

Name: _____

Period: _____

Roman Army

Evolution of Roman Tactics and Strategy:

Roman military tactics and strategy evolved from that typical of a small tribal host seeking local hegemony, to massive operations encompassing a world empire.

This advance was affected by changing trends in Roman political, social and economic life, and that of the larger Mediterranean world, but it was also undergirded by a distinctive "Roman way" of war. This approach included a tendency towards standardization and systematization, practical borrowing, copying and adapting from outsiders, flexibility in tactics and methods, a strong sense of discipline, a ruthless persistence that sought comprehensive victory, and a cohesion brought about by the ideal of Roman Citizenship under arms – embodied in the Legion.

Training, Arms and Equipment:

Over time the military system changed its equipment and roles, but throughout the course of Roman history, it always remained a discipline and professional war machine. Soldiers carried out training common to every army, from initial muster, arms and weapons drill, formation marching and tactical exercises. The typical training regime consisted of gymnastics and swimming, to build physical strength and fitness, fighting with armatura (wooden weapons), to learn and master combat techniques and long "Route" marches with full battle gear and equipment to build stamina, endurance and to accustom them to the hardships of campaigns.

Combat training exercises consisted of thrusting a wooden gladius into a "Quintin" (wooden dummy) while wearing full armor, and sparring with one another. Legionaries were training to thrust with their gladii because they could defend themselves behind

their large shields while stabbing the enemy. The Romans were well aware that a wound of only 3-4 cm could cause death, so they emphasized quick, stabbing techniques to vital areas or between gaps in armour.

Contemporary artistic depictions of Roman soldiers fighting, depict them as standing with their left foot and shield forward with their right foot back and turned outwards ninety degrees. This indicates a boxing like style of fighting where the shield in the left is used to jab and harass the enemy while the sword in the right is used to deliver the final blow. Other training exercises taught the legionary to obey commands and assume battle formations.

A legionary typically carried about 60 pounds of armour, weapons and equipment. This load consisted of armour, sword shield, two pila (one heavy, one light) and 15 days of food rations. There were also tools for digging and constructing a castra, the legion's fortified base camp.

At the end of training the legionary had to swear an oath of loyalty to the *Senatus Populusque Romanus* or the Senate and the Roman People and later the emperor. The soldier was then given a diploma and sent off to fight for his living and the glory and honour of Rome.

Operations and Tactics

Command, control and structure. Once the soldier had finished his training he was typically assigned to a legion, the basic mass fighting force. The legion was split into ten sub-units called cohorts, roughly comparable to a modern infantry battalion. The cohorts were further sub-divided into three maniples, which in turn were split into two centuries of about 60-100 men each. Total strength of a legion when fully staffed stood at around 60 centuries or 6,000 men. The first cohort in a legion was usually the strongest, with the fullest personnel complement and with the most skilled, experienced men. Several legions grouped together made up a distinctive field force or "army".

Supreme command of either legion or army was by consul or proconsul, sometimes holding public office. In the early Republican period it was customary for an army to have dual commands, with different consuls holding the office on alternate days. In later centuries this was phased out in favor of one overall army commander. The legati were officers of senatorial rank who assisted the supreme commander. Tribunes were young men of aristocratic rank who often supervised administrative tasks like camp construction. Centurions (roughly equivalent in rank to today's non-commissioned or junior officers, but functioning as modern captains in field operations) commanded cohorts, maniples and centuries. An assortment of specialist groups like engineers and artificers were sometimes used. An in-depth analysis of ranks, types, and historical units including their evolution over time is beyond the scope of this article.

The approach march. Once the legion was deployed on an operation, the marching began. The approach to the battlefield was made in several columns, enhancing maneuverability. Typically a strong vanguard preceded the main body, and included scouts, cavalry and light troops. A tribune or other officer often accompanied the vanguard to survey the terrain for possible camp locations. Flank and reconnaissance elements were also deployed to provide the usual covering security. Behind the vanguard came the main body of heavy infantry. Each legion marched as a distinct formation and was accompanied by its own baggage train. The last legion usually provided the rear force, although several recently raised units might occupy this final echelon.

Construction of fortified camps. Legions on a campaign typically established a strong field camp, complete with palisade and a deep ditch, providing a basis for supply storage, troop marshaling and defense. Camps were recreated each time the army moved, and were constructed with a view to both military necessity and religious symbolism. There were always four gateways, connected by two main criss-crossing streets, with the intersection at a concentration of command tents in the

center. Space was also made for an altar and religious gathering area. Everything was standardized, from the positioning of baggage, equipment and specific army units, to the duties of officers who were to set up sentries, pickets and orders for the next day's march. Construction could take between 2 to 5 hours with part of the army laboring, while the rest stood guard, depending on the tactical situation. No other ancient army persisted over such a long period in systematic camp construction like the Romans, even if the army rested for only a single day.

