

# **CITY IN HISTORY**

**CRP 213**

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## **Warfare, Defense and Battle Strategies in Republic of Rome and Roman Imperial Period and Their Manifestations on the Settlement Plan**

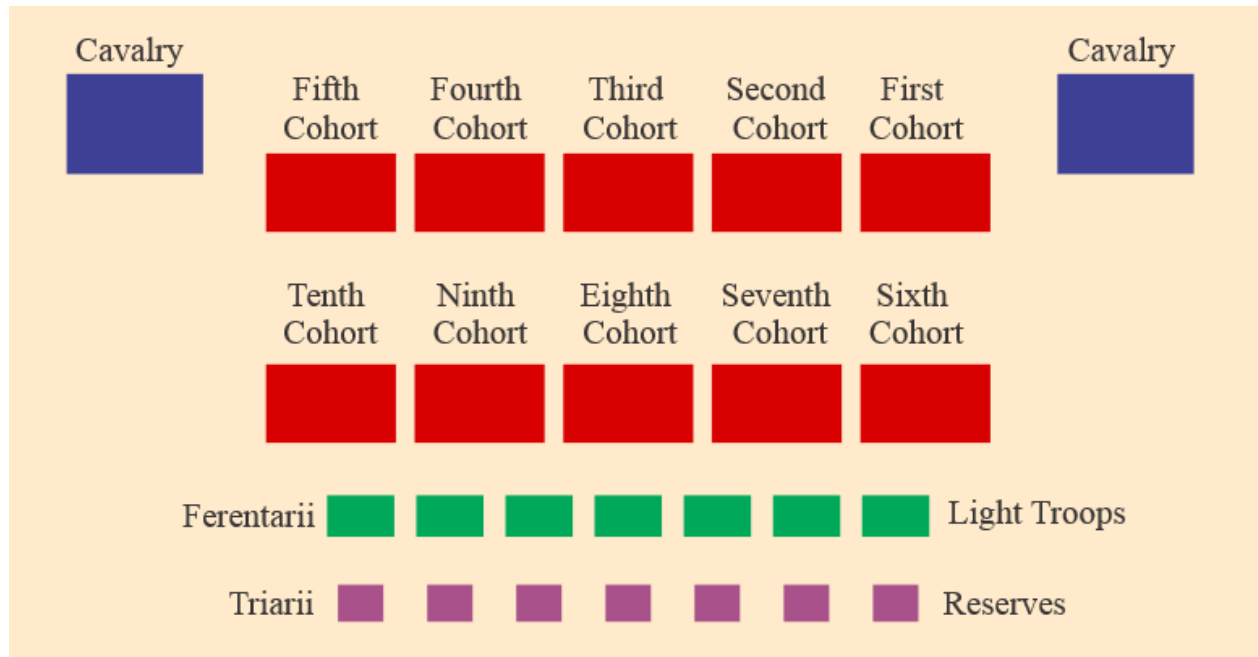
*"We find that the Romans owed the conquest of the world to no other cause than continual military training, exact observance of discipline in their camps, and unwearied cultivation of the other arts of war."*

Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus, 4<sup>th</sup> century AD

What was first established as a modest Kingdom, later turned into a Republic which then gave rise to the most powerful Empire of its period, who not only conquered but also ruled a majority the world for over a thousand years. Its birth goes as back as 753 BC, when it was founded on a hilltop by the River Tiber. In a matter of centuries, slowly but surely, that city-scaled, small Kingdom became an extremely dominant and prospering Imperial power. Its transition into a Republic dates back to 509 BC and while it mostly thrived on its cultural aspects at those times, its emergence as an Empire rooted from its strict military organization. Rome not only engulfed and assimilated other cultures, it also incorporated them into its core both cultural and military-wise. It imposed its superior culture on non-Romans sometimes by force, but mostly as a gesture of kindness and generosity. But what made Rome so superior and paramount that other groups voluntarily wanted to be a part of it? Was it Rome's dominant culture, or was it Rome's unshakable and steady power and the sense of security and belonging it provided?

Rome owed most of this success to its unyielding and invasive socio-political and military establishments. The Romans regarded themselves to be descending from Mars, the God of War. This belief manifested itself on the military disciplines and strategies that they held to a great importance. The Roman army's prominence comes from the professionalism and ordonnance of its soldiers and commanders. Typically, a Roman army consisted of legions, which were the largest units of the army, consisting of approximately 3000 soldier in earliest formations, and rising up to as much as 5200 soldiers in the Imperial Period. These soldiers were referred to as legionnaires and were under the command of a Praetor or a Legatos. Each legion consisted of 30 divisions –or maniples- which, then further divided into 3 lines. The maniples were close in formation, ordained and highly maneuverable and mobile. They carried light-weight weapons, short, double-edged swords called Gladius Hispaniensis, to enhance their

