

You
Wouldn't
Want to...

BE

A ROMAN SOLDIER

Bathe,
battle and
build like
a Roman!



Written by David Stewart • Illustrated by David Antram





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Introduction

The year is 105 CE, and the Roman Emperor Trajan is fighting against the barbarians on the Danube. You are Marius Gaius who, at the age of eighteen, joined the army to become a Roman soldier. The Roman army invades and conquers foreign lands beyond the borders of the Empire. These lands are called provinces and all must send tributes and taxes to Rome. By the second century, people living on the edge of the Arabian deserts, in North Africa or in Britannia (Britain) can call themselves Roman citizens. As a Roman citizen who can speak Latin, you join the army as a legionary soldier. Joining the army will change your life forever bringing you hard work, danger and excitement! Soldier's pay varies from one unit to another, but at the time of Emperor Hadrian (117-138), legionary soldiers are paid about 300 silver denarii each year.



Joining up

A soldier's life is tough, so why would you want to enlist? You might die in battle or from diseases caught on campaign! Even when you are not fighting, you will spend long hours training or building roads and forts. Food is simple and discipline is harsh, so why do it? Well... money! The pay is pretty good and it comes in regularly. Soldiers also get shares of booty, there's always chance of promotion, and they get a generous pension when they retire. On top of all that, it's a great escape from dull, routine life.



Swearing the oath



THE MILITARY OATH

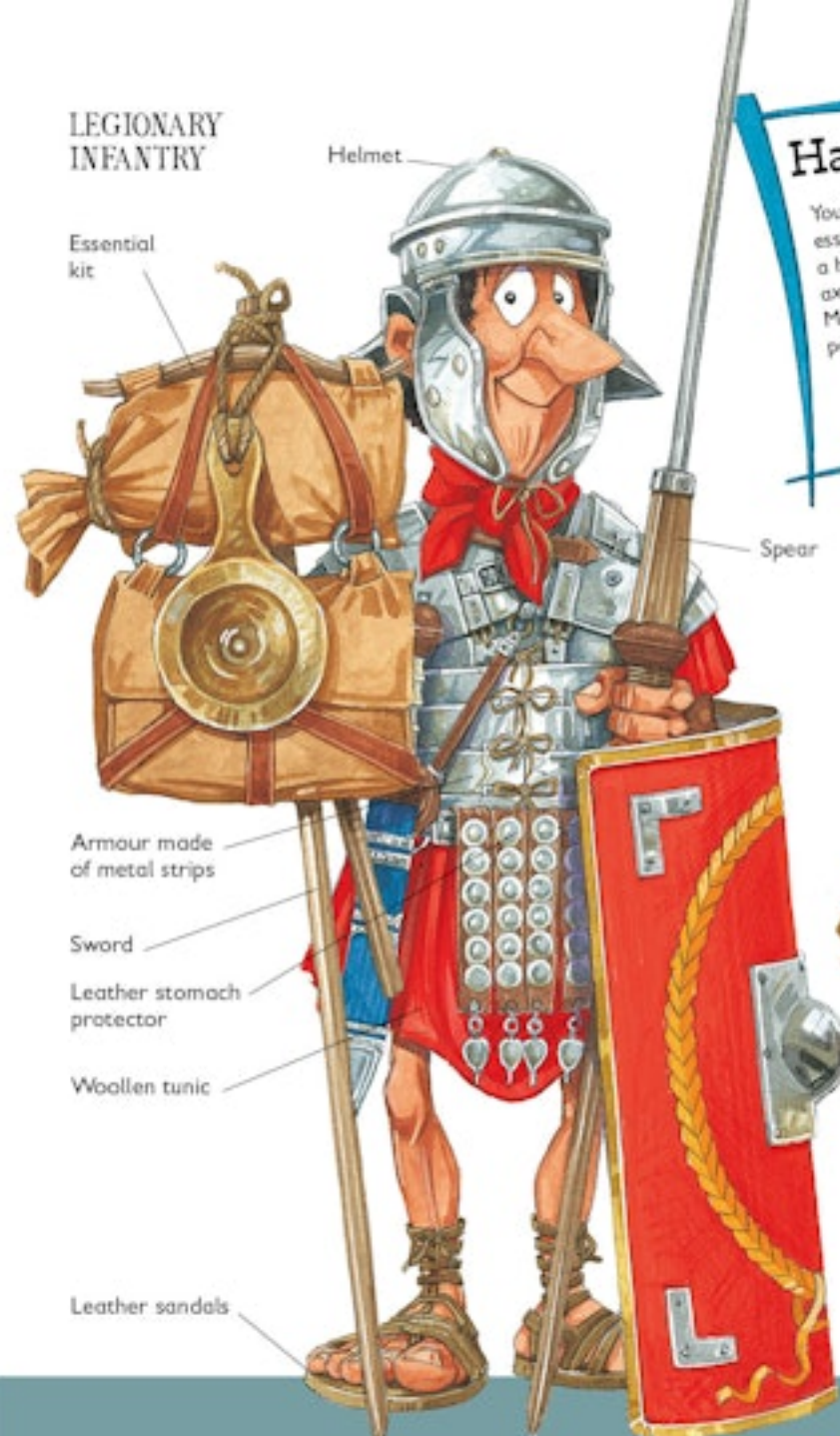
When you arrive at the recruitment camp, you swear an oath which binds you to the army for 25 years (or until you die).