Breaking camp and marching. After a regimented breakfast at the allocated time, trumpets were sounded and the camp's tents and huts were dismantled and preparations made for departure. The trumpet then sounded again with the signal for "stand by to march". Mules and wagons of the baggage train would be loaded and units formed up. The camp would then be fired to the ground to prevent its later occupation and use by the enemy. The trumpets would then be sounded for a final time and then the troops asked three times whether they were ready, to which they were expected to shout together "Ready!", before marching off

Intelligence. Good Roman commanders did not hesitate to exploit useful intelligence, particularly where a siege situation or impending clash in the field was developing. Information was gathered from spies, collaborators, diplomats and envoys, and allies.

Logistics. Roman logistics were the best in the ancient world over the centuries- from the deployment of purchasing agents to systematically buy provisions during a campaign, to the construction of roads and supply caches, to the rental of shipping if the troops had to move by water. Heavy equipment and material (tents, artillery, extra weapons and equipment, millstones etc.) was moved by pack animal and cart, while troops carried weighty individual packs with them, including staves and shovels for constructing the fortified camps. Typical of all armies, local opportunities were also exploited by troops on the spot, and the fields of peasant farmers unlucky

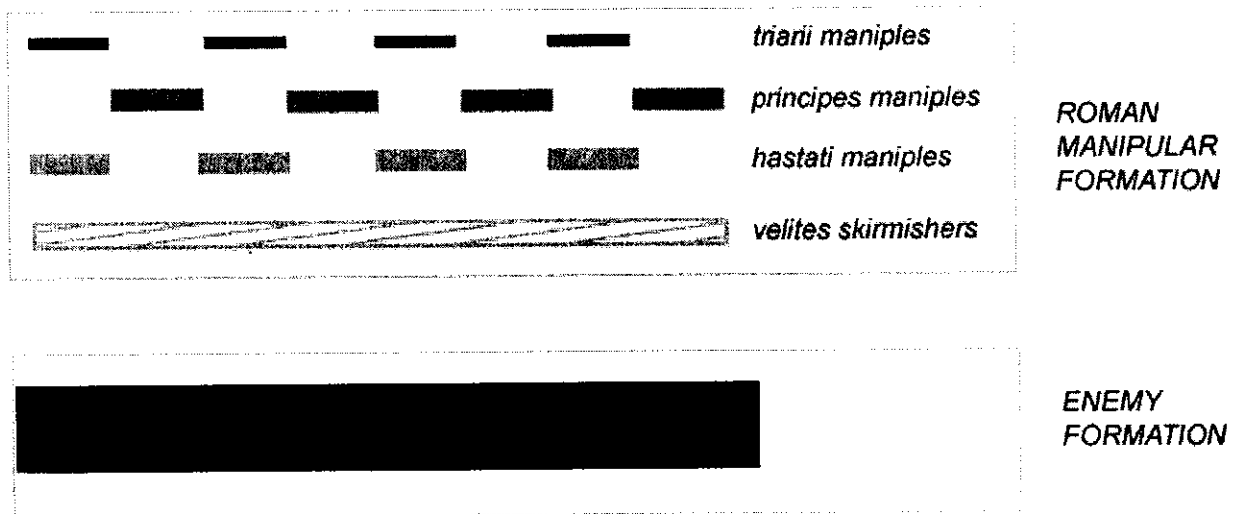
enough to be near the zone of conflict might be stripped to meet army needs. As with most armed forces, an assortment of traders, hucksters, prostitutes and other miscellaneous service providers trailed in the wake of the Roman fighting men.

Deployment for battle- the "triple line" triplex acies:

Pre-battle maneuver gave the competing commanders a feel for the impending clash, but final outcomes could be unpredictable, even the start of hostilities. Skirmishing could get out of hand, launching both main forces towards one another. Political considerations, exhaustion of supplies, or even rivalry between commanders for glory could also spark a forward launch, as at the Battle of the Trebia River.

Maneuver within the triple line:

