; ably suited to close-quarters fighting, trench warfare and urban engagements. In this role its demolisher cannon can be brought into play against fortified positions and enemy strongpoints, while its multiple heavy bolters can be used to sweep areas for concealed infantry and defend the tank from close assault. Although the Defender is extremely cramped (fitting a large crew of eight into its tightly packed and sweltering hull) and as prone to engine difficulties as other Malcador variants, its battlefield role means it seldom operates far from support or resupply, which has a tendency to mitigate the design's failings, while its considerable firepower and heavy protection make it a powerful asset both in attack and defence.

On Vraks

During the Siege of Vraks, after the renegade Cardinal Xaphan had led the planet's defence forces into rebellious succession from the Imperium and its eventual slide into the worship of Chaos, the Malcador saw extensive service with the renegade forces. Xaphan had chosen his bastion of malcontent well; Vraks was a massive storehouse of arms stockpiled over the centuries, and mothballed among them were a large quantity of Malcadors and its variants, as well as considerable stores of spares for the tank. Although not much seen in the conflict's early stages, (probably passed over for more familiar and reliable war machines), the Malcador saw an increasingly prominent role in the fighting as the war ground on. Malcadors were used by the renegades both to anchor their defensive lines and to spearhead brutal, and often suicidal, counter-attacks into the besieging Krieg lines.

In particular, the Malcador Defender was a particularly valued weapon against the Krieg regiments, who favoured mass-infantry attack as a chosen strategy. The Defender's multiple heavy bolters could be used to wreak havoc on the attack waves, particularly if they could counter-attack into the body of the Krieg assault, lashing all around them with raking fire, although this was a particularly dangerous and desperate tactic for the tank and crew. This tactic did however prove successful on several occasions particularly as the war progressed and the Vraksian renegades began to devolve further into brute savagery and fanaticism as the lure of Chaos began to take a firm hold on them. Indeed the grip of corruption on the renegades became increasingly evident as the war continued and their Malcadors and other war machines became adorned with the malign iconography and symbols of the Ruinous Powers, eventually sporting bloody trophy racks and other macabre decorations in imitation of the Chaos Legion warbands drawn into the spiralling war.

Malcador



DVLA 6724930

ADEPTUS MECHANICUS DEPARTMENTO MANUFACTURUM

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Vehicle Designation 8677-032-8391-ML021

Vehicle Name MALCADOR

Forge World of Origin M'KHAND

Known Patterns I-XIII

Crew DRIVER, COMMANDER, 4 x GUNNERs, LOADER

Powerplant HL330 V12 MULTI-FUEL

Weight 105 TONNES

Length 9.6 M

Width 4.4 M

Height 3.9 M

Ground Clearance .65 M

Max Speed - On Road 25 KPH

Max Speed - Off Road 18 KPH

Main Armament BATTLE CANNON

Secondary Armament 3 X HEAVY BOLTERS

Traverse 60°

Elevation -2° TO +20°

Main Ammunition 32 ROUNDS

Secondary Ammunition 7,500 ROUNDS

Armour

Turret N/A

Superstructure 180 MM

Hull 160 MM

Gun Mantlet NA

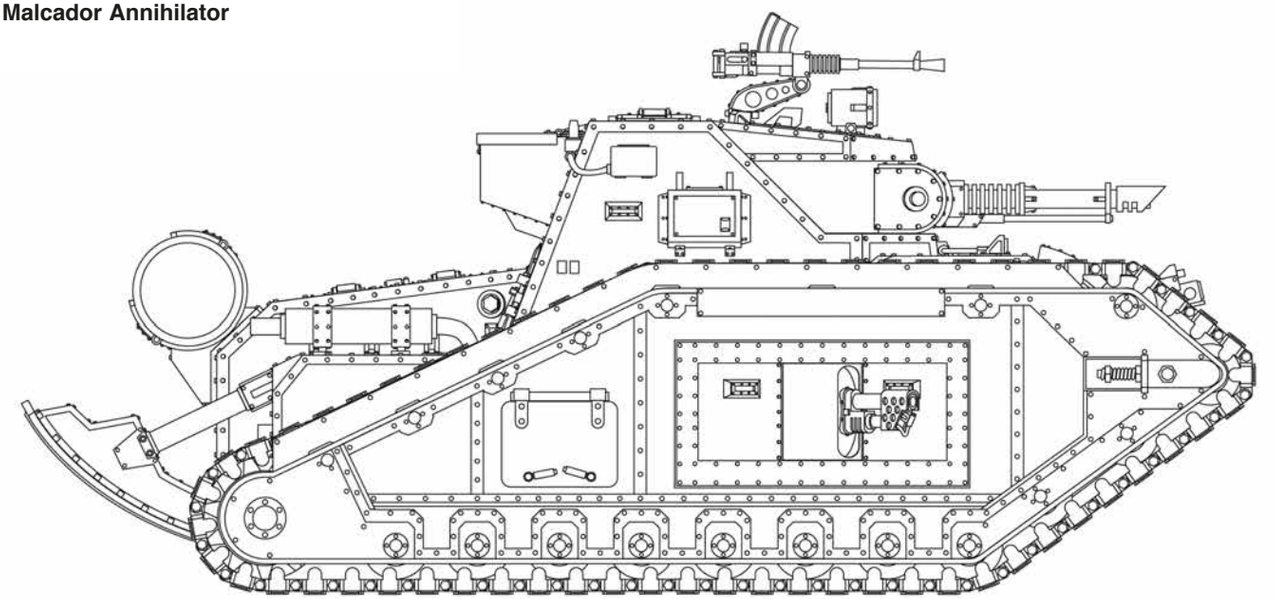
Date 185014.M38

signature

Magos Fabricator

Dominus Ex Machina

Malcador Annihilator



DVLA 6724930

ADEPTUS MECHANICUS DEPARTMENTO MANUFACTURUM

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Vehicle Designation 8677-032-8391-ML028

Vehicle Name MALCADOR ANNIHILATOR

Forge World of Origin M'KHAND

Known Patterns I-VII

Crew DRIVER, COMMANDER, 4 x GUNNERs, LOADER

Powerplant HL330 V12 MULTI-FUEL

Weight 99 TONNES

Length 9.6 M

Width 4.4 M

Height 3.9 M

Ground Clearance .65 M

Max Speed - On Road 25 KPH

Max Speed - Off Road 18 KPH

Main Armament TWIN-LINKED LASCANNONS

Secondary Armament HEAVY BOLTER, 2 X HEAVY FLAMERS

Traverse 60°

Elevation -2° TO +20°

Main Ammunition UNLIMITED

Secondary Ammunition 2,500 ROUNDS

Armour

Turret N/A

Superstructure 180 MM

Hull 160 MM

Gun Mantlet NA

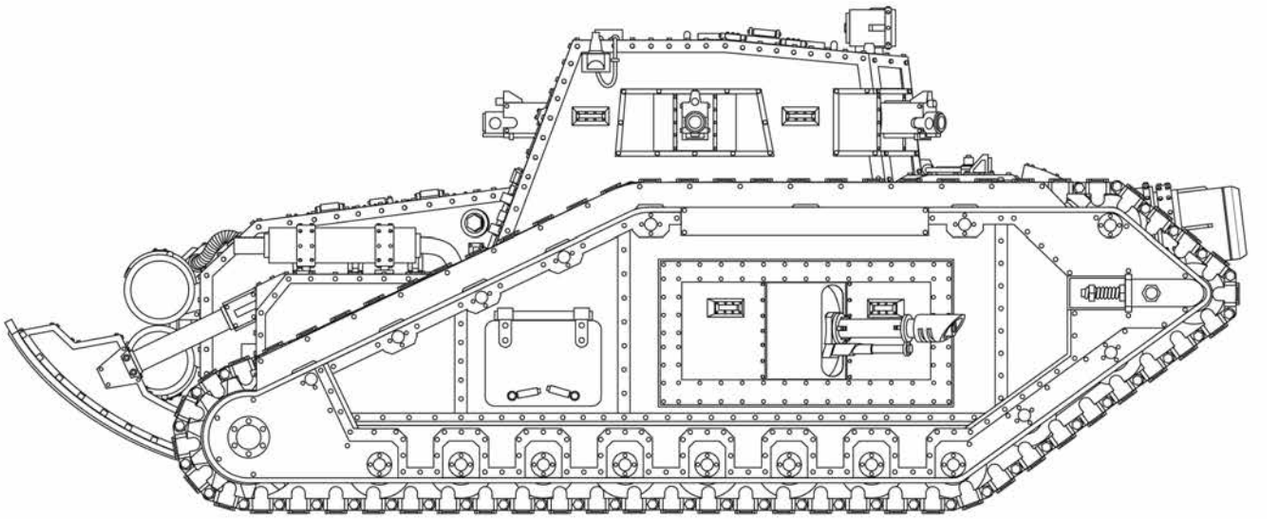
Date 190014.M38

signature

Magos Fabricator

Dominus Ex Machina

Malcador Defender



DVLA/674930

ADEPTUS MECHANICUS DEPARTMENTO MANUFACTURUM

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Vehicle Designation 8677-032-8391-ML036