BUY YOUR UNIFORM

Equipment used by legionaries is mass produced in the eastern lands of the Roman Empire. The cost of your uniform, weapons, bedding, rations, a share in the tent, and the unit's burial fund will all be taken from your pay.



LEGIONARY INFANTRY



Handy hint

You carry your own essential kit – a saw, a hook, a rope, a pick-axe and much more. Make sure you pack carefully.

AUXILIARIES



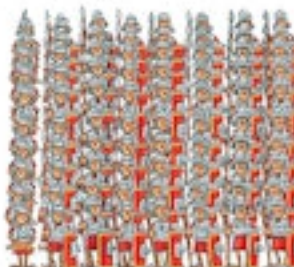
Auxiliary soldiers were originally recruited from non-Roman tribes. Their name means 'helpers', and they provide Roman legionary troops with extra manpower and specialised fighting techniques, using armour and weapons from their native lands.

Training to be a legionary

A Roman legion is made up of...



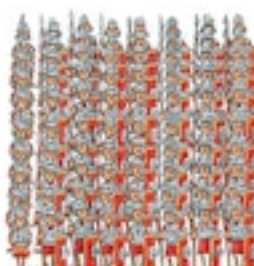
8 men = 1 contubernium



10 contubernia = 1 century



2 centuries = 1 maniple



6 centuries = 1 cohort

The Imperial Roman army has about 150,000 soldiers, called legionaries. Each one signs on for 25 years service. Your army life begins with training in Rome. You are taught how to march, how to build a camp and you must drill twice a day. Your main training is in the use of weapons and you are taught how to fight. You are in a group of 8 men called a contubernium (a tent group). A century (80 men) is made up of ten such groups with a leader called a centurion.



ROAD BUILDING

Roman roads are built by ordinary soldiers. They form a vital network across the Roman Empire.

The word 'military' comes from the Latin for soldier.



HORSE RIDING!



WRESTLING!

Handy hint

Remember your sword is still sharp along its edges. It's only the point that is covered!



LEGIONARIES

are taught to ride, wrestle and to swim. Training battles are always dangerous and bloody. It's hard work, but you survive... just about!

RUNNING!

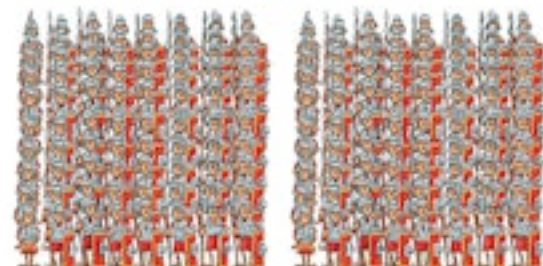


They said stab and thrust, not slice and dice!

He thinks he's chopping firewood!

THE TRAINING GROUND

A post is set up for you to practise. You use real swords and spears, but the tips are covered.



10 cohorts = 1 legion (too many to fit on this page!)

