

LEGIONS OF ROME

THE DEFINITIVE HISTORY OF EVERY IMPERIAL ROMAN LEGION

STEPHEN DANDO-COLLINS

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For Louise, who soldiers at my side,
and Richard, who always fights the good fight.

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INTRODUCTION

The Roman legion of the imperial era was a triumph of organization. Its basic structure was so effective that it continues to be used to this day, by armies whose squads, platoons, companies and battalions reflect the contubernium, century, cohort and legion of old. The imperial legion created by Augustus was like a giant Lego set, with each component, from heavy infantry to cavalry, artillery to supporting auxiliary light infantry, fitting neatly together to form a solid, self-contained military machine.

The fearsome effectiveness of the organizational structure, training, and tactics of the legions were so universally acknowledged that several of Rome's greatest foes used them against her. Men who had formerly served in Rome's army and went on to raise rebellions against her not only organized their own forces along Roman lines, their intimate knowledge of how the legions operated allowed them to employ tactics which exploited their few weaknesses. As a result, Arminius destroyed Varus and his three legions in Germany's Teutoburg Forest, Tacfarinas was able to terrorize North Africa for years and Civilis took the Rhine and seven legions from Rome and threatened to remove all of Gaul from Roman control.

The legions' make-up, originally homogeneous as a result of mass enlistments in specific provincial areas, became increasingly ethnically diverse, with men from opposite ends of the Roman world bringing greatly varying customs, dialects, and religious observances to their legions without any detrimental effect to the serviceability of the overall unit. This can be put down, in part, to the fact that, like a modern military unit, legions had for centuries possessed a strong corporate identity, with the battle honors of previous enlistments being cited by commanders to rouse their troops to greater battlefield deeds.

It is remarkable that even though all the imperial legions sprang from common roots and used common training and equipment, their performance varied. Some were consistently reliable while others were fated to disappoint. Others that had once failed later grabbed glory with spectacular victories. Others still did not live up to earlier reputations. The legions destroyed with Varus in the Teutoburg Forest, for example, had been, up to that time, considered by Velleius, an officer who served with them on the Rhine, among Rome's best and bravest. Yet clever tactics by their attackers and poor leadership by their commander led to their destruction.

The question of leadership emerges time and again in the history of the legions. The 12th Fulminata Legion, for example, poorly led in Rome's initial confounded attempt to put down the first century Jewish Revolt, disgraced itself by losing its eagle standard to the rebels. A century later, this same legion regained its reputation by standing firm in a thunderstorm to save its leader Marcus Aurelius from surrounding German hordes. Vastly outnumbered but under firm leadership, the 14th Gemina Martia Victrix Legion similarly gained fame, by defeating Boudicca's rebels in Britain.

The first century and the early part of the second century represented the golden age of the legions when massive armies of up to 100,000 legionaries and a similar number of auxiliaries swept all before them, and a legionary could expect to retire rich with the spoil of conquest. From the death of the emperor Trajan in AD 117, the situation changed. Stretched thin along porous borders, Roman forces were forced permanently on to the defensive. Internal divisions would soon regularly rend the empire. Central control was frequently lost, reasserted, and lost again.

In the process, the quality of the men and their units declined, as their leaders increasingly adopted foreign mercenaries and foreign methods, created ever more new units, and changed the legions' organizational structure. And with change came regular defeat, stimulating even more debilitating change. Only the occasional emergence of a great commander stemmed the tide of decline and even

offered hope of a return to the glory days, but always just for the duration of his lifetime.

The long existence of the Roman Empire had everything to do with the legions. While the legions were strong, Rome was strong. Conversely, the disintegration of the Late Empire had everything to do with the disintegration of the legions as effective fighting forces. At the end of the fourth century, the *Notitia Dignitatum* listed several hundred legions and auxiliary units of the day, yet these units were small, with many no more than border police and some perhaps existing only on paper. Even the most elite units then in existence paled in comparison to the Augustan legions. Vegetius' plea to his emperor Valentinian, just prior to the creation of the *Notitia Dignitatum*, for a return to the legion structure, weapons and training of old, fell on deaf ears.

When, in AD 398, Rome's last great general, Stilicho, son of a Vandal cavalry commander, put together a task force in northern Italy to wrest Africa back from rebel governor Gildo, the state of the legions then mirrored the state of the empire. Stilicho's force was organized from Mediolanum (Milan), which had superseded Rome as imperial capital in the West, and it sailed from Pisa in Tuscany, not from one of the old imperial naval bases of Misenum or Ravenna. This army consisted of legions including the Jovian, Herculian, and 3rd Augusta, plus several auxiliary units—although the distinction between legionary and auxiliary had blurred since Commodus' AD 212 decree had made Roman citizenship universal.

Yet, this task force's seven units totaled no more than 5,000 men, most of them Gallic veterans. Rome's once proud legions had shrunk to complements of some 1,000 men each, less than a fifth the size of the Augustan legions. Training, equipment, and tactics had also changed drastically since the days of Augustus. Legionaries were now using light equipment and light arms. Not long before this, entire units had thrown away their armor and helmets, claiming they were too heavy, to fight unprotected, with predictably fatal results.

Stilicho's task force won back Africa without having to lift a sword—the very sight of their disciplined ranks caused the rebel governor's troops to run. But it would be a different story just three years later, when Alaric's Visigoths invaded Italy. Stilicho's legions, withdrawn from Britain and the Rhine to save Italy, would, under his inspiring leadership, fight bloody battles and conduct gritty sieges, driving the Visigoths out of Italy. Yet once Stilicho died, soon after, those same legions were devoured by Alaric, who, in AD 410, achieved his ambition of sacking Rome.