Vehicle Name MALCADOR DEFENDER

Forge World of Origin M'KHAND

Known Patterns I-IX

Crew DRIVER, COMMANDER, 4 x GUNNERs, LOADER

Powerplant HL330 V12 MULTI-FUEL

Weight 106 TONNES

Length 9.6 M

Width 4.4 M

Height 3.9 M

Ground Clearance .65 M

Max Speed - On Road 25 KPH

Max Speed - Off Road 18 KPH

Main Armament DEMOLISHER CANNON

Secondary Armament 5 X HEAVY BOLTERS, 2 X LASCANNONS

Traverse 5°

Elevation -0° TO +46°

Main Ammunition 18 ROUNDS

Secondary Ammunition 7,500 ROUNDS

Armour

Turret N/A

Superstructure 180 MM

Hull 160 MM

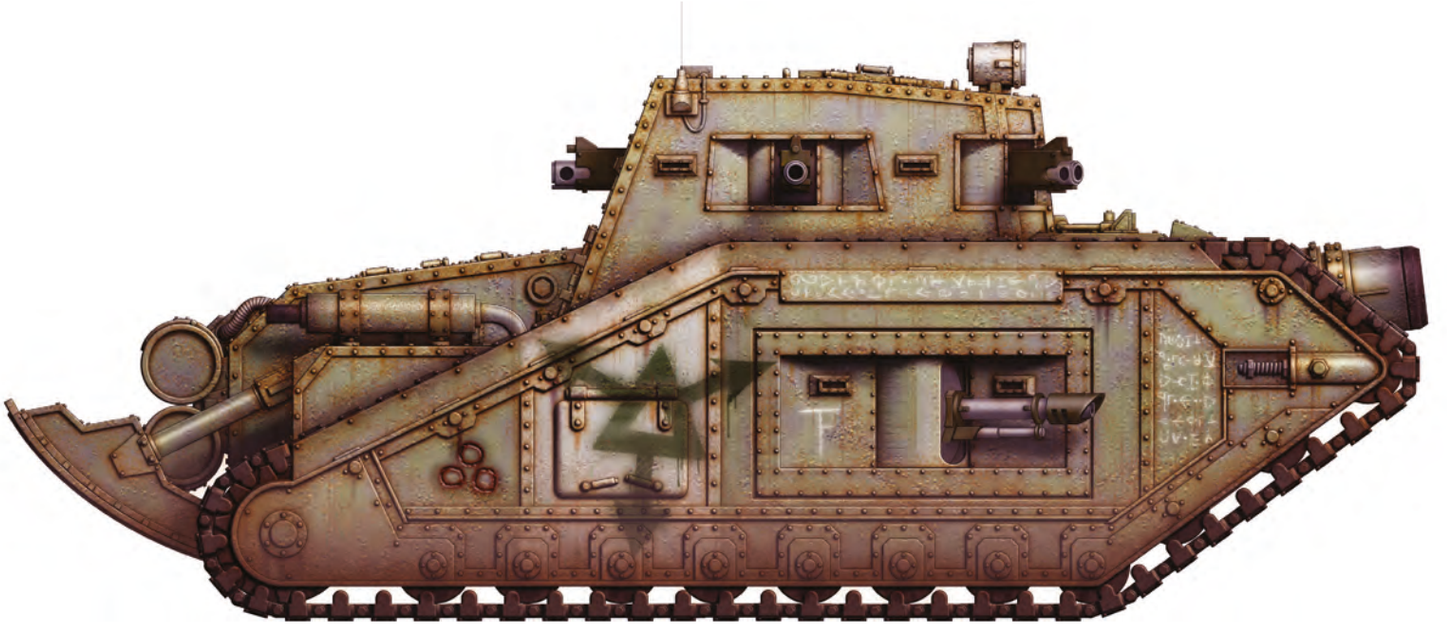
Gun Mantlet NA

Date 201014.M38

signature

Magos Fabricator

Dominus Ex Machina



DREADCLAW
ASSAULT POD

Known to the whispered legends of the Imperial Navy as "the Touch of Death", the talon-like shape of the Dreadclaw assault boat is a feared one. A technologically superior boarding craft that doubles as both a drop pod and assault boat, the Dreadclaw has served the Chaos Legions since the Horus Heresy, while the malevolent machine-intelligences that control them were infamous long before the Warmaster's betrayal.

The Dreadclaw class assault boat is recorded in the Balthus Apocrypha as one of the last combat craft to be rolled out into the service of the Space Marine Legions before the Horus Heresy began. The Apocrypha states that its deployment was a troubled one and not universally accepted, and the forge world of its origin has since been wiped from the records.

The sophisticated Dreadclaw design was without doubt the most advanced assault craft in Imperial service, capable of serving both as a planetary assault vehicle and as a boarding craft to forcibly breach the hulls of enemy vessels in space battles. The design's crowning glory was its automated control system; a highly advanced machine spirit thought to be of a higher order of magnitude than those found in the ancient Land Raider.

The powers of self-awareness the Dreadclaw possessed were a source of contention and controversy from its first deployment, Matters only worsened over time. Such was the ill-feeling the Dreadclaw created, that superstitious rumours soon spread that the machine spirits of the Dreadclaw were somehow corrupted.

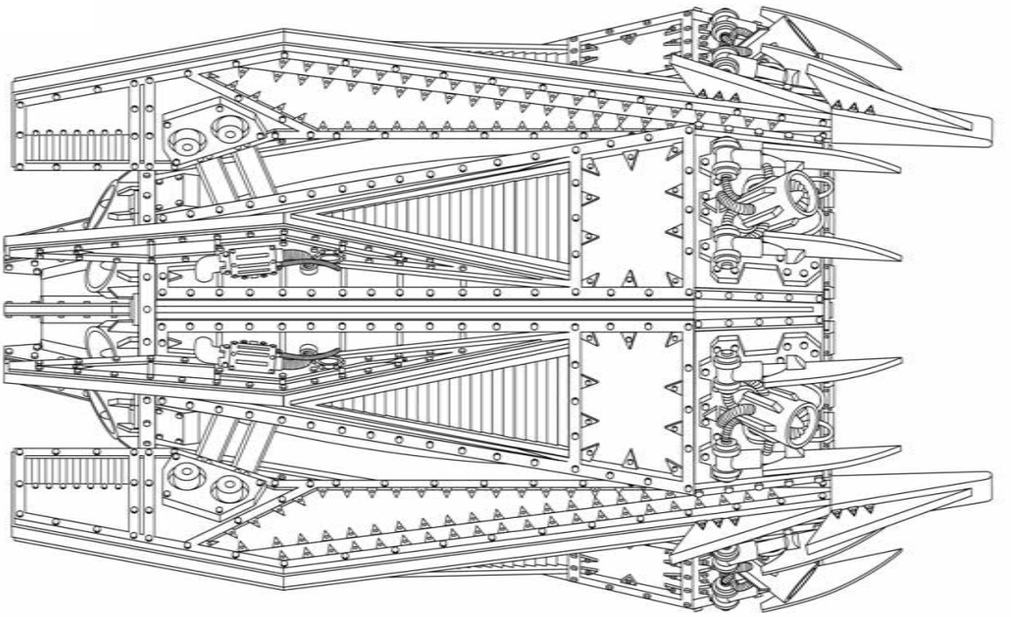
During the Heresy itself, it seems that malign incidents involving the Dreadclaw reached almost epidemic levels. After a particularly devastating incident aboard the battleship *Legate Peracles* during the vital Battle of Terra, there was no more room for argument and loyalist Magos presided over the ritual decommissioning of all Dreadclaws in Imperial service. Since that day, the Dreadclaw has only been evident in Traitor hands.

The Dreadclaw's advanced design incorporates a powerful thruster array that allows it to close rapidly with its selected target as an assault boat, or undertake a fully guided and powered decent to a planetary surface.

The Dreadclaw's armoured hull is surrounded by a number of primary and secondary grappling claws which give the vehicle its distinctive profile and enable it to securely latch onto the hulls of enemy ships. Once attached, the Dreadclaw breaches its target by burning through its hull with a ring of powerful melta-cutters, effecting entry via an airtight iris-hatch for the troops inside. When used as a more conventional drop pod, the claws serve a different function, deploying after landing to right the Dreadclaw and raise its bulk off the ground in order to rapidly deploy its passengers without exposing the vehicle's vulnerable interior to enemy fire.

Unlike more primitive drop craft, the Dreadclaw is capable of taking off again after landing, and, although less manoeuvrable in a planet's atmosphere than a purpose-designed aircraft, it can be used to effect re-deployment in the field as well as performing rapid extractions to planetary orbit; a vital advantage given the raiding activities of many Chaos warbands.

Dreadclaw assault pod



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DA4 : 73 : 04A

ORDO XENOS

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NOT FOR ARCHIVING

Date : 1221.062.M40

Signature :

Serial Number : 2109-044-8657-DP 010
Designation : ASSAULT POD
Vehicle Codename : DREADCLAW
Vehicle Type : DROP POD - PERSONNEL
Crew : NONE. AUTOMATED
Weight : 21 TONNES
Length : N/A
Width : 5.7 M
Height : 9.2 M
Max Recorded Speed : 12,000 KPH DESCENT

Main Armament : NONE
Secondary Armament : NONE
Traverse : N/A
Elevation : N/A
Ammunition : N/A
Armour Type : 60 MM

CLASSIFIED

Summary :

HELL TALON

The Hell Talon is another product of the malevolent masters of the damned forge world of Xana in the Eye of Terror. A thing of daemon-infused machinery, the Hell Talon was created to deal death from the skies. It is a strike aircraft, used to conduct lighting low-altitude attacks against ground targets, utilising its heavy armament to deal with enemy tanks and its payload of incendiary bombs to rip a swath of fire across the battlefield while the daemonic forces that power it corrupt the very air they fly through.

Much like the Hell Blade, the diabolic arts of the Hell Talon's construction are said to be the Dark Priesthood's alone, but it has seen service in increasing numbers with an ever widening group of Chaos Legions and renegade forces over the last millennia, as its makers are content to supply their devices of destruction to any that will meet their bloody price. The Hell Talon is known to be highly sought after, and no wonder for it is a singularly deadly machine, and a powerful addition to the Chaos forces, valued both for its power and the terror that it inspires.

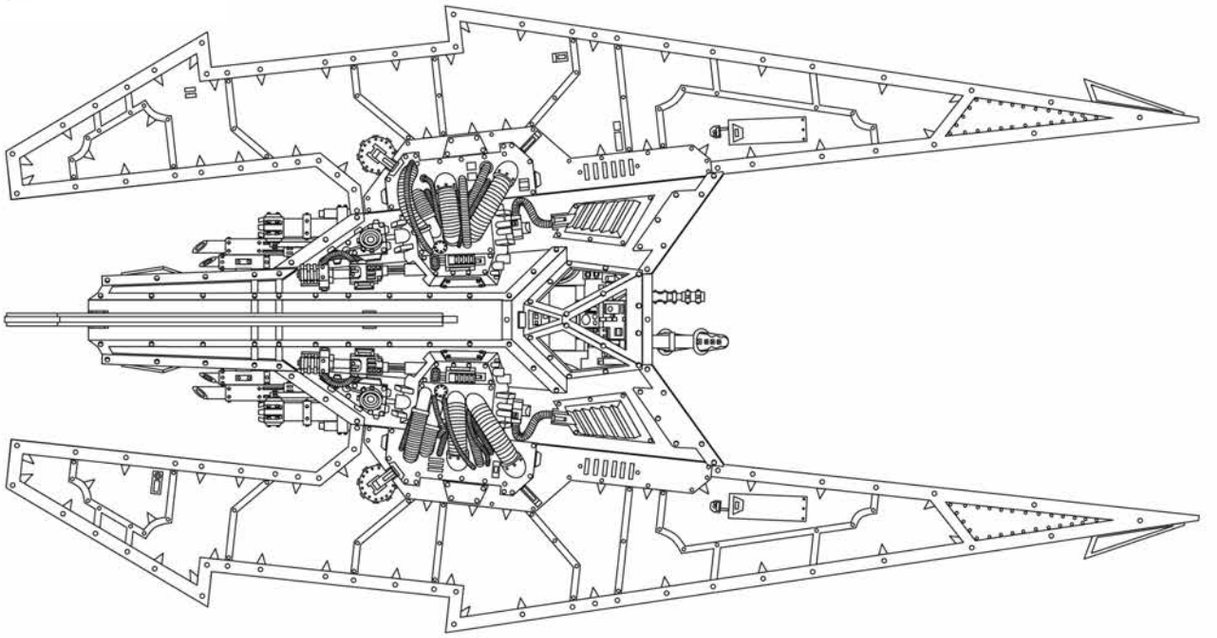
The Hell Talon's power has been proven in many war zones from the killing fields of the Sherilax Uprising to the plague-bombing of the paradise world of Eurydice by aircraft linked to the Blighted Ones during their raid on the Ixaniad Sector. Often small groups of Hell Talons attached to independent warbands such as those drawn into the spiralling conflict of the Siege of Vraks have proved effective in turning the tide of battles far out of proportion to their number.

