

The Roman army and British resistance

By Michael Coleman

NARRATOR: By the year 47 AD, just four years after they'd arrived, the Romans had conquered most of the south and east of Britain from what is now Exeter to as far as what is now Lincoln. This was fast going in those days! The Roman army really was the greatest the world had ever seen. The Roman army was made up of professional soldiers, men who were paid to fight. They'd agreed to join the army for 25 years. There were two kinds of soldier: legionaries and auxiliaries...

LEGIONARY: I am a legionary! We're true Romans and we're the best fighters in the army!

AUXILIARY: I'm an auxiliary. I joined the army after those rotten legionaries invaded my country and captured me. Well, it was better than being executed.

LEGIONARY: All legionaries belong to a group of 80 men, called a century. That's why our group leader is called a centurion.

AUXILIARY: Auxiliaries belong to a regiment called an auxilia. An auxilia has 1,000 men!

LEGIONARY: Well, our centuries are grouped into legions. That's where we legionaries get our name from. And a Roman legion has 5,000 men, so there!

AUXILIARY: All right, but when it comes to a battle, which group gets put at the front? The auxilia!

LEGIONARY: Yeh – because it's your job to protect us legionaries. Which means you get killed first! Ha-ha! Boo-sucks to you!

NARRATOR: Whether you were a legionary or an auxiliary, life in the Roman army was tough and dangerous. But it was well paid – and not just in money...



History Clips: The Romans

- LEGIONARY: Wa-hey! I've just been paid!
- AUXILIARY: So have I! Lots of lovely coins...
- LEGIONARY: And...a big bag of salt!
- NARRATOR: Yes, soldiers were partly paid in salt, which they used to stop their food going mouldy. Nearly 2,000 years later we still say that somebody who does a good job 'is worth their salt'. Another reason for the success of the Roman army was its fighting equipment. It wasn't just good – it was very good!
- BRITISH CHIEF: Trusty warriors! Soon you will face the Roman Army! Do you know what to expect?
- WARRIOR: A big punch-up, sire! Hand-to-hand fighting! Bring it on!
- CHIEF: Valiantly spoken! But before they get close enough for that the Romans like to use long-distance weapons. Be prepared for thousands of arrows to land on you. After that they'll use a giant catapult called a 'ballista' to hurl great big rocks and balls of fire at you.
- WARRIOR: And...er...then it's hand-to-hand fighting?
- CHIEF: For those of you still standing, yes. But...
- WARRIOR: But what? We've got our swords and shields, ain't we?
- CHIEF: And so have they. Except that their shields aren't like our little ones: they're tall and curved so it's hard to get at them.
- WARRIOR: They'll jump when I do, though!
- CHIEF: Er...possibly. Roman soldiers wear armour to stop swords getting through, whereas we have...
- WARRIOR: No armour at all!



CHIEF:

True. But even so, my brave men, I believe we can beat them. Agreed?
Men? Where are you going? Wait for me!