This, then, is the comprehensive story of Rome's imperial legions. From the army molded by Augustus through the heady early phase of the empire's expansion, with its conquests, revolts, and self-destructive civil conflicts, to the long, grinding decline as the quest to maintain the gains of old sometimes stemmed the barbarian tide but inevitably gave way to it.

Despite their inglorious end, the legions remain to this day, thousands of years after their creation the most preeminent example of how detailed organization, tight discipline, and inspiring leadership can take a group of individuals and turn them into a winning team.

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March 2010

I

THE MEN

“Every country produces both brave men and cowards, but it is equally certain that some nations are naturally more warlike than others.”

VEGETIUS, *De Re Militari*, FOURTH CENTURY

Down through the centuries, millions of men served with the army of imperial Rome; half a million during the reign of Augustus alone. The history of the legions is the collective story of those individuals, not just of Rome's famous generals. Men such as Titus Flavius Virilis, still serving as a centurion at the age of 70. And Titus Calidius, a cavalry decurion who missed military life so much after retiring he re-enlisted, at the reduced rank of optio. And Novantius, the British auxiliary from today's city of Leicester, who was granted his discharge thirteen years early for valiant service in the second century conquest of Dacia. Any analysis of the legions must begin with the men, their organization, their equipment, and their service conditions.

I. WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

The origins of the legions of Pompey, Caesar, Augustus, Vespasian, Trajan and Marcus Aurelius go back to the Roman Republic of the fifth century BC. Originally, there were just four Roman legions—*Legios I* to *III* (the legion number 4 was written as *III*, not *IV*). Each of the two consuls, “who were charged both singly and jointly to take care to preserve the Republic from danger,” commanded two of these legions. [Vege., III]

All legionaries were then property-owning citizens of Rome, conscripted in the spring of each year into the armies of the two consuls. *Legio*, the origin of the word “legion,” meant “levy,” or draft. Service ordinarily ended with the Festival of the October Horse on October 19, which signaled the termination of the campaigning season.

Men of “military age”—16 to 46—were selected by ballot for each legion, with the 1st Legion considered to be the most prestigious. Rome's field army was bolstered by legions from allied Italian tribes. Legionaries of the early Republic were appointed to one of four divisions within their legion, based on age and property qualifications. The youngest men were assigned to the *velites*, the next oldest to the *hastati*, men in the prime of life to the *principes* and the oldest to the *triarii*, with the roles and equipment of each group differing. By Julius Caesar's day, the conscripted infantry soldier of the Republic was required to serve in the legions for up to sixteen years, and could be recalled in emergencies for a further four years.

Originally, republican legions had a strength of 4,200 men, which in times of special danger could be brought up to 5,000. [Poly., VI, 21] By 218 BC and the war between Rome and Carthage, the consuls' legions consisted of 5,200 infantry and 300 cavalry, which approached the form they would take in imperial times. From 104 BC, the Roman army of the Republic underwent a major overhaul by the consuls Publius Rutilius Rufus and Gaius Marius. Rutilius introduced arms drill and reformed the process of appointment for senior officers. Marius simplified the requirements for enrollment, so that it was not only property owners who were required to serve. Failure to report for military service would result in the conscript being declared a deserter, a crime subject to the death penalty.

A legionary would be paid for the days he served—for many years, this amounted to ten asses a day. He was also entitled to the proceeds from any arms, equipment or clothing he stripped from the enemy dead, and was entitled to a share of the booty acquired by his legion. If a legion stormed a town, its legionaries received the proceeds from its contents—human and otherwise—which were sold to traders who trailed the legions. If a town surrendered, however, the Roman army's commander could elect to spare it. Consequently, legionaries had no interest in encouraging besieged cities to surrender.

Marius focused on making the legions independent mobile units of heavy infantry. Supporting roles were left to allied forces. To increase mobility, Marius took most of the legionaries' personal equipment off the huge baggage trains which until then had trailed the legions, and put it on the back

of the soldiers, greatly reducing the size of the baggage train. With the items hanging from their baggage poles weighing up to 100 pounds (45 kilos), legionaries of the era were nicknamed “Marius’ mules.” Until that time, the maniple of 160–200 men had been the principal tactical unit of the legion, but under Marius’ influence the 600-man cohort became the new tactical unit of the Roman army, so that the legion of the first century BC comprised ten cohorts, with a total of 6,000 men.

Half a century later, Julius Caesar fashioned his legions around his own personality and dynamic style. Of the twenty-eight legions of Augustus’ new standing army in 30 BC, some had been founded by Caesar, others molded by him. The civil war, between the rebel Caesar and the forces of the republican Senate led by their commander Pompey the Great, created an insatiable demand for military manpower. At the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC, Caesar led elements of nine legions; Pompey twelve. For the 42 BC Battle of Philippi, two years after Caesar’s murder, when Mark Antony, Marcus Lepidus and Octavian took on the so-called Liberators, Brutus and Cassius, more than forty legions were involved.

II. SOLDIERING FOR AUGUSTUS

The emperor Augustus, as Octavian became known from 27 BC, totally reformed the Roman army after he finally defeated Antony and Cleopatra in 30 BC.

In the professional army of Augustus, the legionary was a full-time soldier, sometimes a volunteer but more often a conscript, who signed on, initially for sixteen and later twenty years. Toward the end of his forty-three-year reign, Augustus was to boast: “The number of Roman citizens who bound themselves to me by military oath was about 500,000. Of these I settled in colonies or sent back into their own towns more than 300,000, and to all I assigned lands or gave money as a reward for military service.” [*Res Gest.*, I, 3] That retirement payment was standardized by Augustus at 12,000 sesterces for legionaries, 20,000 for men of the Praetorian Guard. After the completion of his enlistment, an imperial legionary could be recalled in an emergency to the *Evocati*, a militia of retired legionaries.