Clearly a design which has much in common with others of the Xana II lineage, the Hell Talon presents a low, blade-like wing profile, and is propelled by a powerful thruster array, granting it observed speeds well in excess of 2200 kph in a standard atmosphere, with a manoeuvrability that far exceeds any comparable Imperial design at these speeds. The Hell Talon's effectiveness in its fighter-bomber role is also greatly enhanced by its advanced flight systems and the peculiarities of its arcane design which enable it to excel at conducting strafing runs and ground attacks at both great speed and very low altitude, handling turns and extreme manoeuvres far beyond the physical limitations of human pilots.

Its standard armament is comprised of two lascannons and an autocannon of heretical design for direct attack, supplemented with an under-slung munition rack carrying up to eight bombs. The usual payloads for the Hell Talon are firebombs utilising an unknown and extremely toxic incendiary mix. These firebombs burn with extreme heat and also produce a lethal vapour cloud capable of causing respiratory failure and death if inhaled. The Hell Talon's armament varies to include cluster munitions, rapid-fire unguided rockets and more exotic weapons such as radiological and viral bombs.

Within the Ordo Malleus it is believed that the these machines are fashioned with such dark arts as to become more than mere weapons, but to be a sufficient aberration in the natural order as to be considered truly daemonic. In the most extreme cases, the simple presence of large numbers of Hell Talons gathered together has been observed to create severe and unpredictable Warp phenomena. Disturbances caused in the wake of a Hell Talon squadron's passage manifest most often as climatic disturbances and unnatural storms, although severe vox-distortion, and visual and auditory hallucinations are not unknown. Such is the baleful taint of these blood-forged aircraft that their presence literally darkens the skies as if the very air around them recoils at their touch.

Hell Talon



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DA4 : 73 : 04A

ORDO XENOS

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NOT FOR ARCHIVING

Date : 2665671.M40

Signature :

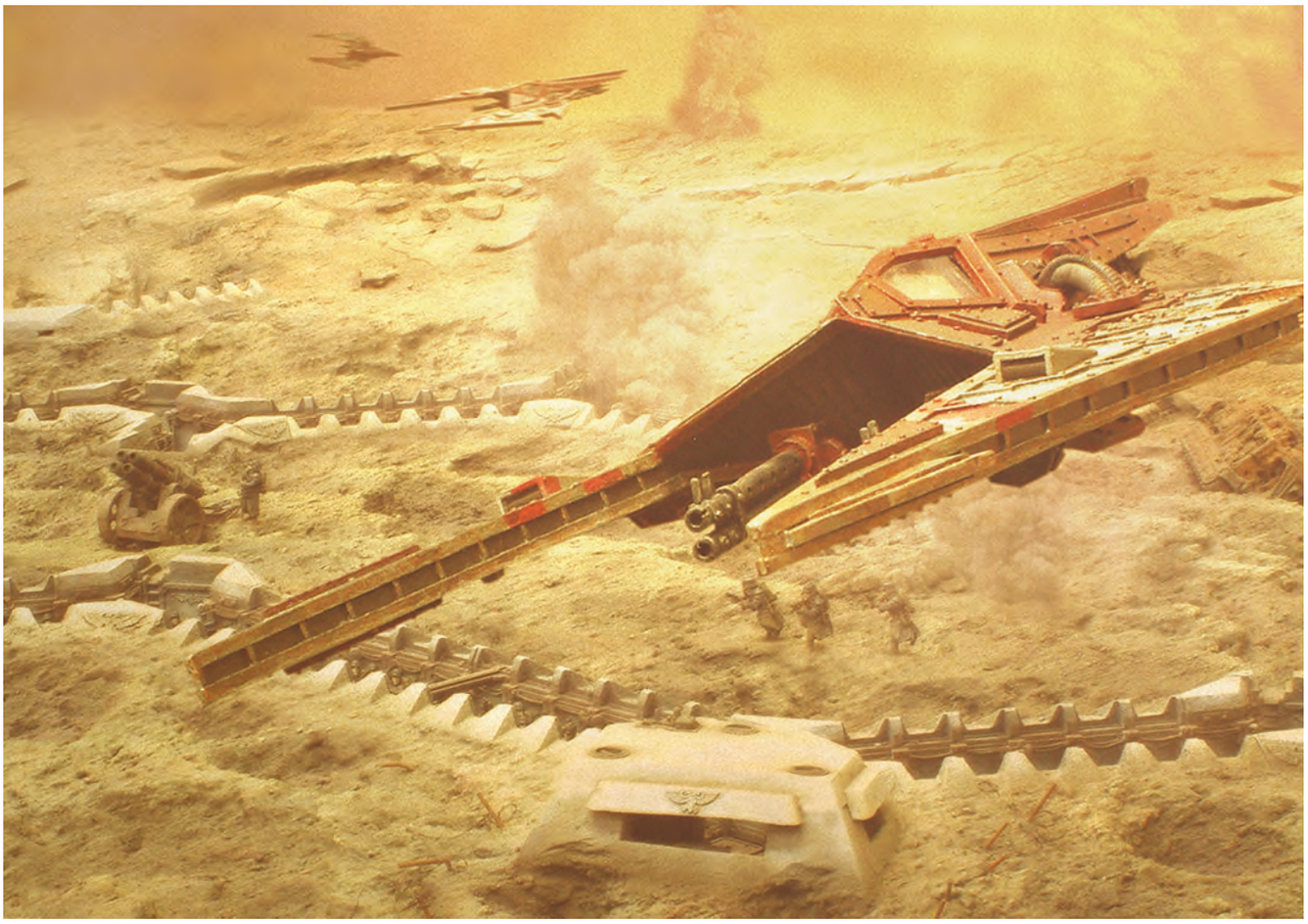
Serial Number : 86754-672393
Designation : HEAVY FIGHTER
Vehicle Codename : HELL TALON
Vehicle Type : AIRCRAFT
Crew : 3. PILOT. GUNNER. COMMANDER
Weight : 17 TONNES (EMPTY)
Length : 20.3 M
Width : 10.4 M
Height : 3 M
Max Recorded Speed : 2350 KPH

Main Armament : 2 LASCANNONS
Secondary Armament : 1 AUTOCANNON
8 INCENDIARY BOMBS
Traverse : 0°
Elevation : +0° TO -0°
Ammunition : UNKNOWN
Armour Type : UNKNOWN

CLASSIFIED

Summary : INFORMATION RESTRICTED BY ORDER OF THE ORDO MALLEUS.
ALL ARCHIVES TO BE PURGED.

HELL BLADE



The Hell Blade is a blasphemous fusion of advanced technology, daemonic forces and the nightmarish invention of machine-minds long fallen to the corruption of Chaos. Supremely fast and agile, the Hell Blade is designed to swiftly achieve air superiority for Chaos raiding forces and sweep enemy aircraft from the skies, clearing the way for heavier aircraft to pound ground defences and the Chaos Space Marine onslaught to begin.

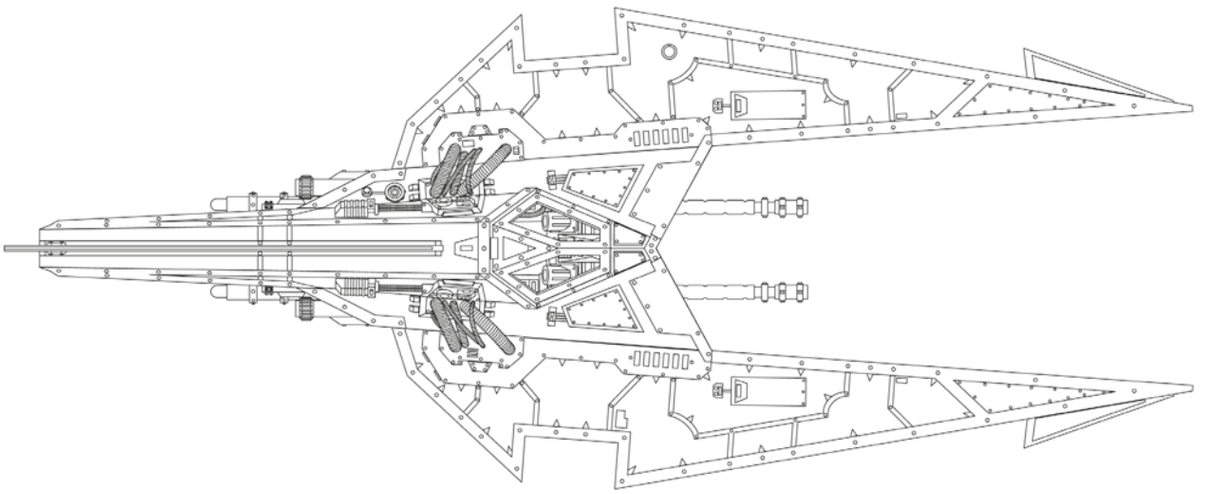
A devilish device that fuses daemon, flesh and metal into a single murderous machine, its slim double-bladed shape cuts through the air, emitting hideous shrieks and wails as it swoops down on its victims, and flown with reckless abandon by a hardwired living servitor whose only pleasure is the kill.