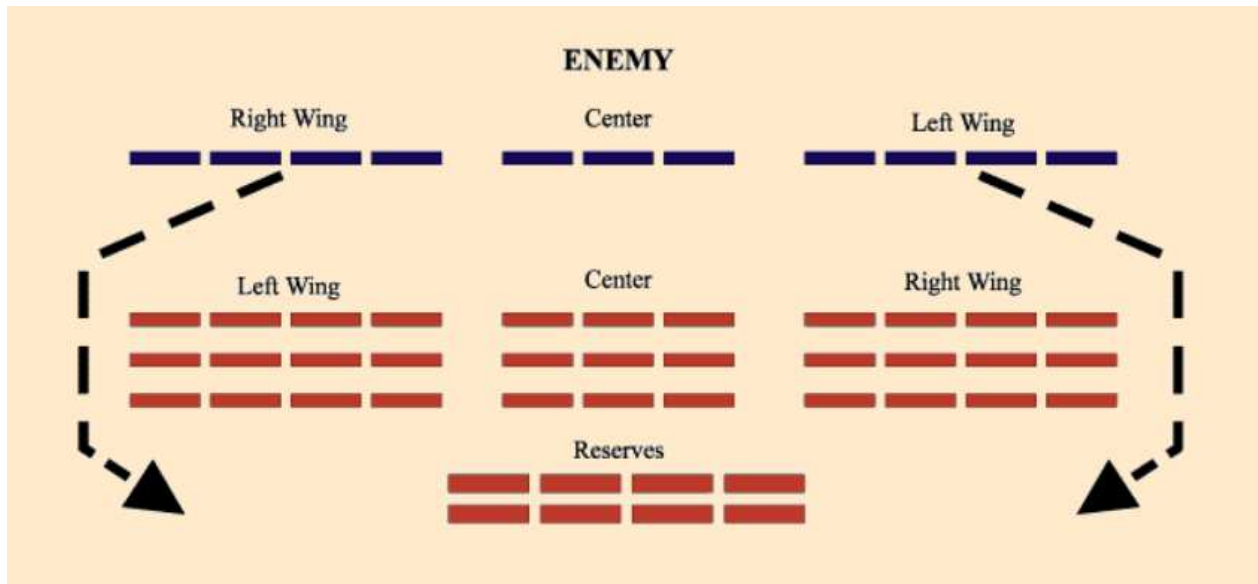
mobility. They were highly trained to surmount complex military strategies and maneuvers, such as pivoting in battle, rotating their encounter with enemy in order to allow the passage of new troops into the battlefield. Later on, as Rome went on expanding and its organization began shifting towards that of an Empire, the maniple formation began to fail in organizational and tactical aspects. What emerged instead of the maniple formation was the cohort formation. In this new adopted strategy, a legion consisted of 10 cohorts of approximately 4500 soldiers as the tactical unit. Cohorts, then divided to form the smallest units of the Roman army consisted of approximately 100 soldiers and was called a century, each century was commanded by a Centurion. Each Roman legion had an Aquilifer, who carried the pendant or the eagle. The eagle was considered to be one of the most symbolic aspects of a Roman legion, if it was somehow lost during the battle, the whole legion faced the risk of disbandment. Other standards of the Roman legion consisted of the imago, the legionary symbol, and vexilla flags. Imago was carried to pay tribute to the emperor and vexilla flags were used when detachment troops were being dispatched.



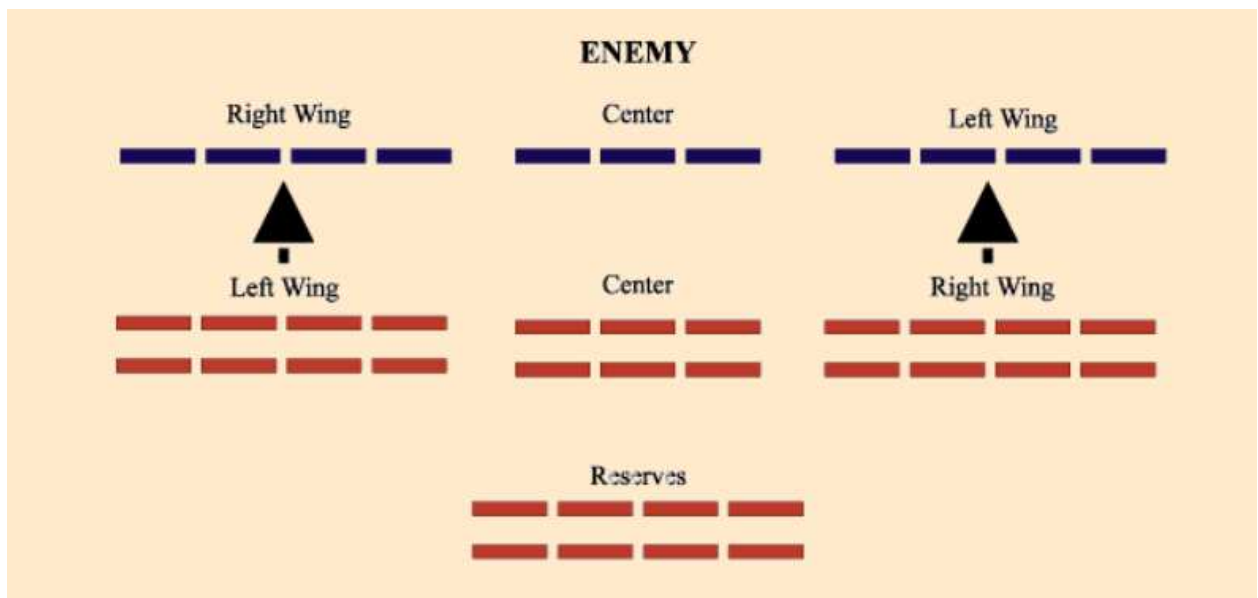
**Figure 1:** Standard legion formation.