On Antony’s death, Augustus controlled approximately sixty legions. Many of these were promptly disbanded. “Others,” said Cassius Dio, “were merged with various legions by Augustus,” and as a result “such legions have come to bear the name *Gemina*,” meaning “twin.” [Dio, LV, 23] By this process, Augustus created a standing army of 150,000 legionaries in twenty-eight legions, supported by 180,000 auxiliary infantry and cavalry, stationed throughout the empire. He also created a navy with two main battle fleets equipped with marines, and several smaller fleets. In addition, Augustus employed specialist troops at Rome—the elite Praetorian Guard, the City Guard, the *Vigiles* or Night Watch, and the imperial bodyguard, the German Guard.

In AD 6, Augustus set up a military treasury in Rome, initially using his own funds, which were given in his name and that of Tiberius, his ultimate successor. To administer the military treasury he appointed three former praetors, allocating two secretaries to each. The ongoing shortfall in the military treasury’s funds was covered by a death duty of 5 percent on all inheritances, except where the recipient was immediate family or demonstrably poor.

III. ENLISTING AND RETIRING

Some volunteers served in Rome’s imperial legions—“the needy and the homeless, who adopt by their own choice a soldier’s life,” according to Tacitus. [Tac., A, IV, 4] But most legionaries were conscripted. The selection criteria established by Augustus required men in their physical prime. A recruit’s civilian skills would be put to use by the legion, so that blacksmiths became armorers, and tailors and cobblers made and repaired legionaries’ uniforms and footwear. Unskilled recruits found

themselves assigned to duties such as the surveyor's party or the artillery. When it was time for battle however, all took their places in the ranks.

A slave attempting to join the legions could expect to be executed if discovered, as happened in a case raised with the emperor Trajan by Pliny the Younger when he was governor of Bithynia-Pontus. Conversely, during the early part of Augustus' reign it was not uncommon for free men to pose as slaves to avoid being drafted into the legions or the Praetorian Guard when the *conquistors*, or recruitment officers, periodically did the rounds of the recruitment grounds. This became such a problem that Augustus' stepson Tiberius was given the task of conducting an inquiry into slave barracks throughout Italy, whose owners were accepting bribes from free men to harbor them in the barracks when the *conquistors* sought to fill their quotas. [Suet., III, 8]

Once Tiberius became emperor the task of filling empty places in the legions became even more difficult. Velleius Paterculus, who served under Tiberius, made a sycophantic yet revealing statement about legion recruitment in around AD 30: "As for the recruiting of the army, a thing ordinarily looked upon with great and constant dread, with what calm on the part of the people does he [Tiberius] provide for it, without any of the usual panic attending conscription!" [Velle., II, CXXX] Tiberius, who followed Augustus' policy of recruiting no legionaries in Italy south of the River Po, broadly extended the draft throughout the provinces.

Legionaries were not permitted to marry. Recruits who were married at the time of enrollment had their marriages annulled and had to wait until their enlistment expired to take a wife officially, although in practice there were many camp followers and many *de facto* relationships. The emperor Septimius Severus repealed the marriage regulation, so that from AD 197 serving legionaries could marry.

For many decades, each imperial legion had its own dedicated recruitment ground. The 3rd Gallic Legion, for example, was for many years recruited in Syria, despite its name, while both 7th legions were recruited in eastern Spain. By the second half of the first century, for the sake of expediency, recruiting grounds began to shift; the 20th Legion, for instance, which had up to that time been recruited in northern Italy, received an increasing number of its men from the East.

When a legion was initially raised, its enlistment took place *en masse*, which meant that a legion's men who survived battle wounds and sickness were later discharged together. As a result, as Scottish historian Dr. Ross Cowan has observed, Rome "had to replenish much of a legion's strength at a single stroke." [Cowan., *RL* 58–69] When a legion's discharge and re-enlistment fell due, all its recruits were enrolled at the same time. Although the official minimum age was 17, the average age of recruits tended to be around 20.

Some old hands stayed on with the legions after their discharge was due, and were often promoted to *optio* or centurion. There are numerous gravestone examples of soldiers who served well past their original twenty-year enlistment. Based on such gravestone evidence, many historians believe that all legionaries' enlistments were universally extended from twenty to twenty-five years in the second half of the first century, although there is no firm evidence of this.

Legions rarely received replacements to fill declining ranks as the enlistments of their men neared the end of their twenty years. Tacitus records replacements being brought into legions on only two occasions, in AD 54 and AD 61, in both cases in exceptional circumstances. Accordingly, legions frequently operated well under optimum strength. [Ibid.]

By AD 218, mass discharges would be almost a thing of the past. The heavy losses suffered by the legions during the wars of Marcus Aurelius, Septimius Severus and Caracalla meant that the legions needed to be regularly brought up to strength again or they would have ceased to be effective fighting units. The short-lived emperor Macrinus (AD 217–218) deliberately staggered legion recruitment, for "he hoped that these new recruits, entering the army a few at a time, would refrain from rebellion."