Although many strange and bizarre aerial war machines have been encountered in service with the Traitor Legions and renegades over the millennia, and in turn these are dwarfed in number by the many corrupted or copied Imperial designs encountered, in the last centuries of the 41st millennia, a lineage of new and terrifying war planes has risen to prominence, and among them the Hell Blade, Hell Talon and Harbinger.

Secret reports for the Departmento Munitorum, based upon investigations by the Ordo Malleus, have tentatively named the home of this new source of heretic war machines as the hellish forge world of Xana II, deep within the Eye of Terror. Said to be a stronghold of the Dark Mechanicus (known sometimes as the Dark Priesthood or the Hellsmiths), Xana is believed to be a world wholly given over to daemon-machines and infernal industries, where mills grind flesh and suffering to make the insane visions of its nightmarish masters real, and countless millions are enslaved to work in a world-spanning network of labyrinthine forges, churning out an endless supply of weapons and armaments for the Traitor Legion's Long War. The masters of Xana, half-daemon machines themselves (so it is said), have long since left the shreds of their humanity behind and are beholden to none – be they mortal or Chaos god. They sell or barter their unholy inventions and arms to the highest bidder, be they warlord, demagogue, sorcerer or Daemon Prince without favour, and their coin of exchange is always the same, raw materials, the flesh and souls of slaves to feed Xana's endless hunger.

The Imperium remains in ignorance of much of the technology and design that has gone into the creation of the Hell Blade and the other aircraft of the dreaded Xana II lineage. This is in no small part from the frequent spectacular immolation and disintegration the aircraft undergoes when destroyed – a factor that some attribute to the escape of warp forces from their bindings. From observation and telemetric recordings however, the Hell Blade can reach observed speeds of over 2800kph in a standard atmosphere, with a cruising speed of perhaps two-thirds this amount.

Hell Blade



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DA4 : 73 : 04A

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NOT FOR ARCHIVING

Date : 2667671.M40

Signature :

Serial Number : 86754-672448
Designation : AIR SUPERIORITY FIGHTER
Vehicle Codename : HELL BLADE
Vehicle Type : AIRCRAFT
Crew : 1. PILOT.
Weight : 3.5 TONNES (EMPTY)
Length : 13.8 M
Width : 5.6 M
Height : 1.65 M
Max Recorded Speed : 2800 KPH

Main Armament : 4 AUTOCANNONS
Secondary Armament : NONE
Traverse : 0°
Elevation : +0° TO -0°
Ammunition : UNKNOWN
Armour Type : UNKNOWN

Summary : INFORMATION RESTRICTED BY ORDER OF THE ORDO MALLEUS.
ALL ARCHIVES TO BE PURGED.

CHAOS DREADNOUGHT

Encountered at the very forefront of battle, Chaos Dreadnoughts are giant, armoured walkers, terrifying living machines that stride the battlefield, bellowing war-cries and dealing death alongside the rank and file of the Chaos Legion.

The Dreadnoughts of the loyal Space Marine Chapters are revered 'ancients', living shrines to the Chapter's glory, and repositories of valour and wisdom. But while the venerated Space Marine Dreadnoughts house the mortal remains of the Chapter's fallen heroes, the Dreadnoughts of the Traitor Legions are hideous and cruel mockeries of this lofty ideal. To be encased alive within the nightmarish shell of a Chaos Dreadnought is a curse, not a blessing. It is the price of failure; to undergo an agonising enslavement in which the victim must endure an endless living death, never again to know the pleasures of flesh or accession to the ranks of a dark god's chosen. It is to be trapped in limbo, neither flesh nor daemon.

The origins of Dreadnought technology, such as its sophisticated life-support sarcophagus, compact, high-yield thermic reactor and powerful exoskeleton frame, remains lost to antiquity. What is evident however is that there have been numerous variants and models that follow the basic Dreadnought design over the millennia. At the time of the Horus Heresy, it seems that Mk IV Dreadnoughts were common, and most Chaos Dreadnoughts are of this type, which in turn has lead many to suspect that there was (and still is) some flaw in the machine spirit of the Mk IV that leaves it open to corruption.

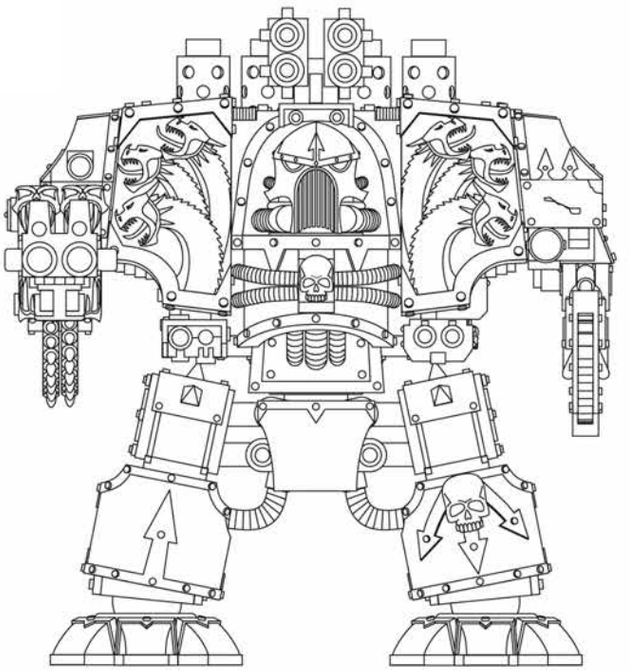
It is not known when in the case of the Traitor Legions internment within a Dreadnought became a punishment rather than an honour, although some speculate it has as much to do with callous disregard and a failing understanding of the technologies involved in these ancient war machines, as much as the malignancy to which they had succumbed.

Regardless of the truth of this, the Chaos Legions have always employed their Dreadnoughts as shock troops, unleashed often without care whether they survive or not by their commanders, just so long as they kill and sow terror in the enemy ranks. The tortured souls within are driven into insanity by the horrors of their existence and are always happy to oblige. Such is the shredded psyche of a Dreadnought occupant that it will frequently succumb to mindless homicidal frenzy, and their heedless rampages and wild, blazing storms of fire can prove as dangerous to their own side as to the enemy.

Perhaps the greatest battlefield asset the Dreadnought template has is the flexibility and variety of weapons. They can potentially be armed for any battlefield role, and their armament commonly includes twin-lascannon or autocannon, as well as twin-heavy bolters for infantry suppression and rarer weapons such as the plasma cannon and the multi-melta for more specialised missions.

A Traitor force's specialisation may also be evident in a Dreadnought's chosen armament, with some geared purely for close combat and equipped with twin chainfists or similar murderous devices – such as are often favoured by the Berserkers of the World Eater's Legion, or a predilection for unique and arcane sonic assault weaponry in the Dreadnoughts of the Emperor's Children and their successors. Perhaps the most singular and disturbing Chaos Dreadnoughts belong however to the Death Guard Legion. These monstrous creations are alive with organic corruption, their hulls blistered with oozing sores and weeping, filth encrusted wounds and other stigmata of the Plague God Nurgle. What living nightmare is experienced by the occupant of such a vile and horrific machine is best left unimagined.

Dreadnought – Alpha Legion



DVLA 6724930

ADEPTUS MECHANICUS DEPARTMENTO MANUFACTURUM

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Vehicle Designation 8681-756-0115-DR 041