Your first battle

You and the other recruits are sent to the Danube – your first post abroad. Emperor Trajan has decided to enlarge the frontiers (borders) of the Empire. These areas have not changed since the time of Emperor Augustus, 94 years ago, and Trajan thinks the time is right for another advance. He plans to declare war against the Dacians. Drobeta is a wealthy Dacian city (in modern day Romania) on the Danube. If captured, it will provide the Imperial Treasury with a large profit. That'll show anyone who thinks the Roman Empire's lack of expansion is anything to laugh at!

BALLISTA

Like a giant crossbow, the ballista fired huge arrows or stone balls.



War machines:

ONAGER

Rocks are loaded into a sling fixed to a wooden arm. Twisting a rope will winch the arm back before being released and firing the rocks.



Handy hint

Keep well clear when the onager is being fired – you could go with it!



BATTERING RAM

These were built for knocking holes in the enemy walls. Soldiers inside are well protected by the strongly made sides and roof.



TESTUDO (TORTOISE)

Soldiers make a 'tortoise' formation by overlapping their shields to form a strong defensive shell.



The wooden posts didn't fight back!



Return to Rome

You have survived your first real battle, and have been lucky to return from the Danube with some Dacian prisoners and the treasures you captured. Every Roman loves a good show. One of their favourite shows is when a winning army returns to Rome and puts on a triumph, or victory parade. The Roman Emperor rides in a gilded chariot while the procession winds through the streets, through the Forum and towards the Capitol. Here, animals are then sacrificed to the Roman gods Venus, Mars and Victory, and the chief prisoner (usually the enemy leader) may be executed.

Victory parade:

The streets of Rome are packed with crowds. Senators lead the parade, followed by row upon row of troops. Treasures captured in battle are carried shoulder high and soldiers lead white oxen to be sacrificed at the Temple of Jupiter. The crowds cheer as enemy leaders are displayed in chains.



PRISONERS

Prisoners are sold in the slave market. Throughout the Roman empire, there are millions of slaves who have no rights at all. Families are split up and sold separately. Strong, fit men are sold to be trained as gladiators.



Handy hint

To keep him humble, a slave holds a laurel wreath above the emperor's head and whispers in his ear, "Remember that you are only a man."

"Io triumphe!"
(Behold the triumph!)

All at sea

Time passes, but there is no rest for the soldiers. You have fought in many campaigns, and as an experienced soldier you are sent to Britannia (Britain). The Roman Empire has a new emperor now, Emperor Hadrian. It is his policy not to expand the empire but to strengthen its existing frontiers. He wants his army to be highly efficient and is introducing reforms to make auxiliary troops serve far away from their country of origin.



The Imperial navy



Are we nearly there yet?

THE ROMAN NAVY

The Roman navy plays its part in wars. Ships are used to carry men and horses to fight in distant lands. Julius Caesar had 600 special landing crafts and 28 warships built to help with his invasion of Britannia in 54 BCE. But sea travel is difficult and has to be done during the summer.

Handy hint

Try to catch some local food when you arrive. You won't march far on your rations of bread, lard and vinegar!



Left, right, left, right, left, right!



After a long sea journey you arrive in Britannia. You march north along roads built by other soldiers. Roads are built to suit the army, not the local people. They are usually as straight as possible, connecting important military centres. Soldiers march in strict order – cavalry at the front, then infantry, then the baggage train followed by the very best troops. It is necessary to make temporary overnight camps to rest in. Northern tribes have resisted the Roman invaders and the previous legion which fought them has been wiped out. To stop the tribes attacking his troops and settlements, Hadrian has decided to build a long wall across the most easily defended part of Britannia.



We're on guard, so no tent for us tonight!

MARCHING

Marching makes the legionaries strong and fit. Distances of 25 or more kilometres must be covered at a quick pace in 5 hours. You would also carry 20 kilograms of equipment.



DIET

A basic diet is hard, dry bread with lard, washed down with vinegar or sour wine. When they're available you might also have lentils, beans, cabbage, mutton, lamb, beef, hare, goat and deer. If you're lucky, you might even have some locally caught fish.

SANDALS

Sandals have heavy studs on the soles to prevent the leather wearing down quickly.



Home, sweet leathery home.

Handy hint

Try to get a space in the middle of the tent, it's the warmest and driest position.