[Dio, LXXIX, 30]

In 216 BC, two previous oaths of allegiance were combined into one, the *ius iurandum*, administered to legion recruits by their tribunes. From the reign of Augustus, initially on January 1, later on January 3, the men of every legion annually renewed the oath of allegiance at mass assemblies: “The soldiers swear that they will obey the emperor willingly and implicitly in all his commands, that they will never desert, and will always be ready to sacrifice their lives for the Roman Empire.” [Vege., II]

On joining his legion, the legionary was exempt from taxes and was no longer subject to civil law. Once in the military, his life was governed by military law, which in many ways was more severe than the civil code.

IV. SPECIAL DUTIES

Legions’ headquarters staff included an adjutant, clerks and orderlies who were members of the legion. The latter, called *beneficiari*, were excused normal legion duties and were frequently older men who had served their full enlistment but who had stayed on in the army.

V. DISCIPLINE AND PUNISHMENT

“I want obedience and self-restraint from my soldiers just as much as courage in the face of the enemy.”

JULIUS CAESAR, *The Gallic War*, VII, 52

Tight discipline, unquestioning obedience and rigid training made the Roman legionary a formidable soldier. Roman military training aimed not only to teach men how to use their weapons, it quite deliberately set out to make legionaries physically and mentally tough fighting machines who would obey commands without hesitation.

As one of the indications of his rank, every centurion carried a vine stick, the forerunner of the swagger stick of some modern armies. Centurions were at liberty to use their sticks to thrash any legionary mercilessly for minor infringements. A centurion named Lucilius, who was killed in the AD 14 Pannonian mutiny, had a habit of brutally breaking a vine stick across the back of a legionary, the calling “Bring another!,” a phrase that became his nickname. [Tac., A, I, 23]

For more serious infringements, legionaries found guilty by a court martial conducted by the legion’s tribunes could be sentenced to death. Polybius described the crimes for which the death penalty was prescribed in 150 BC—stealing goods in camp, giving false evidence, homosexual offenses committed by those in full manhood, and for lesser crimes where the offender had previously been punished for the same offense three times. The death penalty was later additionally prescribed for falling asleep while on sentry duty. Execution also awaited men who made a false report to their commanding officer about their courage in the field in order to gain a distinction, men who deserted their post in a covering force, and those who through fear threw away weapons on the battlefield. [Poly., VI, 37]

If whole units were involved in desertion or cowardice, they could be sentenced to decimation: literally, reduction by one tenth. Guilty legionaries had to draw lots. One in ten would die, with the other nine having to perform the execution. Decimation sentences were carried out with clubs or swords or by flogging, depending on the whim of the commanding officer. Survivors of a decimated unit could be put on barley rations and made to sleep outside the legion camp’s walls, where there wa

no protection against attack. Although both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony decimated their legions, this form of punishment was rarely applied during the imperial era.

First-century general Corbulo had one soldier brought out of the trench he was digging and executed on the spot for failing to wear a sword on duty. After this, Corbulo's centurions reminded their men that they must be armed at all times, so one cheeky legionary went naked while digging, except for a dagger on his belt. Not famed for his sense of humor, Corbulo had this man, too, pulled out and put to death. [Tac., XI, 18]

VI. LEGIONARY PAY

Julius Caesar doubled the legionary's basic pay from 450 to 900 sesterces a year, which was what an Augustan recruit could expect. This was increased to 1,200 by Domitian in AD 89. [Dio, LXVII, 3] Before this, Roman soldiers were paid 300 sesterces three times a year, installments which Domitian raised to 400 sesterces each. [Ibid.]

The legionary's annual salary was infinitesimal compared to the 100,000 sesterces a year earned by a *primus pilus*, the most senior centurion of a legion, and the 400,000 a year salary of the legate commanding the legion. Deductions were made from the legionary's salary to cover certain expenses including contributions to a funeral fund for each man. Conversely, he also received small allowances for items such as boot nails and salt.

Another source of legionary income was the donative, the bonus habitually paid to the legions by each new emperor when he took the throne—300 sesterces per man was common. The legionaries normally received another, smaller, bonus on each subsequent anniversary of the emperor's accession to the throne. In addition, emperors frequently left several thousand sesterces per man to their legionaries in their wills. Profits from war booty could also be substantial. After Titus completed the Siege of Jerusalem in AD 70, so much looted Jewish gold was traded in Syria that the price of gold in that province halved overnight.

A legionary could lodge his savings in a bank maintained at his permanent winter base; his standard-bearer was the unit's banker. In AD 89, Domitian limited the amount each man could keep in his legion bank to 1,000 sesterces, after a rebel governor used funds from his legions' banks in an abortive rebellion against him. [Suet., XII, 7]

A soldier who fought bravely could have his pay increased by 50 percent or doubled for the rest of his career, and accordingly gained the titles of *sesquipliciarus* or *duplicarius*. Men with these awards were represented separately from the other rank and file when units submitted their strength reports to area headquarters, immediately following the optios and centurions on the lists. Men of *duplicarius* status proudly made reference to it on their tombstones.

To gain popularity with the legions, the emperor Caracalla (AD 211–217), “who was fond of spending money on the soldiers,” increased legionary pay and introduced various exemptions from duty for legionaries. [Dio, LXXVIII, 9] Cassius Dio, a senator at the time, complained that the salary increase would add 280 million sesterces to the cost of maintaining the legions. [Dio, LXXIX, 36] In AD 218, Caracalla's successor Macrinus announced that the pay increase would only apply to serving legionaries and that new recruits would from that time forward be paid at the same rate as had applied during the reign of Caracalla's father, Septimius Severus. This only hastened Macrinus' overthrow that same year. [Ibid.]