Vehicle Name DREADNOUGHT

Forge World of Origin INCALADION

Known Patterns I-V

Crew PILOT

Powerplant XD503 V12 P6 TWIN-COUPLED MULTI-FUEL

Weight 11 TONNES

Length 2.2 M

Width 3.4 M

Height 3.7 M

Ground Clearance N/A M

Max Speed - On Road 8 KPH

Max Speed - Off Road 5 KPH

Main Armament TWIN-LINKED HEAVY BOLTER

Secondary Armament STORM BOLTER

Traverse 360°

Elevation -90° TO +90°

Main Ammunition 2,000 ROUNDS

Secondary Ammunition 1,000 ROUNDS

Armour

Turret NA

Superstructure 75 MM

Hull 75 MM

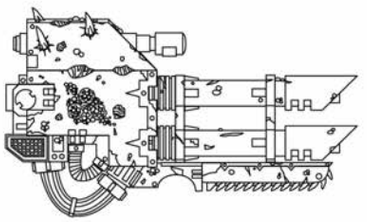
Gun Mantlet NA

Date 1224056.M40

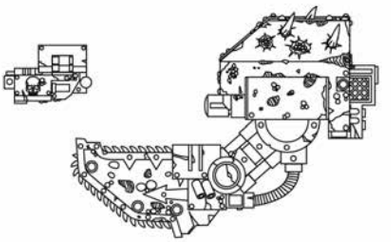
signature

Magos Fabricator

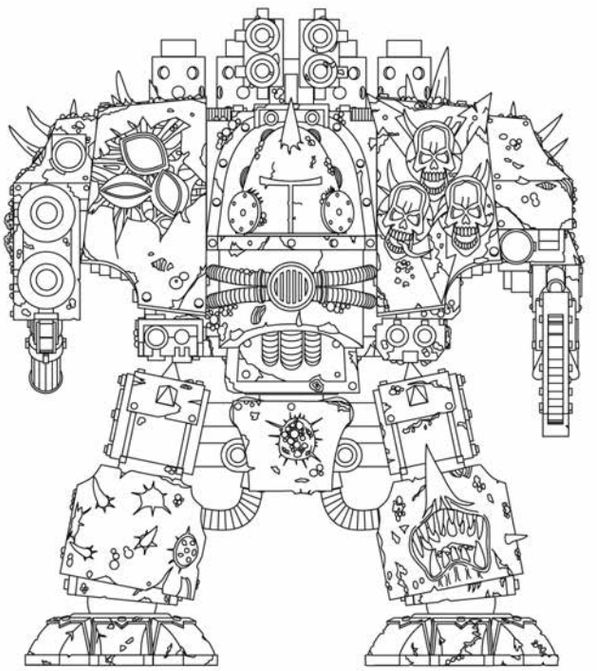
Dominus Ex Machina



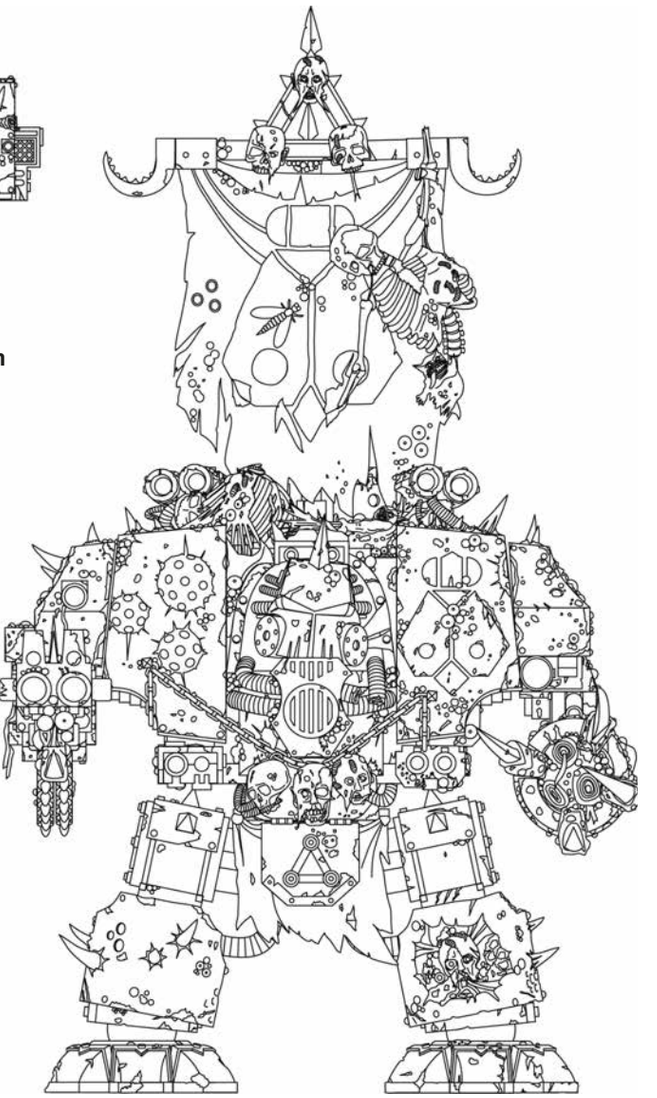
Twin-linked lascannons



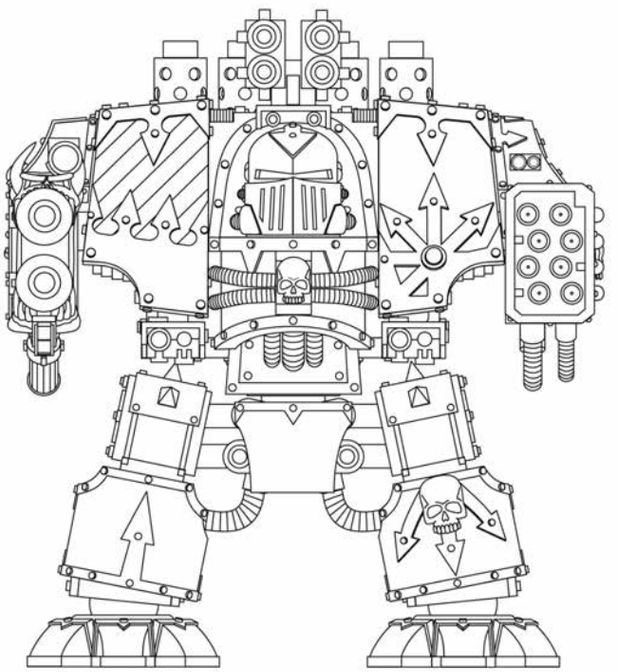
Close combat weapon and combi-bolter



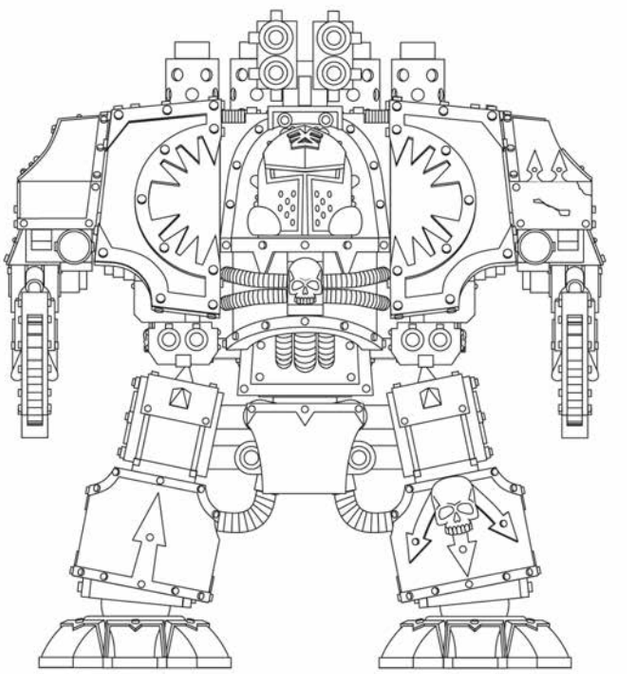
Dreadnought – Death Guard



Dreadnought – Death Guard (variant)

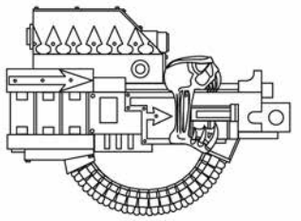


Dreadnought – Iron Warriors

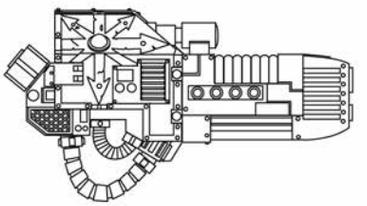


Dreadnought – World Eaters

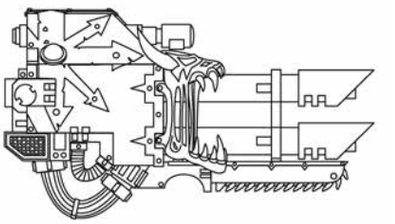
Dreadnought Weapons



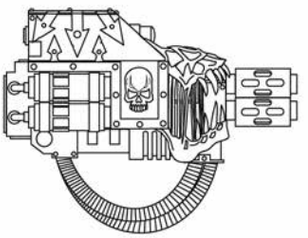
Twin-linked heavy bolters



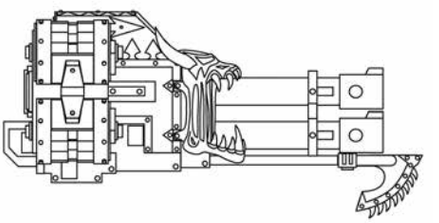
Plasma Cannon



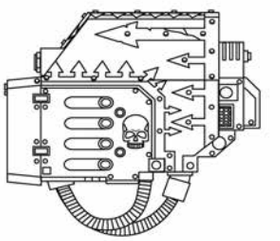
Twin-linked lascannons



Multi-melta



Twin-linked autocannons



Missile launcher

CHAOS RHINO

The Rhino Armoured Personnel Carrier is an ancient design that has long been the most numerous of Space Marine vehicles, seeing service long before the Horus Heresy split the Legions between loyalist and traitor. When the defeated renegades scattered to the Eye of Terror, they took their war machines with them, and over the 10,000 years of the Long War, the Chaos Space Marines have continued to use the Rhino as their main transport vehicle.

The service history of the Rhino with the forces of the Ruinous Powers goes back into antiquity, and the chassis' use as a template for a variety of armoured fighting vehicles is as commonplace now as it was at the time of the Horus Heresy. As with many former Imperial patterns and designs in the service of Chaos, the use of Imperial model designations has long ceased to be relevant, and Chaos forces sport a number of permutations on the Mk Ib, Mk IIb and Mk IIc models, often produced or heavily modified in uncounted ways deemed blasphemous by the Adeptus Mechanicus to the original's sacred STC design.

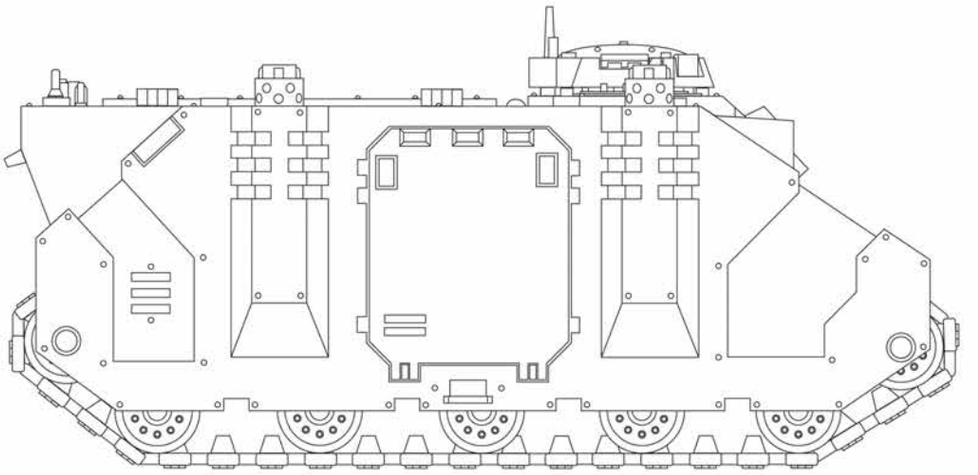
While the provenance and history of no war machine in the Chaos ranks can be known for certain, it is true that some of the Rhinos that are present in the Renegade arsenals are the self same vehicles that once served under the banner of the Emperor thousands of years ago, preserved and endlessly repaired by faithful warsmiths, or by some fickle twist of time and the warp and treated as blood-stained sacred relics by the Traitor Legions. The vast majority of Rhinos in service with the Chaos forces however are newer models, seeded to Chaos by the treachery of newly turned renegades or churned out in their hundreds by the war worlds deep within the Eye.

A further source of new war machines is by plunder and the recovery of battlefield wreckage. Many Chaos factions, particularly the smaller warbands, are forced into a scavenger existence by necessity, preying not only on Imperial worlds, but on rival warbands and the servants of hated enemy gods. The servants of Chaos delight in looting and corrupting the weapons and tools of the Imperium and turning them against their former masters, and the Rhino and its variants with their ubiquitous design and ease of repair are particularly valued prizes. No greater pleasure is to be had than the perversion and corruption of wargear once belonging to the hated loyalist Space Marines. Defaced and mutilated, these vehicles are bedecked with blasphemous icons and the livery of their new masters, and fitted with gristly trophy racks, blades, hooks and flayed skins so as to curry favour with a sworn Chaos Power or daemonic allegiance.

The Pre-Imperial Rhino design has its origin in the patterns of the STC (Standard Template Construction). Thanks to the genius of the STC, the basic Rhino pattern can be repaired and constructed from a wide variety of materials, ranging from carbon composites to hardened steel. The Rhino's standard engine system, which utilises four independent thermic combustor units, has the twin advantages of being able to run on just about any fuel (to varying degrees of efficiency), as well as take damage to multiple engines and keep running at reduced power, greatly increasing its combat survivability.