Hadrian's Wall

Once built, Hadrian's Wall is around 117 kilometres long. It stretches from Bowness-on-Solway on the west coast to Wallsend-on-Tyne in the east. The wall is over 6 metres high, 3 metres thick and takes 6 years to complete! It is built by legionaries and marks the northern boundary of the vast Roman Empire. To the north of the wall lies a deep, defensive ditch designed to keep

the unconquered tribesmen out, and to the south is a vallum, which is a large ditch flanked by huge mounds of earth. It is manned by 10,000 auxiliary soldiers from across the empire, and you're soon put to work building forts large enough to house men, horses, weapons and supplies.



FORTLET

There are a total of 16 forts along the length of the wall. Fortlets (above) are built every 1.6 kilometres with signal towers every 530 metres between them.

Emperor Hadrian ordered the building of the great wall after his visit to Britain in 122 CE. The work began in the east.



Handy hint

Ask a scribe to write home for underwear. Romans do not usually wear it, but a winter spent on the freezing wall soon changes old habits.



Life in the fort

Luckily for you, once the Wall is complete you return to your well-appointed barracks in Chester, 160 kilometres to the south. Soldiers are not always fighting so you have regular training sessions to keep fit. Life for legionaries and auxiliaries is much the same. Weapons need cleaning, animals need feeding, wood for fires needs cutting, and braziers need to be kept lit. The job of cleaning the latrines (lavatories), is usually given as punishment so try to avoid it!

Who's on latrine cleaning duties this week?



Keeping clean:



ROMAN LATRINES

Seats are placed over a channel, flushed with running water. Washable sponge sticks are shared because there is no such thing as toilet paper yet!



BATH HOUSES

Bathing is an important part of Roman life all over the empire. Baths are a good place to meet friends, gossip and relax.



You share two rooms in the fort barrack block with seven other men. One room is used for sleeping, and the other is for storing, cleaning and repairing equipment. You all cook, eat and relax there together.

Handy hint

If you have to clean the latrines, keep the sponge stick well away from your nose.

Hmph! I can't believe they've put me on latrine duties... again!

I'm cleaning barracks all week!

Day-to-day life

Local people hated the Wall and its forts when they were built. But they soon realised that there was money to be made from the newly arrived and well-paid soldiers. Some local chiefs make an alliance with Rome to help fight their old tribal enemies. Villagers provide all kinds of services, from food and clothes to taverns to relax in. They also feel much safer being so close to such a large number of soldiers, and are grateful that these troops (backed up

by your legion's extra muscle when needed) can protect them from attack. Serving soldiers in the Roman army – legionary or auxiliary – aren't allowed to marry because of the long periods of time they must spend away from wives and children. However, many lonely soldiers choose local women as wives and rent houses outside the fort to live in and raise families. The army refuses to recognise these 'unofficial' marriages until you complete your service, but everyone else does!

Getting friendly:



ROMANCE

A local girl catches your eye and after romancing her, the two of you fall head-over-heels in love!