VII. COMPARATIVE BUYING POWER OF A LEGIONARY'S INCOME (First-Second Centuries AD)

ITEM	AMOUNT (In sesterces, [HS])	SOURCE
Annual salary, legionary (from reign of Domitian)	1,200	Suetonius [<i>Twelve Caesars</i>]
Legionary's retirement bonus	12,000	Dio [<i>Histories</i>]
Annual salary, centurion	20,000	Dudley [<i>RaiB</i>]
Annual salary, chief centurion	100,000	Dudley [<i>RaiB</i>]
Annual salary, procurator	60,000–100,000	Radice*
Annual salary, senior proconsul, Prefect of Egypt, and senior legate	400,000	Radice*
Praetorian guardsman's retirement bonus	20,000	Dio [<i>Histories</i>]
Value, small farm	100,000	Pliny [<i>Letters</i>]
Purchase price, large Italian estate	3 million	Pliny [<i>Letters</i>]
Permissible fee for defence advocate in a major court case	10,000	Pliny [<i>Letters</i>]

Cost of banquet thrown by the emperor Vitellius (AD 69)	400,000	Suetonius [<i>Twelve Caesars</i>]
Estimated fortune of writer and senator Pliny the Younger	15–20 million	Pliny [<i>Letters</i>]
Estimated fortune of Nero's chief secretary Seneca (AD 60)	300 million	Tacitus [<i>Annals</i>]
Entry requirement, Equestrian Order – personal net worth	400,000	Dio [<i>Histories</i>]
Entry requirement, Senatorial Order – personal net worth	1.2 million	Dio [<i>Histories</i>]
State price for grain, per peck (one fourth of a bushel)	3	Tacitus [<i>Annals</i>]
Daily cash dole (<i>sportula</i>) to clients	6 ¹ / ₄	Juvenal [<i>Satires</i>]
Cost of admission to public baths	¹ / ₁₆	Juvenal [<i>Satires</i>]
Purchase price of the latest book by the author Martial	20	Martial [<i>Epigrams</i>]

*Betty Radice, editor and translator, in notes to *The Letters of the Younger Pliny*, Penguin Books, 1963.

VIII. MILITARY DECORATIONS AND AWARDS

Legionaries who distinguished themselves in battle could expect not only monetary rewards. At an assembly following a victorious battle, soldiers would be called forward by their general. A thorough written record was maintained on every man in every unit, with promotions, transfers, citations, reprimands and punishments all studiously noted down by the man's optio, the second-in-command of his century. The general would read the legionary's previous citations aloud, then praise the soldier publicly for his latest act of gallantry, promoting him and often giving him a lump sum cash award or putting him on double pay, before presenting him with decorations for valor, to the applause of the men of his legion. Polybius recorded these awards, which continued to be presented for hundreds of years: [Poly., VI, 39]

THE SPEAR: for wounding an enemy in a skirmish or other action where it was not necessary to engage in single combat and therefore expose himself to danger. Literally "the Ancient Unadorned Spear," a silver, later golden, token. No award was made if the wound was inflicted in the course of a pitched battle, as the soldier was then acting under orders to expose himself to danger. The emperor Trajan appears to be presenting a spear to a soldier in a scene on Trajan's Column.

THE SILVER CUP: for killing and stripping an enemy in a skirmish or other action where it was not necessary to engage in single combat. For the same deed, a cavalryman received a decoration to place on his horse's harness.

THE SILVER STANDARD: for valor in battle. First awarded in the first century AD.

THE TORQUE AND AMULAE: for valor in battle. A golden necklace and wrist bracelets. Frequently won by centurions and cavalrymen.

THE GOLD CROWN: for outstanding bravery in battle.

THE MURAL CROWN: awarded to the first Roman soldier over an enemy city wall in an assault. Crenellated, and of gold.

THE NAVAL CROWN: for outstanding bravery in a sea battle. A golden crown decorated with ships' beaks.

THE CROWN OF VALOR: awarded to the first Roman soldier to cross the ramparts of an enemy camp in an assault.

THE CIVIC CROWN: awarded to the first man to scale an enemy wall. Made from oak leaves, the Civic Crown was also awarded for saving the life of a fellow soldier, or shielding him from danger. The man whose life was saved was required to present his savior with a golden crown, and to honor him as if he were his father for the rest of his days. It was considered to be Rome's highest military decoration, and the holder of the Civic Crown was venerated by Romans and given pride of place in civic parades. Julius Caesar was awarded the Civic Crown when serving as a young tribune in the assault on Mytilene, capital of the Greek island of Lesbos.

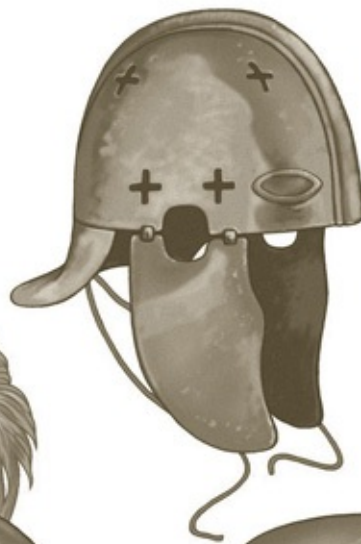
Entire units could also receive citations, and these were displayed on their standards.

IX. LEGIONARY UNIFORMS AND EQUIPMENT

In early republican days, each legionary was expected to provide his own uniform, equipment and personal weapons, and to replace them when they were worn out, damaged or lost. After the consul Marius' reforms, the State provided uniforms, arms and equipment to conscripts.