The Chaos Rhino, like its Imperial counterpart, provides battlefield transport for a squad of up to ten Chaos Marines and is crewed by a single operator, who serves both as the driver and in addition controls its basic armament. Individual Rhinos may also be further upgraded according to their role, the resources available to the warbands and factions to which they belong. One additional weapon system often encountered fitted on the Rhinos used by Chaos forces is a true relic of the ancient days of the Great Crusade, which has since fallen out of use with the Imperium, the Havoc Launcher. The multi-barrelled Havoc fires clusters of rockets fitted with high explosive, fragmentary warheads, intended as an anti-personnel weapon.

Rhino



DVLA 6724930

ADEPTUS MECHANICUS DEPARTMENTO MANUFACTURUM

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Vehicle Designation 0120-766-0724-PR 113

Vehicle Name RHINO ARMOURED PERSONNEL CARRIER

Forge World of Origin MARS

Known Patterns I-XXXV

Crew DRIVER

Powerplant QUAD MKII ADAPTABLE THERMIC COMBUSTOR REACTOR

Weight 30 TONNES

Length 6.6 M

Width 4.5 M

Height 3.6 M

Ground Clearance 0.44 M

Max Speed - On Road 70 KPH

Max Speed - Off Road 55 KPH

Main Armament STORM BOLTER

Secondary Armament N/A

Traverse 360°

Elevation -65° TO +45°

Main Ammunition 800 ROUNDS

Secondary Ammunition N/A

Armour

Turret N/A

Superstructure 60 MM

Hull 60 MM

Gun Mantlet N/A

Date 1224011.M40

signature

Magos Fabricator

Dominus Ex Machina

CHAOS PREDATOR

The most common variant of the basic Rhino used by the Traitor Legions, the Predator is the premier battle tank of the Chaos forces, and found providing armoured fire support or operating as a roving battlefield hunter-killer in almost all Chaos warbands and raiding forces of any size. Like many other war machines used by the Chaos Marines, it is a legacy of pre-Heresy times, and its design has stood the test of time, as deadly now as it was on the battlefields of the Great Crusade.

Unlike the Predators found within the armouries of loyalist Space Marine Chapters, which are often clearly delineated into variants such as the Destructor and Annihilator, and maintained in a Chapter's armoury until needed, Chaos Predators are battle-scarred veterans of perhaps hundreds of campaigns and a war without end. Each tank may have served many masters in its long and bloody career.

As well as operating in concert with a wider assault plan, Predators, with their mixed array of weapon options, are also able to conduct independent operations using pack tactics to locate, isolate and destroy priority targets on the battlefield.

The Predator has been the armoured fist of Chaos since the days of the Horus Heresy, and took part in many of the major battles of those dark times from the betrayal at Gethamon, where the Predators of the Alpha Legion slaughtered the arrayed troops of the waiting Imperial Army by the thousand on the mustering fields, to the vast tank battles that occurred between Traitors forces and the loyalists on Tallarn.

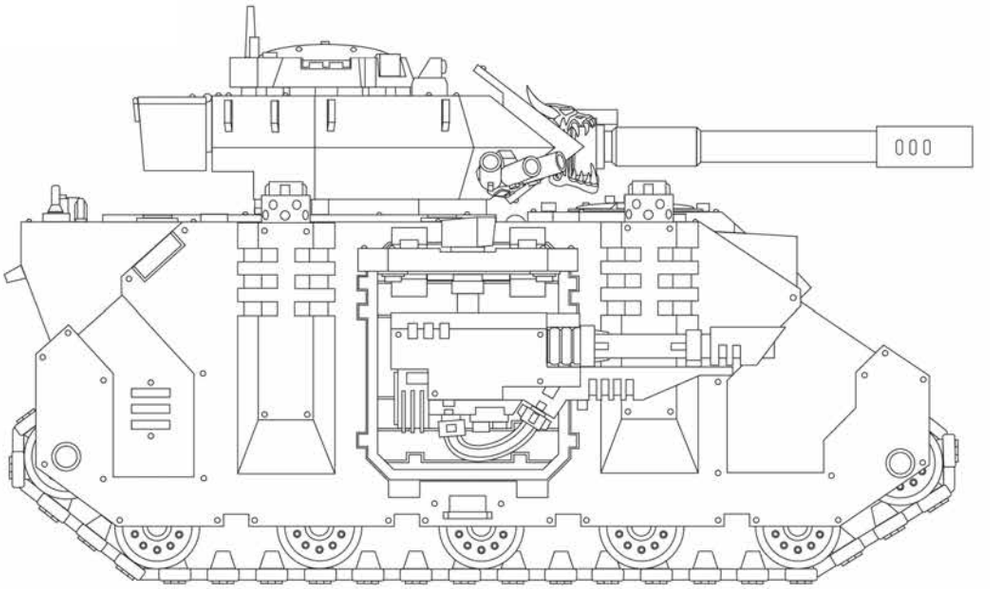
Since then the Predator has seen action in every conceivable theatre of war where the forces of Chaos have been present, from the fratricidal conflict that broke out between the Traitor Legions following the attempted cloning of Horus, to the Black Crusades of Abbadon and the century long scourging of the Ralgor Cluster by the Word Bearers of the Arch-Apostle Erisine. While more recent treacheries such as the Badab Uprising and the Wars of the Paraxial Succession have also seen large numbers of more recent Predator variants find their way into the ranks of Mankind's enemies.

Further to their long and bloody history, there are many accounts both apocryphal and sealed under the veil of Inquisitorial authority, of Predator tanks operating under malefic influence, evidencing no crew, and surrounded by strange and unexplained phenomena. These hellish vehicles are said to act more in the manner of a living beast that hungers for the kill, rather than any driven machine of war and seem able to shrug off damage more in the manner of a living being.

The Predator variant sacrifices the Rhino's troop carrying capacity in exchange for a substantial increase in armour, and a reinforced chassis, as well as a greatly expanded armament. The Predator's armoured turret is usually equipped with either a rapid firing destructor (or other heretic pattern) autocannon, or alternately twin-linked lascannon for an anti-armour role. Additionally, the Predator may also feature side-sponson mounted heavy bolters or lascannons, increasing its firepower.

As often re-built and modified as Chaos Predators are, there are numerous recorded incidences of them sporting additional secondary weapons, reinforced armour, rough-terrain modifications and many are heavily adorned with trophies, blades, ramming spikes and further marked with the banners and fell iconography of the Chaos gods. In some few cases more extreme modifications and singular weapons fits have been reported, ranging from inbuilt sacrificial shrines, and vehicles bedecked with a covering of still-twitching bodies somehow still infected with some semblance of life, to additional advanced command-and-control systems, as well as strange and esoteric armaments such as vile toxic sprays or psycho-sonic weapons as hallmarks of their service to some particular Chaos cult or order.

Predator



DVLA 6724930

ADEPTUS MECHANICUS DEPARTMENTO MANUFACTURUM

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Vehicle Designation 0120-766-0723-RH 812/819

Vehicle Name PREDATOR DESTRUCTOR

Forge World of Origin MARS

Known Patterns I-XII

Crew DRIVER, GUNNER

Powerplant QUAD MKII ADAPTABLE THERMIC COMBUSTOR REACTOR

Weight 44 TONNES

Length 6.6 M

Width 6 M WITH SPONSONS

Height 4.4 M

Ground Clearance .44 M

Max Speed - On Road 68 KPH

Max Speed - Off Road 50 KPH

Main Armament AUTOCANNON

Secondary Armament HEAVY BOLTERS

Traverse 360°

Elevation -15° TO +28°

Main Ammunition 120 ROUNDS

Secondary Ammunition 1100 ROUNDS

Armour

- Turret 65 MM
- Superstructure 65 MM
- Hull 55 MM
- Gun Mantlet 65 MM

Date 1224013.M40 signature

Magos Fabricator

Dominus Ex Machina

CHAOS VINDICATOR

The Vindicator is an assault tank, designed principally for siege warfare and for smashing through heavily fortified positions.

It is a very old design believed to date back to the era of the Great Crusade, and has served largely unaltered since then with both the loyalist and Traitor Space Marines. Its particular service history with the forces of Chaos goes back to its prominent roles in the battles of the Horus Heresy, where its power was brought to devastating effect not lest by the Traitor Legions in the siege of the Imperial Palace on Terra, where hundreds of Vindicators were used as the armoured spearhead of attacks to battle through line after line of bitterly contested defences. Since then though their numbers have diminished somewhat in renegade service, as losses through attrition, and the difficulty of supply have far outstripped the desire of warlords and commanders to field the powerful tank.

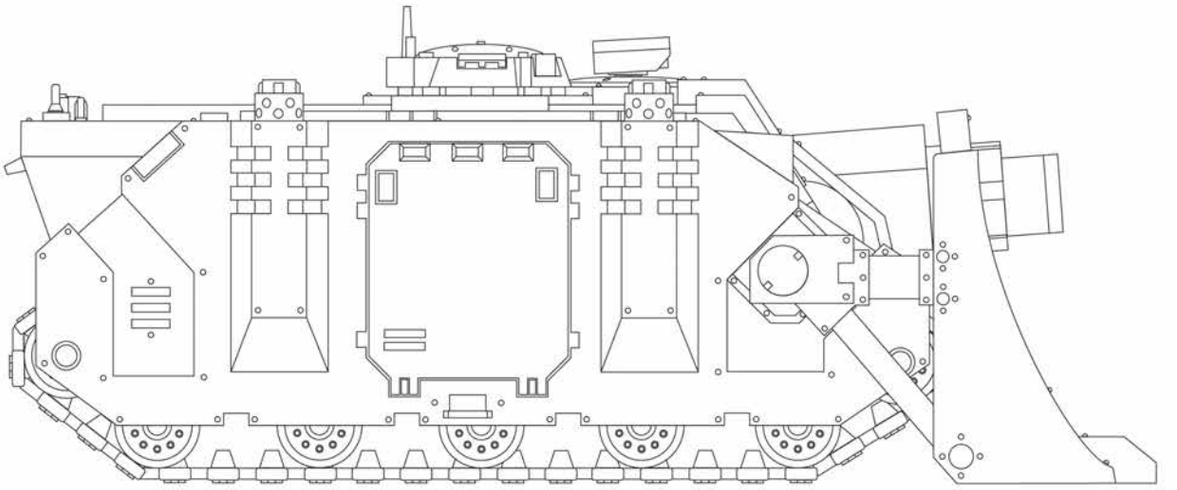
In particular the Vindicator has been frequently found in the armouries of the Iron Warriors Traitor Legion, whose penchant for siege warfare and a tactical doctrine of brutal direct assaults is well served by the Vindicator. Also, given the numbers of newly constructed Vindicators fielded in the armies of the 13th Black Crusade, it seems likely that either the Iron Warriors or some other faction has the required STC lore to mass-produce these vehicles.