The prominent success and dominance of the Roman army was ensured partially by the skillfully led strategies of the legion commander, and partially by the high motivation of the troops. All troops were made to swear a sacred oath of allegiance, called the *Sacramentum*, to the emperor to secure their loyalty and encourage military discipline, called the *Disciplina Militaris*, that the Roman army was renowned for. This high order of the army was further secured through a continual practice of reward and punishment. The soldiers frequently received promotions for taking initiative in the battlefield and for their displays of heroic courage. In the Imperial period, a military treasury particularly created for military expenses, called *Aerarium Militare*, was funded through taxation. These rewards promoted order and increased motivation on the battlefield. However, in case of any discordance or mutiny, certain measures were taken as punishments. Deterrent factors such as decimation were implemented on disloyal or in particular, cowardly troops, during which, the troops were divided into groups of 10 and casted lots. The soldier who casted the different lot than the rest got beaten to death with clubs by the remaining 9 soldiers. This display of violent intimidation conveyed the message that if the *Sacramentum* oath of loyalty and allegiance was broken, one would lose all his rights as a Roman.

By this way, once the discipline and order was ensured, more goal-oriented strategies could have been carried out on the battlefield. More often than not, commanders of the Roman legions adopted an aggressive and full frontal battle strategy. However, it was the commander's duty to improvise and adapt the battle strategy regarding the enemy that is being faced and the environmental conditions that the enemy is being faced in. The structuring and functioning of each battle strategy is reinforced with the resolve of the commander and his troops. And the more meticulously that strategy was enforced, the more likely that army was to triumph. In general, the battle formation was done in such a way that the new recruits were almost exclusively placed in the central front of the legion, in front of the experienced soldiers. The reasons for this placement were to give the recruits a sense of confidence, knowing that experienced soldiers were right behind them in the battle, to stop them from fleeing the battlefield if they ever lost courage, and to eliminate the weakest links of the army in the earliest phase of the battle and the loss of an inexperienced recruit would not cause that great of a harm.



**Figure 2:** The marching formation.



**Figure 3:** The fourth formation, shock value.

The foundations of the Roman battle strategies were to maintain the order within troops and to increase effectiveness on the battlefield. Even though every circumstance was dealt with in its own customized way, standardized strategies like these came in handy in the battle conditions with particularly disciplined and well-organized legions.

In spite of their offensive battle strategy, the Romans put great emphasis and importance of defense techniques as well. This natural need for protection manifested itself mainly as fortification walls not only in military camps, but also in Roman cities. Romans took such a great notice of the security of the settlement issue, so much so that the fortification walls around Roman cities were built even before the city itself and these walls limited the urban macroform in accordance with the desired settlement plan. The orderly fashion of military legions reflected itself on the settlement plans of Roman cities as a grid-iron plan within the city walls. Special, full military cities called garrisons, to which they would send in the soldiers first and civilian families later to form the city sets an example of the military-urban connections. Also, military base camps called castra were established in grid-iron pattern for facilitated administration and order. They were mostly rectangular or square in shape with ditches around them and towers built within the fortification walls. These ditches and towers would provide a natural high ground and better sight for the army in case of an attack. Even though city walls are mostly associated with feudal regime, fortification walls were an impeccable and essential element of a typical Roman settlement. The protected area would imply the security and stability that the Empire provided and the meticulously designed and implemented order within these walls would reflect the cultural superiority and civility of the Roman ways. The military tactics of Roman legions not only carried security and order to its occupancies but also the advanced culture and technology of the Roman Empire, such as roads, infrastructures, aqueducts and sewage systems. The very basic premises of Roman cities remained intact regardless of the tenancy of a settlement, whether it be military, civil or both.

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Figures 1,2,3: *Formations of the Legion / Strategy & Tactics / The Roman Military*, [romanmilitary.net/strategy/legform/](http://romanmilitary.net/strategy/legform/).