The tunic and personal legionary equipment remained basically unchanged for hundreds of years. By Augustan times, the legionary wore a woolen tunic made of two pieces of cloth sewn together, with openings for the head and arms, and with short sleeves. It came to just above the knees at the front, a little lower at the back. The military tunic was shorter than that worn by civilians. In cold weather, it was not unusual for two tunics to be worn, one over the other. Sometimes more than two were worn—Augustus wore up to four tunics at a time in winter months. [Suet., II, 82]

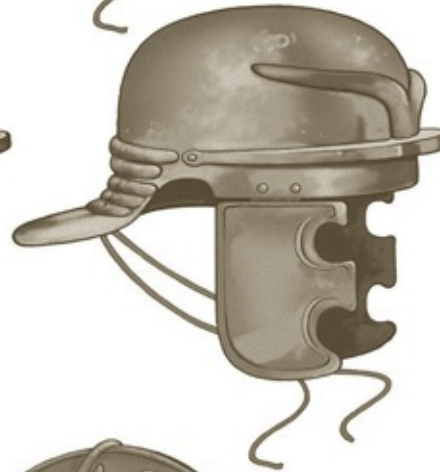
With no examples surviving to the present day, the color of the legionary tunic has always been hotly debated. Many historians believe that it was a red berry color and that this was common to legions and guard units. Some authors argue that legionary tunics were white. Vitruvius, Rome's chief architect during the early decades of the empire, wrote that, of all the natural colors used in dyeing fabrics and for painting, red and yellow were by far the easiest and cheapest to obtain. [Vitr., OA, VII, 1–2]



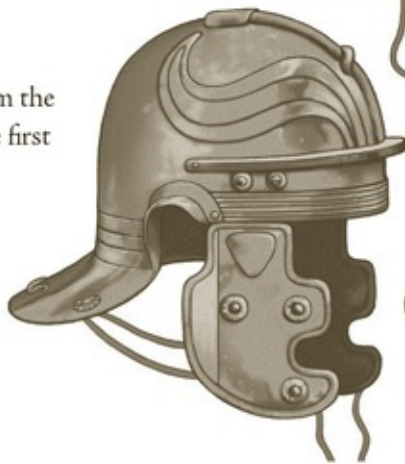
A cheap fourth-century helmet. It offered less protection than earlier styles



The coolus-style helmet, shown here with removable horsehair parade crest, was in use until AD 100



The Imperial-Gallic helmet, common from 15 BC until the mid first century



A style in use from the second half of the first century



An early second-century helmet, fitted with cruciform protection against curved Dacian swords

LEGIONARY HELMETS

Second-century Roman general Arrian described the tunics worn by cavalry during exercises as predominantly a red berry color, or, in some cases, an orange-brown color—a product of red. He also described multicolored cavalry exercise tunics. [Arrian, *TH*, 34] But no tunic described by Arrian was white or natural in color. Red was also the color of unit banners, and of legates' ensigns and cloaks.

Tacitus, in describing Vitellius' entry into Rome in July AD 69, noted that marching ahead of the standards in Vitellius' procession were "the camp-prefects, the tribunes, and the highest-ranked centurions, in white robes." [Tac., *H*, II, 89] These were the loose ceremonial robes worn by officers when they took part in religious processions. That Tacitus specifically notes they were white indicates that he was differentiating these garments from the non-white tunics worn by the military.

The one color that legionaries and auxiliaries were least likely to wear was blue. This color, not unnaturally, was associated by Romans with the sea. Pompey the Great's son Sextus Pompeius believed he had a special association with Neptune, god of the sea, and in the 40s to 30s BC, when admiral of Rome's fleets in the western Mediterranean, he wore a blue cloak to honor Neptune. After

Sextus rebelled and was defeated by Marcus Agrippa's fleets, Octavian granted Agrippa the right to use a blue banner. Apart from the men of the 30th Ulpia Legion, whose emblems related to Neptune, any of Rome's military wore blue in the imperial era, it would have been her sailors and/or marines.

Whatever the weather, and irrespective of the fact that auxiliaries in the Roman army, both infantry and cavalry, wore breeches, Roman legionaries did not begin wearing pants, which were for centuries considered foreign, until the second century. Some scholars suggest that legionaries wore nothing beneath their tunics, others suggest they wore a form of loin cloth, which was common among civilians.

Over his tunic the legionary could wear a *subarmalis*, a sleeveless padded vest, and over that a cuirass—an armored vest. Because of their body armor, legionaries were classified as “heavy infantry.” Early legionary armor took the form of a sleeveless leather jerkin on to which were sown small ringlets of iron mail. Legionaries and most auxiliaries continued to wear the mail cuirass for many centuries; there was no concept of superseding military hardware as there is today.

Early in the first century a new form of armor began to enter service, the *lorica segmentata*, made up of solid metal segments joined by bronze hinges and held together by leather straps, covering torsos and shoulders. This segmented legionary armor was the forerunner of the armor worn by mounted knights in the Middle Ages. By AD 75, a simplified version of the segmented infantry armor was in widespread use. Called today the Newstead type, because an example was found in modern times at Newstead in Scotland, it stayed in service for the next 300 years.

On his head, the legionary wore a conical helmet of bronze or iron. There were a number of variations on the evolving “jockey cap” design, but most had the common features of hinged cheek flaps of metal, tied together under the chin, a horizontal projection at the rear to protect the back of the neck, like a fireman's helmet, and a small brow ridge at the front.