As a variant of the basic Rhino chassis, the Vindicator has the advantage of the utility, durability and ease of repair of the Rhino's STC design, using many common components and compatibility with numerous standard weapon and drive systems. Its most prominent and unique feature of course is its mounting of the heavy demolisher cannon, and the vast majority of the vehicle's interior space is taken over by the weapon itself, hydraulic recoil systems for the cannon, its automated loading mechanism and a magazine for 16 of its huge shells, barely leaving enough space for its Chaos Space Marine crew of two: a driver and gunner. Additionally, the Vindicator's prow and upper surfaces feature significantly reinforced armour which increases its survivability and it commonly also sports a heavy dozer-bladed plough for clearing wreckage and rubble from its path.

Its demolisher cannon fires a hugely powerful, high calibre, rocket-assisted shell capable of breaching heavily reinforced or fortified constructions. Although relatively unstable and short ranged owing to its sheer size of shell, the demolisher cannon's firepower can also be used to smash with ease through even densely plated vehicle armour when called on to do so.

It is in the close confines of urban warfare though that the Vindicator's design excels. This most savage, relentless and costly form of fighting is commonly a murderous prospect for any aggressor. Fields of fire and observation are restricted, and the advantages of numbers and manoeuvrability are quickly stymied by densely packed terrain and a determined group of defenders can quickly turn the most well-disciplined attack into an anarchic morass of shifting battle lines where every building, sewer, basement or ruin can become an enemy stronghold, sniper position, ambush site or death-trap. For the Vindicator, its heavy armoured construction and squat profile serve to give it excellent protection. Battlefield rumours and scattered after action reports also persist of Chaos Vindicators which seem to have become mutated, as if infected with the stuff of the Warp, and of other, seemingly all but unstoppable Vindicators, bound with webbings of chains and talismans, and graven glowing runes carved into their hulls, crewed by no living being.

Vindicator with dozerblade



DVLX 6724930

ADEPTUS MECHANICUS DEPARTMENTO MANUFACTURUM

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Vehicle Designation 0120-766-0833-VI 054

Vehicle Name VINDICATOR

Forge World of Origin LUCIUS

Known Patterns II-XXVI

Crew DRIVER, GUNNERS

Powerplant QUAD MkII ADAPTABLE THERMIC COMBUSTION REACTOR

Weight 42 TONNES

Length 7.5 M

Width 4.5 M

Height 3.6 M

Ground Clearance 0.44 M

Max Speed - On Road 64 KPH

Max Speed - Off Road 48 KPH

Main Armament DEMOLISHER CANNON

Secondary Armament N/A

Traverse 2°

Elevation -0° TO +45°

Main Ammunition 18 ROUNDS

Secondary Ammunition N/A

Armour

Turret N/A

Superstructure 65 MM

Hull 65 MM

Gun Mantlet 55 MM

Date 1224026.M40 signature

Magos Fabricator

Dominus Ex Machina

CHAOS LAND RAIDER

The Chaos land raider is a tank that has struck terror into the hearts of many down the millennia. Just like its loyalist equivalent, it is a truly ancient engine of war and is still the pre-eminent battle tank of the 41st Millennium. On its own a Land Raider is a match for any other tank of its size, and many that are larger. As well as a battle tank, it is also a secure transport vehicle equipped with an assault ramp, enabling a whole squad of Space Marines or a Terminator unit to be delivered directly into the thickest fighting.

Rediscovered by the Techmagos Arkhan Land during his great expedition into the perilous depths of the Libraries Omnis beneath the surface of Mars, it was named in his honour.

The advantages given by the use of this unparalleled war machine in battle and its role as a deciding factor in the struggle to liberate Mankind from the tyranny of the Age of Strife, was not lost on the Traitors during the Horus Heresy.

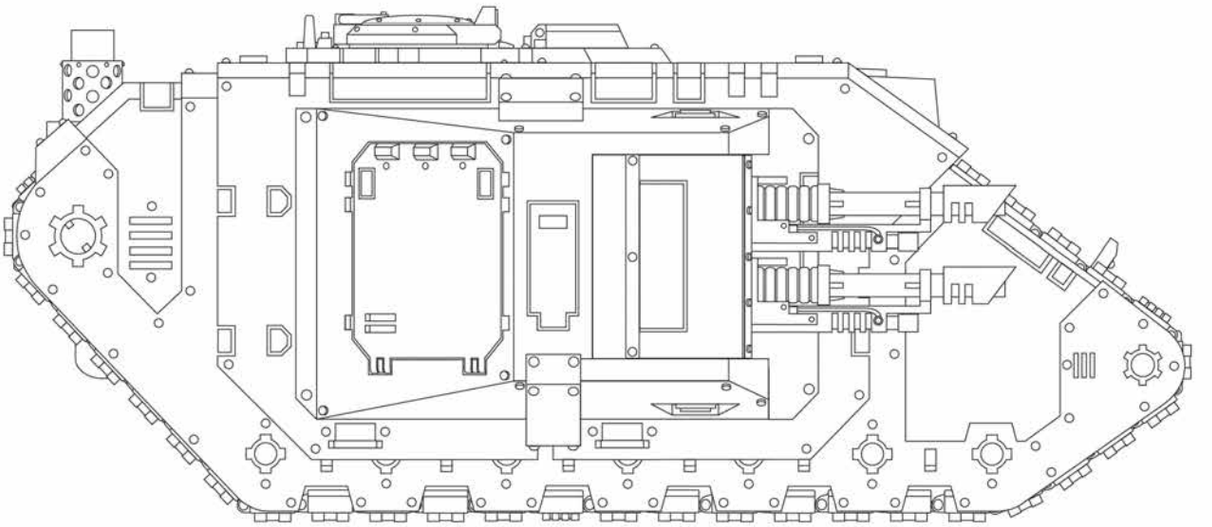
At the time of the Great Betrayal, the principle source of Land Raider production was the dedicated forge world of Anvilus 9, which the Warmaster and his allies plotted to ensure fell quickly to the rogue Mechanicus elements bound to his service. This had the duel effect of at once denying the loyalists access to these important weapons, while ensuring their continued supply for the rebels. Though ultimately the Traitor's grip on Anvilus would prove short lived, during this time it churned out large numbers of Land Raiders for the Traitor Legions, and when the Traitor factions were eventually forced from the forge world, it was left devastated beyond repair. The enemy took the knowledge of the secret arts of the Land Raider's construction with them. The damage was done, and to this day, only the loyal Chapters of the Adeptus Astartes are permitted to use these precious machines. It is thought that within the twisting depths of the Eye of Terror, production of new Land Raiders for the Chaos forces remains largely in the hands of the Dark Mechanicus, and is used by them as a bargaining chip in the incessant intrigues and struggles for power between the Traitor factions.

Arguably still the most technologically advanced tank in operation with the forces of Chaos, even a single Land Raider is a true engine of destruction able to tip the balance of a battle alone. Heavily armed and armoured from every angle, reactor-driven and environmentally sealed, it can operate successfully on almost any battlefield conceivable from the seabed, to burnings ash wastes, and endure hellish corrosive storms and hard vacuum. Its defences are sufficient to shrug off fire that would cripple or destroy lesser machines, while its own firepower can lay waste to enemy tanks and infantry alike.

Of all the ancient design shared between the Imperium and the Chaos forces, it's perhaps noteworthy that the Land Raider is the least often modified, or changed by hands of its dark masters, save for the vile and infernal machine sprits that possess them (although this is not universally the case). The reason for this lack of deviation from the ancient template is arguably of course a testament to the tank's near perfection for its role, and the Chaos Land Raider maintains the standard pattern armament of two twin-linked lascannon and a twin-linked heavy bolter for anti-personnel fire support.

Most Chaos forces will make cosmetic changes to the Land Raiders in their service, easily marking out these battlefield horrors from Land Raiders in loyalist service. Suitably adorned, the Chaos Land Raider becomes more than a simple battle tank but a true altar of war and a portent of death for those who would stand against them. It is a bloody temple that proclaims its worship in the shriek of its weapons and takes its sacrifices crushed beneath its mighty tracks.

MkII Land Raider



DVLA 6724930

ADEPTUS MECHANICUS DEPARTMENTO MANUFACTURUM

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Vehicle Designation 5657-776-0155-G099