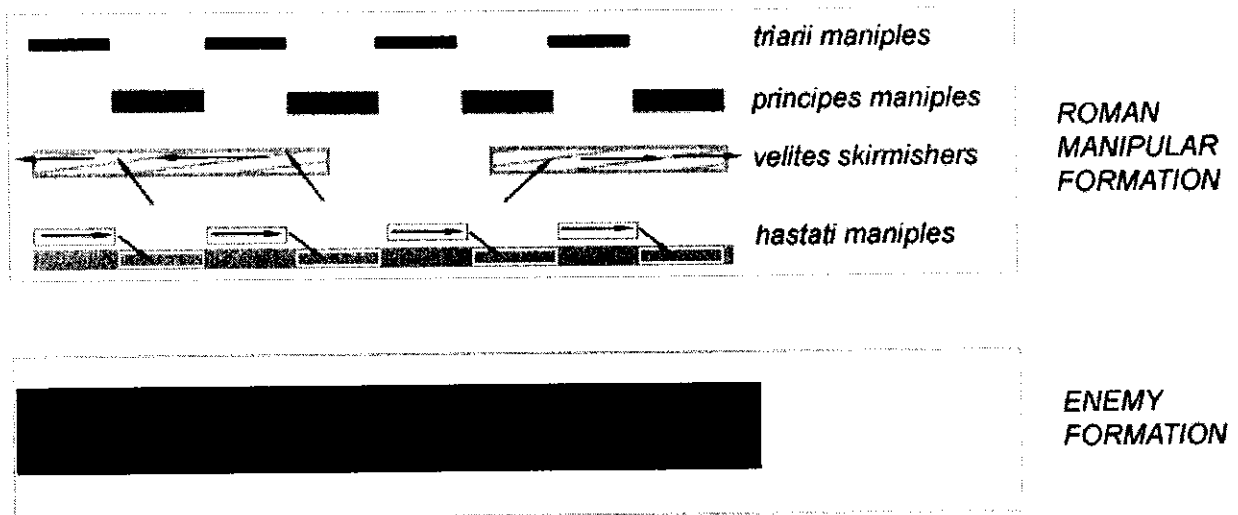
Roman manipular disposition after deployment but prior to engagement



As the army approached its enemy, the velites in front would throw their javelins at the enemy and then retreat through the gaps in the lines. This was an important innovation since in other armies of the period skirmishers would have to either retreat through their own armies ranks, causing confusion, or else flee around either flank of their own army. After the velites had retreated through the hastati, the 'posterior' century would march to the left and then forward so that they presented

a solid line, creating a solid line of soldiers. The same procedure would be employed as they passed through the second and third ranks or turned to the side to channel down the gap between the first and second rows on route to help guard the legion's flanks.

Roman manipular disposition after velites engagement and retreat



At this point, the legion then presented a solid line to the enemy and the legion was in the correct formation for engagement. When the enemy closed, the hastati would charge. If they were losing the fight, the 'posterior' century returned to its position creating gaps again. Then the maniples would fall back through the gaps in the principes, who followed the same procedure to form a battle line and charge. If the principes could not break the enemy, they would retreat behind the triarii and the whole army would leave the battlefield in good order.

The manipulatory system allowed engaging every kind of enemy even in rough terrain, because the legion had both flexibility and toughness according to the deployment of its lines. Lack of a strong cavalry corps however, was a major flaw of the Roman forces.

In the later imperial army, the general deployment was very similar, with the cohorts deploying in quincunx pattern. In a reflection of the earlier placement of the veteran

triarrii in the rear, the less experienced cohorts - usually the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 6th, and 8th - were in the front; the more experienced cohorts - 1st, 5th, 7th, 9th, and 10th - were placed behind.

Variations in formation:

The above is only standard procedure and was often modified; for example, at Zama, Scipio deployed his entire legion in a single line to envelop Hannibal's army just as Hannibal had done at Cannae. A brief summary of alternative formations known to have been used is shown below:

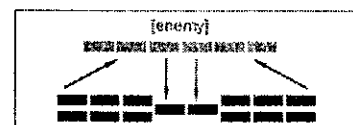
Alternative formations and variations in deployment



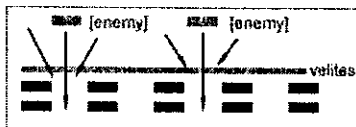
wedge formation - lines thinned to provide concentration in centre to smash through enemy lines



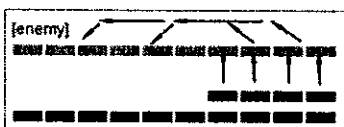
single line defence / extended line - maniples all deployed in a single line to overlap enemy flanks or meet wider enemy formation and protect own flanks



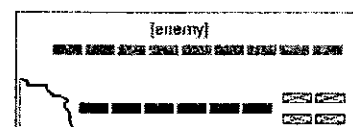
Cannae tactic (weak centre) - centre left weak deliberately to invite enemy centre attack and envelopment. Required tactical reserve behind apparently weak centre



maniple channels / Zama tactic - channels left between maniples for specific purpose of harassing and directing enemy war elephants away from heavy infantry. Tactically very dangerous since heavy infantry flanks vulnerable



strong right flank / rolling up the line - strength would be concentrated on the right flank, which would attempt to break the enemy left flank, and then "roll up the line" attacking the enemy from the rear.



protected flank - one flank protected by a natural barrier such as hillside, lake, etc. Light infantry and cavalry all concentrated on the opposite flank