First- and second-century legionary helmets unearthed in modern times have revealed occasional traces of felt inside, suggesting a lining. In the fourth century, the Roman officer Ammianus Marcellinus wrote of “the cap which one of us wore under his helmet.” This cap was probably made of felt, for Ammianus described how he and two rank and file soldiers with him used the cap “in the manner of a sponge” to soak up water from a well to quench their thirst in the Mesopotamian desert. [Amm., XIX, 8, 8] By the end of the fourth century, legionaries were wearing “Pamonian leather caps” beneath their helmets, which, said Vegetius, “were formerly introduced by the ancients to a different design,” indicating the caps beneath helmets had been in common use for a long time. [Vege., *MIR*, 10]

After a legion had been wiped out in AD 86 by the lethally efficient *falx*, the curved, double-handed Dacian sword, which had sliced through helmets of unfortunate Roman troops, legion helmets had cruciform reinforcing strips added over the crown to provide better protection. It was not uncommon for owners of helmets to inscribe their initials on the inside or on the cheek flap. A legionary helmet unearthed at Colchester in Britain had three sets of initials stamped inside it, indicating that helmets passed from owner to owner. [W&D, 4, n. 56] In Syria in AD 54, lax legionaries of the 6th Ferrata and 10th Fretensis legions sold their helmets while still in service. [Tac., *A*, XIII, 35]

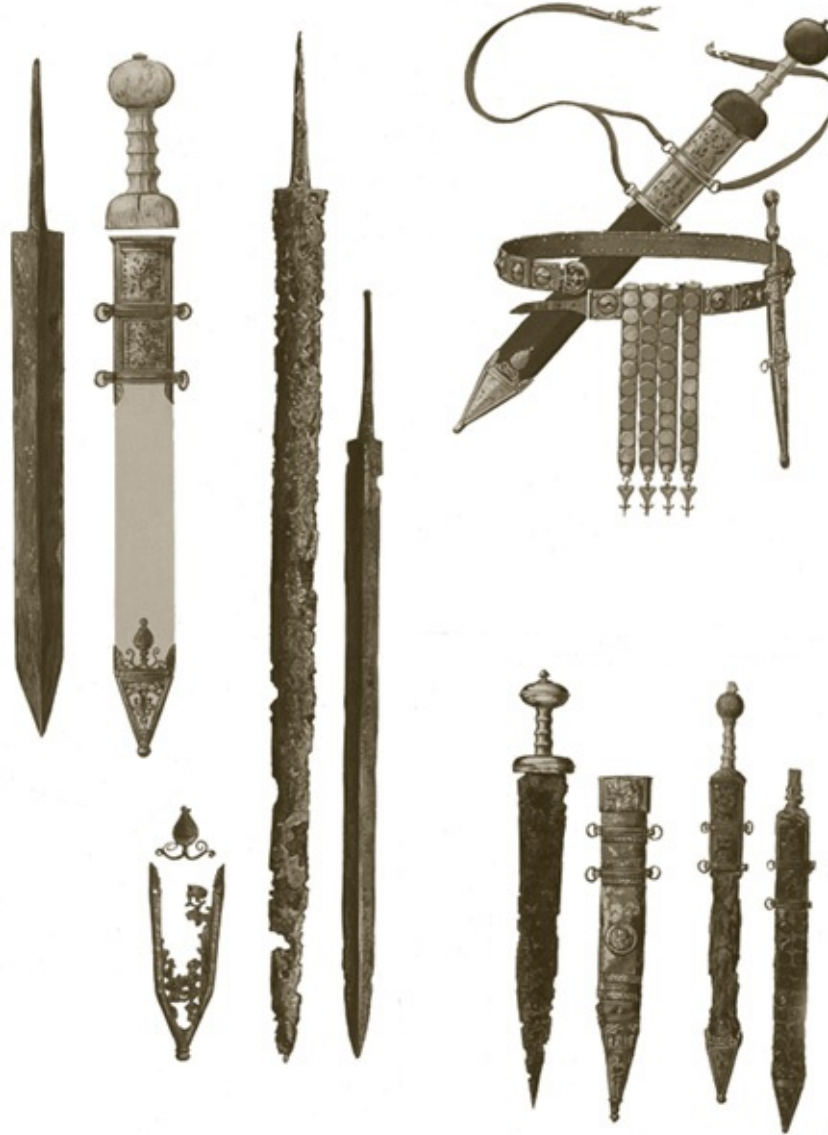
During republican times, Rome's heavy-armored troops, the *hastati*, wore eagle feathers on their helmets to make themselves seem taller to their enemies. By the time of Julius Caesar, this had become a crest of horsehair on the top of legionary helmets. These crests were worn in battle until the early part of the first century, before being relegated to parade use. The color of the crest is debatable. Some archaeological discoveries suggest they were dyed yellow. Arrian, governor of Cappadocia in the reign of Hadrian, described yellow helmet crests on the thousands of Roman cavalrymen under his command. [Arr., *TH*, 34] The feathers of the republican *hastati* were sometimes purple, sometimes black, which possibly evolved into purple or black legionary helmet crests. [Poly., VI, 23]

The helmet was the only item of equipment a legionary was permitted to remove while digging trenches and building fortifications. Helmets were slung around the neck while on the march. The legionary also wore a neck scarf, tied at the throat, originally to prevent his armor from chafing his neck. The scarf became fashionable, with auxiliary units quickly adopting them, too. It is possible that different units used different colored scarves. On his feet the legionary wore heavy-duty hobnailed leather sandals called *caligulae*, which left his toes exposed. At his waist he wore the *cingulum*, an apron of four to six metal strands which by the fourth century was no longer used.

X. THE LEGIONARY'S WEAPONS

The imperial legionary's first-use weapon was the javelin, the *pilum*, of which he would carry two or three, the shorter 5 feet (152 centimeters) in length, the longer, 7 feet (213 centimeters). Primarily thrown, javelins were weighted at the business end and, from Marius' day, were designed to bend once they struck, to prevent the enemy from throwing them back. "At present they are seldom used by us," said Vegetius at the end of the fourth century, "but are the principal weapon of the barbarian heavy-armed foot." [Vege., *MIR*, 1] By Vegetius' day, a lighter spear, with less penetrating power, was used by Roman troops.