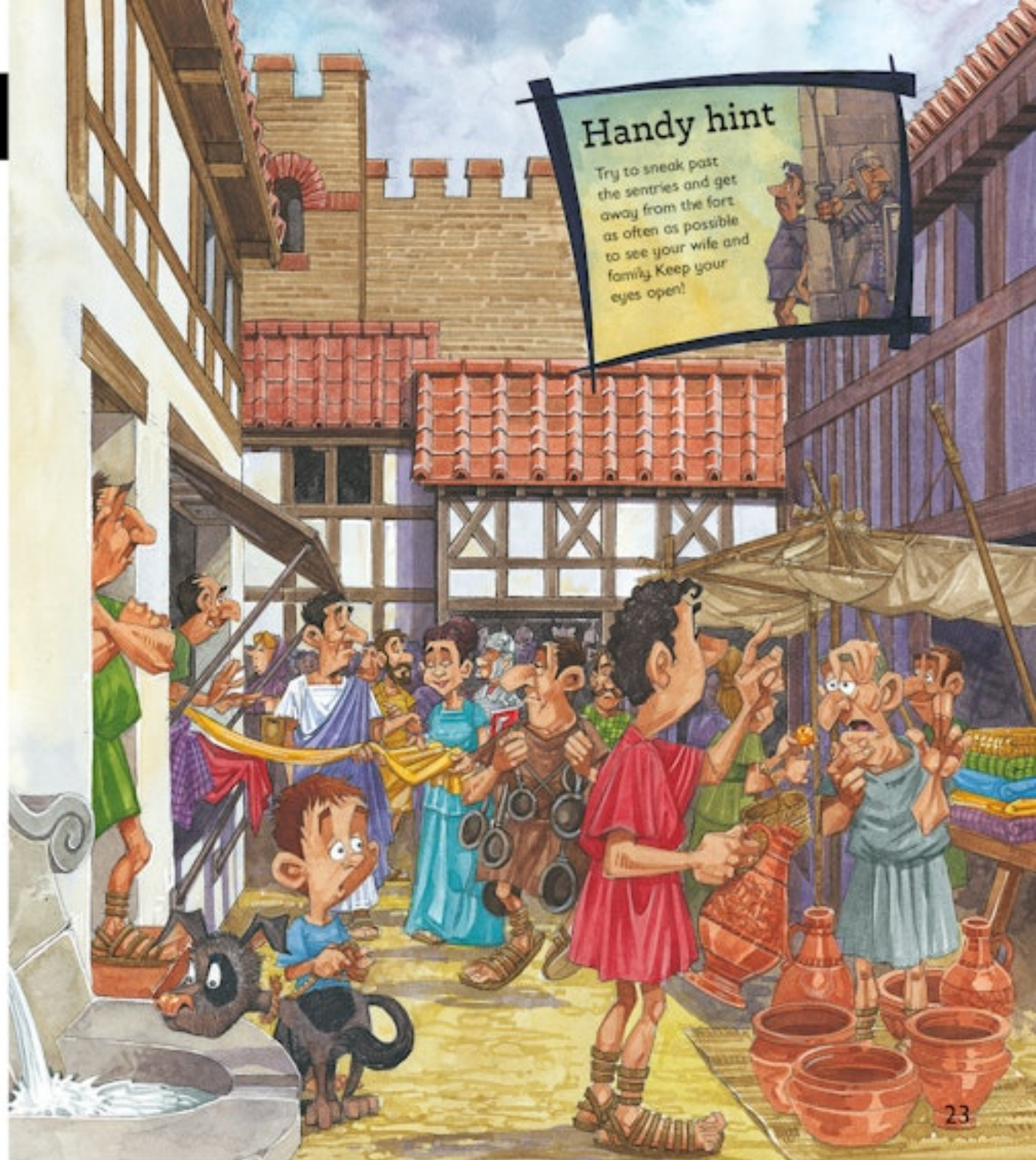
DISAPPROVAL

Not everyone is happy for you though. Your superiors disapprove and urge you to end the relationship.



MARRIED!

Ignoring their advice, you wed the girl of your dreams. However, she will have to live outside the fort.



Battle the barbarians!

A messenger arrives at your fortress – you and your fellow legionaries are needed to help defeat an attack by a large group of Brittones! It's a four-day march back to Hadrian's Wall and when you arrive, you find a heated battle underway. Out on the frontline, you hurl your spear at the enemy – a strong soldier can throw his spear over 25 metres – and then move in

for hand-to-hand fighting using swords. This is the most dangerous time for a Roman soldier and many are injured.

Before you know it, you are wounded too!

Who'd have thought it would end like this?



HEADS AS TROPHIES

The Romans and the Brittones both like collecting their enemies' heads as trophies.

Know your enemies:



Handy hint

Avoid falling into enemy hands. Not all local ladies are kind and gentle.



THE TRIBES OF BRITTONES

make life on the frontier as difficult as possible for the Romans. They use ambushes and often attack in small groups before retreating so they don't get caught. Sometimes they even get inside a Roman fort and burn it down.



Illness and injury

Each fort has a team of medical staff trained to provide emergency treatment and hospital care. Army doctors are highly respected and are assisted by dressers who treat wounds during a battle and nurse the injured soldiers back to health. Common battle wounds include jagged sword cuts, broken bones and dislocated joints. Doctors clean wounds and stitch them together, they also sometimes have to amputate damaged limbs. Salt, turpentine and arsenic are used as antiseptics to stop wounds becoming infected. You're in good hands because Roman army doctors can give you excellent medical care.