Vehicle Name LAND RAIDER

Forge World of Origin PHOBOS

Known Patterns II-XXVII

Crew DRIVER, COMMANDER

Powerplant ADAPTABLE THERMIC COMBUSTION WITH AUXILIARY REACTOR

Weight 72 TONNES

Length 10.3 M

Width 6.1 M

Height 4.11 M

Ground Clearance .45 M

Max Speed - On Road 55 KPH

Max Speed - Off Road 48 KPH

Main Armament 2 X TWIN-LINKED LASCANNONS

Secondary Armament TWIN-LINKED HEAVY BOLTERS

Traverse 180°

Elevation -32° TO +42°

Main Ammunition UNLIMITED FROM POWERPACK

Secondary Ammunition 2,600 ROUNDS

Armour

Turret N/A

Superstructure 95 MM

Hull 95 MM

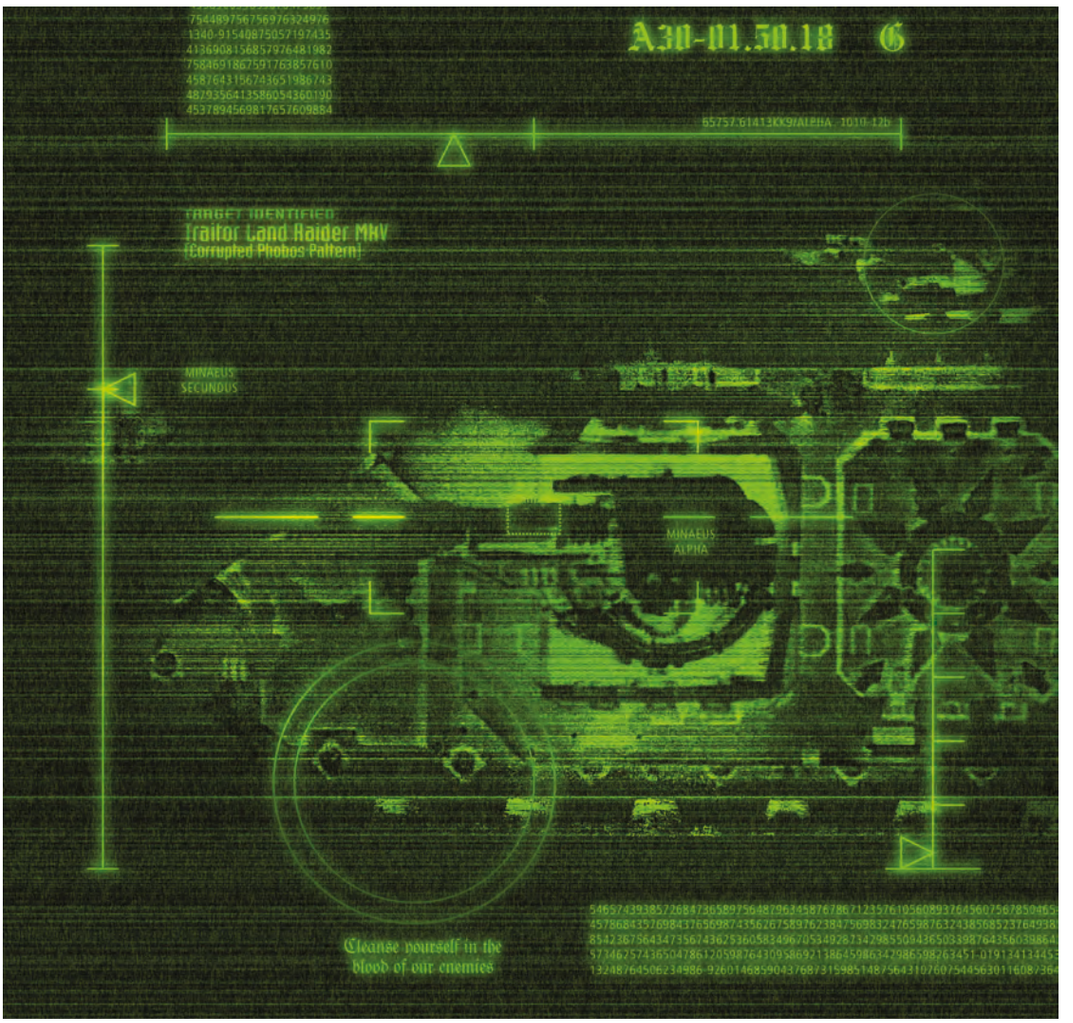
Gun Mantlet N/A

Date 1224030.M40

signature

Magos Fabricator

Dominus Ex Machina


A30-01.50.18 G
TARGET IDENTIFIED
Traitor Land Raider MkV
[Corrupted Phobos Pattern]
MINAEUS
SECUNDUS
MINAEUS
ALPHA
Cleanse yourself in the
blood of our enemies

CHAOS WARHOUND

Of all the war machines and weapons at the disposal of the Chaos gods, few are more powerful, more dreaded or indeed more hated than the Titans of the Traitor Legions. When the Horus Heresy divided the Imperium in bloody internecine warfare, over half of the Titan Legions sided with the rebel Warmaster. In some cases, the Legions merely sided themselves with masters they long served, while others were caught up by treachery within the ranks of the Adeptus Mechanicus, but most who turned traitor, regardless of their original motives, long glutted on the ruination of worlds and countless slaughters during the Great Crusade were easily swayed to the allegiance of Chaos powers.

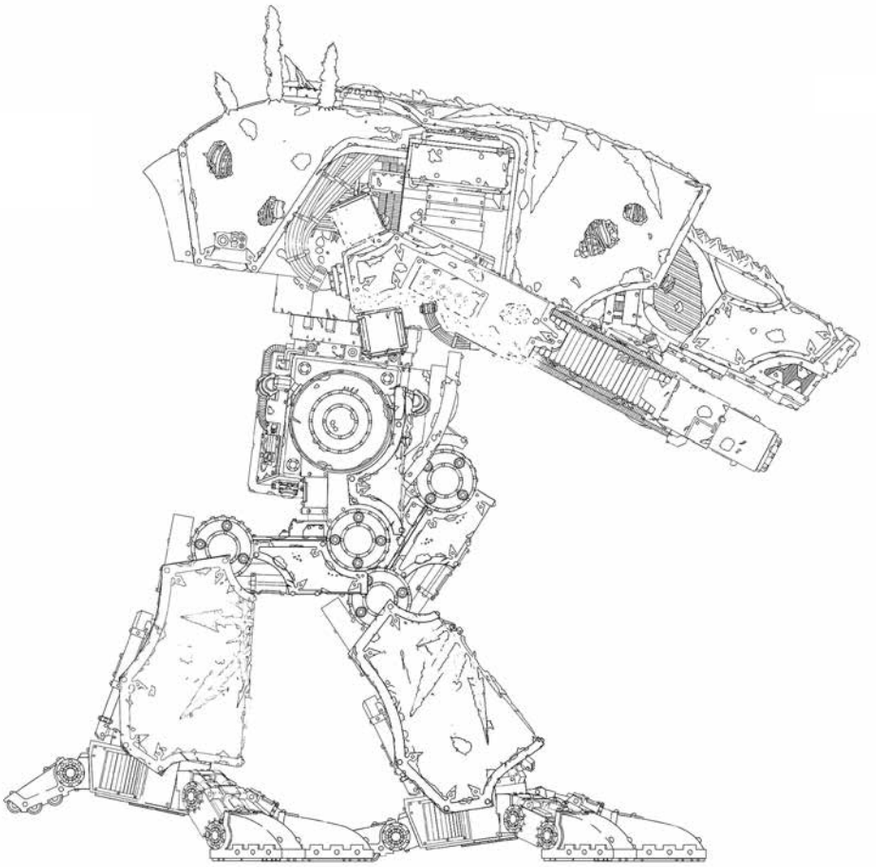
When many of the defeated forces of Horus fled to the warped realities of the Eye of Terror after the Heresy, the Titan Legions who had followed the Warmaster's cause fled with them, and the price they paid for their treacheries was heavy indeed. The Powers of Chaos were quick to look on these unmatched machines of war with their fickle favour and worked on them to make them more pleasing in their sight. As to the fate of their crews it was a dark one. Bound together in war with their machine, most have long since become as one flesh with it, their bodies and souls sacrificed on the altar of battle, merging with metal and Daemon in their endless damnation. Destined to battle forever for the pleasure of their baleful gods and driven on to ever greater depths of destruction by the ceaseless hatred they bear for those they once called brothers.

Titans are colossal war machines, walkers whose tread causes the earth beneath them to shake. Protected by crackling void shields, they carry weapons of awesome firepower capable of laying waste to vast swathes of conventional armour and troops. There are many classes of Titan, ranging from the mighty battle Titans such as the Warlord and Reaver, to the smaller, more agile but still devastating Scout Titans such as the various Warhound patterns. The Titans of Chaos are almost all ancient and irreplaceable relics of the Horus Heresy and having seen millennia of service in the Traitor's Long War have become utterly corrupted by the touch of the Warp and are now as much Daemon as machine.

During the Siege of Vraks, a battle group of Chaos Titans belonging to the hated traitors of the Legio Vulcanum I (known in some sources as 'the Dark Fire'), were seen accompanying the Chaos forces drawn into the steadily escalating conflict. Perhaps the most infamous of these was the Warhound identified by the Imperial Logos Tactica as an ancient and thrice-cursed war machine named the *Venataris Mori*, a corrupted Warhound Titan of the Mars pattern, the Mori's history was known to date back to long before the Horus Heresy and it was said to once have accompanied the (then loyal) Night Lords Space Marine Legion on their infamous xenocidal purge of the Shi'hu'gal Dominion; a campaign of such fury and viciousness it remains a legend of the Great Crusade, even after the Warmaster's betrayal.

Warhound Titan

– Mars patetrn



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ADEPTUS MECHANICUS DEPARTMENTO MANUFACTURUM

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Vehicle Designation 0550-4332-982-WH 03

Vehicle Name WARHOUND TITAN

Forge World of Origin MARS

Known Patterns III-XXI

Crew PRINCEP, 2 X MODERATI, TECHPRIEST

Powerplant TYPE XIV PLASMA REACTOR

Weight 410 TONNES

Length 12.1 M

Width 11 M

Height 14 M AT REST

Ground Clearance 6.5 M

Max Speed - On Road 58 KPH 8.25M STRIDE LENGTH

Max Speed - Off Road 42 KPH

Main Armament PLASMA BLASTGUN

Secondary Armament VULCAN MEGA-BOLTER

Traverse 100°

Elevation -33° TO +34°

Main Ammunition UNLIMITED FROM REACTOR

Secondary Ammunition 14 000 ROUNDS

Armour

Turret N/A

Superstructure 95 MM

Hull 95 MM

Gun Mantlet NA

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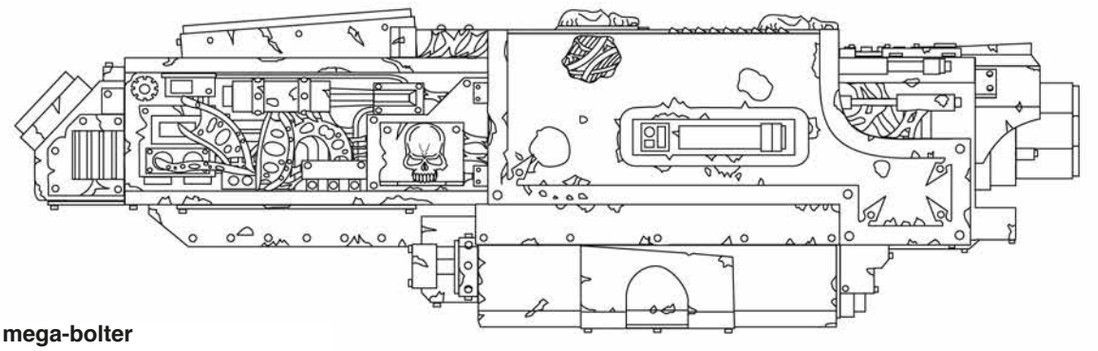
Magos Fabricator

Dominus Ex Machina



Vulcan mega-bolter

– Mars pattern