The legionary carried a short sword, the *gladius*, its blade 20 inches (50 centimeters) long, double edged, and with a sharp point for effective jabbing. Spanish steel was preferred, leading to the *gladius* becoming known as "the Spanish sword." It was kept in a scabbard, which was worn on the legionary's right side, in contrast to officers, who wore it on the left.



Top right: Roman sword, a gladius, with baldric and dagger belt, mid to late first century AD. Bottom right: an early first-century AD gladius from Rheingoenheim and a sheath from the Rhine; a gladius found at Pompeii, and another now in a museum Mainz. On the left: other swords found on the Rhine.

By the fourth century, the gladius had been replaced by a longer sword similar to the *spatha* carried by auxiliary cavalry from Augustus' time. The legionary was also equipped with a short dagger, the *pugio*, worn in a scabbard on the left hip, which was still being carried into the fifth century. Sword and dagger scabbards were frequently highly decorated with silver, gold, jet and ceramic inlay, even precious stones.

The legionary shield, the *scutum*, was curved and elongated. Polybius described the legionary shield as convex in shape, with straight sides, 4 feet (121 centimeters) long and 2½ feet (75 centimeters) across. The thickness at the rim was a palm's breadth. It consisted of two layers of wood fastened together with bull's hide glue. The outer surface was covered with canvas and then with smooth calf-skin, glued in place. The edges of the shield were rimmed with iron strips, as a protection against sword blows and wear and tear. The center of the shield was fixed with an iron or bronze boss to which the handle was attached on the reverse side. The boss could deflect the blows of swords, javelins and stones. [Poly., VI, 23]

On to the leather surface of the shield was painted the emblem of the legion to which the owner belonged. Vegetius, writing at the end of the fourth century, said that "every cohort had its shields painted in a manner peculiar to itself." [Vege., *MIR*, II] While Vegetius was talking in the past tense, several examples suggest that each cohort of the Praetorian Guard may have used different thunderbolt emblems on their shields. The shield was always carried on the left arm in battle, with a strap over the arm taking much of the weight. On the march, it was protected from the elements with

leather cover, and slung over the legionary's left shoulder. By the third century, the legionary shield had become oval, and much less convex.

XI. LEGIONARY TRAINING

First-century Jewish general and historian Flavius Josephus described the training of Rome's legions as bloodless battles, and their battles as bloody drills. "Every soldier is exercised every day," he said "which is why they bear the fatigue of battles so easily." [Jos., *JW*, 3, 5, 1]

The legionary's training officer was his *optio*, who ensured that his men trained and exercised. The Roman soldier's sword training involved long hours at wooden posts. He was taught to thrust, not cut using the sharp point of his sword. "A stab," said Vegetius, "although it penetrates just 2 inches [5 centimeters], is generally fatal." [Vege., *MIR*, 1]

A legionary also learned to march in formation, and to deploy in various infantry maneuvers. In standard battle formation soldiers would form up in ranks of eight men deep by ten wide, with a gap 3 feet (1 meter) between each legionary, who, in the opening stage of a battle, would launch first his javelins then draw his sword. Withdrawing auxiliaries could pass through the gaps in the ranks, until, on command, the legionaries closed ranks. In close order, compacted against his nearest comrades, the legionary could link his shield with his neighbor's for increased protection. His century might run to the attack, or steadily advance at the march.

In battle order, the century's centurion was the first man on the left of the first rank. The century's *tesserarius* was last on the left in the rear rank, while the *optio* stood at the extreme right in the rear rank, from where it was his task to keep the century in order and to prevent desertions. Basic battle formations included the straight line, oblique and crescent. For defense against cavalry, the wedge or stationary hollow square would be employed, or a partial hollow square with the men on three sides facing outward while the tightly packed formation continued to shuffle forward. The *orbis*, or ring, was a formation of last resort for a surrounded force.

Apart from route marches, legionaries, from the time of the consul Marius, were also trained to run considerable distances carrying full equipment. In addition, the legionary learned defensive and offensive techniques, and to rally round his unit's standard, or any standard in an emergency. The famous *testudo*, or tortoise, involved locked shields over heads and at sides, providing protection from a rain of spears, arrows, stones, etc. The *testudo*, "most often square but sometimes rounded or oblong," was primarily used when legions were trying to undermine the walls of enemy fortresses, or to force a gate. [Arr., *TH*, II] Double *testudos* are also known, with one group of men standing on the raised shields of a formation beneath them and in turn fixing their shields over their own heads.

XII. LEGIONARY RATIONS AND DIET

Cassius Dio wrote of the diet of legionaries: "They require kneaded bread and wine and oil." [Dio, LXII, 5] Legionaries were given a grain ration, which they were expected to grind into flour using each squad's grinding stone. They cooked their own loaves, typically round and cut into eight slices, one for each member of the squad. Legionaries drizzled their bread with olive oil. They also ate meat, but this was considered supplementary to their bread ration. Coffee, tomatoes and bananas were unknown to the Romans, as was sugar; honey was their only sweetener.

The quantity of grain provided for the troops depended on the available supply and the generosity of commanders. In Polybius' day it was half a bushel per legionary a month, and the cost was deducted from the soldier's pay. In imperial times, the legionary's grain ration was free. Much of the general population of Rome at that time was also provided with free grain by the government,

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