Medical instruments:

1. Tweezers
2. Probe used for shallow wounds
3. Hook
4. Knife used for surgery
5. Forceps
6. Spatula (knife for spreading ointment)

Handy hint

Drink alcohol as a way to numb pain during surgery. Be careful though, alcohol thins your blood so you will bleed more.



DRESSERS

Dressers give first aid on the battlefield. But spearpoints and arrowheads sunk deep into the flesh are difficult to remove and treat.



HOSPITALS

Well-planned hospitals are an essential part of every fort. As well as operating tables and beds for soldiers to recover on, they also prepared medicines and bandages here. The skilled doctors, called medici, treated wounds, broken bones, and illness using herbs, wine-based medicines, and knowledge from Greek healers.

GRIMACE AND BEAR IT

Bite down on a piece of wood as the doctor operates to stitch and clean the wound. It's agony, but there is no anaesthetic to numb the pain.

RECOVERY

Luckily you make a full recovery, and your wife and son welcome you home. Any soldiers too weak to fight are retired.



Promotion, retirement, death

Ways to become a centurion:

After a full recovery you return to army life, and soon your mind turns to promotion. As you come from an ordinary Roman family, you must work hard to prove you have what it takes to become a legionary centurion – one of the most important ranks in the army. This means showing skill and courage in battle as well as leadership. But it is the emperor who will always hold the highest rank in the army!



THE HARD WAY

Start at the bottom; work your way up.

THE EASY WAY

Be born into a wealthy family.

MEETINGS

As well as fighting, centurions have daily meetings to report any problems and are responsible for ordering fresh supplies.

PASSWORDS

Roman forts were targets for enemy spies. To stop them from infiltrating the fort, change the tessera, or password, daily.



TRIBUNUS
(staff officer)

LEGATUS
(commander
of a legion)

SIGNIFIER
(standard bearer)

Handy hint

It's been so long since you left home that there's no point in returning – nobody would remember you!



RANK AND FILE

On your journey up the career ladder, you have been both a tribune and a standard bearer, but sadly you never made Legatus – if you had, you could have been made governor of a Roman province when you retired.

What can you look forward to?



GIFT OF LAND

After 25 years of loyal service and numerous scars, you retire honourably. The army gives you some land on which you can build a home and start a farm. But farming is hard work – there's no chance to relax for you!



SHARE A DRINK

Swap stories with other retired soldiers and friends.



REMEMBERED

When you die, your proud son erects a tombstone in your honour.

Glossary

Alliance An agreement to co-operate between two or more groups of people.

Amputate When a limb is so badly damaged that all or part of it has to be cut off.

Anaesthetic A substance that reduces the feeling of severe pain.

Antiseptic Something that reduces the likelihood of infection by killing germs.

Arsenic A very poisonous substance used by Romans to treat infections. It is very dangerous.

Auxiliary Soldiers recruited from local areas either inside or outside the Roman Empire.

Ballista A large catapult used to hurl objects such as spears or rocks at enemies.

Barbarian The name given to another nation or civilisation the Romans considered more primitive.



Brazier A metal pan containing hot coals which were used to provide heat.

Britannia The Roman name for Britain.

Brittones The Roman name for the tribes in the area of Hadrian's Wall.

Century A unit of 80 men in the Roman army.

Dacians People from what is now modern-day Romania.

Danube A river that flows through a number of countries in Europe. It was one of the frontiers of the Roman Empire.

Denarii Roman units of currency.

Forum An important meeting place in ancient Rome.

Laurel A bush whose leaves were used to make wreaths worn on the head to celebrate a victory. Only important Romans could wear them.

Legatus The commander of a legion. They are highly skilled and experienced officers.

Legionary A soldier in an army unit of about 4,800 soldiers.

Onager A device like a catapult that fired rocks at enemies.

Scribe Someone paid by the soldiers to write letters home. Many Roman soldiers could not read or write.

Tessera A Latin word meaning 'password'.

Triumph The name of the victory procession through Rome after an important battle had been won.

Turpentine A liquid made from the resin of trees which was used to treat infections. It is very dangerous and is not used as medicine today.



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