

The Full Armor of God: The Warrior's Panoply: Boots, Shield, Helmet, Sword; Awards & Decorations: Vegetius: the Demise of the Roman Army

13. Roman history contains an interesting anecdote about Roman Emperor Gaius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (b. A.D. 12, d. A.D. 41, emperor A.D. 37-41). He was the third of six children born to Germanicus and Agrippina:

His father, Germanicus, desiring to ingratiate himself with the Praetorian Guard, ordered a small pair of *caligae* made for the ten-year old Gaius and had his son march with the Praetorians. The child was fondly nicknamed "Caligula," which means "Little Boots." The name stuck, and Caligula had all the votes! On the death of Tiberius, the army helped make Caligula the emperor of Rome.

These famed *caligae* were a critical part of the Roman soldier's equipment for combat. It was inevitable, therefore, that the Apostle Paul should mention the necessity of adequate footwear in the great spiritual warfare. Again, let me remind you that the infantry of the ancient world depended on well-shod feet for transportation. In Scripture, feet became synonymous with service; but there can be no effective service apart from constant training and preparation along the road to super-grace. It was the seasoned combat veteran of the Roman army who served his country best; and it is the spiritually mature Christian warrior who can serve the Lord to the maximum of his capability and capacity! The particular service here is witnessing.¹

14. The fourth item Paul mentions in the Roman soldier's panoply is the *scutum*, or the shield, a major defensive weapon.² A description of this piece of armor is found in Polybius's *History*:

The Roman panoply consists firstly of a shield (*scutum*), the convex surface of which measures two and a half feet in width and four feet in length, the thickness at the rim being a palm's breadth. It is made of two planks glued together, the outer surface being then covered first with canvas and then with calf-skin. Its upper and lower rims are strengthened by an iron edging which protects it from descending blows and from injury when rested on the ground. It also has an iron boss (*umbo*) fixed to it which turns aside the most formidable blows of stones, pikes, and heavy missiles in general.³

15. Shaped like a door but convex, the Roman shield was able to deflect the darts, stones, and javelins thrown by opponents. This piece of armor was heavy and demanded constant training so the soldier could manage its weight and still remain adroit with the sword in close combat.

¹ R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Christian Warrior* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1975), 76.

² See PowerPoint visuals: "Roman Shield" and "Roman Shields."

³ Polybius, *Histories*, vi.23.

16. Two leather straps were attached to the shield. One was fitted to the warrior's forearm to aid in maneuvering the shield, the other served as a sling over the shoulder for carrying the device in marches.
17. Expert use of the shield in battle was so essential that the Romans published an instruction manual just for the shield. A soldier without a shield was almost a certain casualty.
18. Paul relates the shield to the believer's faith beginning with the faith-rest drill and, with proficiency through spiritual growth – faith in doctrinal principles to the point of cognitive invincibility.
19. The fifth piece of armament is *galea*, or the helmet.⁴ It was generally made of bronze and fitted over an iron skullcap, lined with leather or cloth for greater comfort. It covered the back of the soldier's head and was reinforced with a back plate that protected his neck.
20. The helmet had no visor but instead, above the eyes, was a metal peak that jutted out in front offering protection for downward cuts by the enemy. Hinged bronze cheek pieces held the helmet in place. The plumes were never worn in battle but only for parades or dress occasions.
21. Paul referred to salvation as the believer's helmet. The soul's base of operations is the head where it coordinates with the brain and thus the helmet refers to eternal security that protects the soul.
22. The sixth and final item of armament is the *gladius*, or the sword, the basic weapon for close combat.⁵ It was completely different from the long swords used by most of the enemies of Rome.
23. The *rhomphaia* (ῥομφαία) was developed by the Trachians. It ranged between four and six feet and its length demanded hacking blows against an opponent. It was ineffective against the Romans since its blade was dulled against the iron and steel of the Roman shield.
24. Further, as the opponent pulled the blade back for another blow he exposed his side to the quick and lethal thrust of the Roman *gladius*, the legionary protected by faith in his scutum to deflect a final blow from the *rhomphaia*.
25. Paul's refers to the *gladius* by its Greek name *machaira* (μάχαιρα). The introduction of this weapon into the legionary's panoply shifted the balance of power to the Romans. This weapon was approximately 20 inches long, double-edged to a point. It enabled the soldier to thrust and rip his opponent without losing balance.

⁴ See PowerPoint visual: "Roman Helmet."

⁵ See PowerPoint visuals: "Roman Sword," and Roman Swords."

26. Those who mastered the technique of the *gladius/machaira* exerted much less stress in battle and were able to endure long scrums and wear down their opponents.
27. Paul identified this offensive weapon as a perfect example of the overwhelming offensive power possessed by the believer: “the sword of truth, which is the Word of God.”
28. The truths of Scripture can be thrust at the exigencies of life while remaining safely behind the shield of faith and with absolute confidence in one’s helmet of eternal security.

C. Awards and Decorations:

1. When the Roman legionary learned to utilize his panoply to the maximum so that he excelled in battle, he was granted quite a number of rewards and decorations.
2. The Romans understood the principle of freedom through military victory. No nation can survive the decline and fall of its military which is caused by the decline and ultimate abandonment of establishment viewpoint.
3. Rome became guilty of this tragic loss of thought and the sad tale of its demise is the subject of an important passage from the famous book by Roman military writer Flavius Vegetius Renatus \va-jē'-shē-as ra-nāt'-as\ quoted by Arther Ferrill in his book *The Fall of the Roman Empire*:

We are fortunate to have available a remarkable work on warfare, written by a Roman, Flavius Vegetius Renatus, sometime between 383 and 450, that explains many of the reasons for the decline of Roman military power. Vegetius' *De Re Militari*. (p. 127)

The manual is a description of the earlier Roman system of military conscription, training, strategy, and tactics that, Vegetius said, had been forgotten in his own day—so much so that it was necessary to relearn it all from the study of books.

Vegetius was a professed Christian who nevertheless believed that military victory came from training and discipline—not from faith. Further, the analyst was concerned with the urgent military problem of his day—how to preserve rather than expand the Empire. Where Vegetius rises far above his modern military critics is in his recognition that effective fighting required an integrated army, one that deployed skirmishers, heavy and light cavalry and heavy and light infantry in balanced coordination.

And his main point, that Rome’s chief military problem was its weak infantry, was undoubtedly sound. Vegetius says that down to the death of the Emperor Gratian \grā'-shē-an\ (A.D. 383):

“footsoldiers wore breastplates and helmets. But when, because of negligence and laziness, parade ground drills were abandoned, the customary armour began to seem heavy since the soldiers rarely ever wore it. Therefore, they first asked the emperor to set aside the breastplates and mail and then the helmets. So our soldiers fought the Goths without any protection for chest and head and were often beaten by archers.

“Although there were many disasters, which led to the loss of great cities, no one tried to restore breastplates and helmets to the infantry. Thus it happens that troops in battle, exposed to wounds because they have no armour, think about running and not about fighting.”⁶
(pp. 128-29)

⁶ Arther Ferrell, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: The Military Explanation* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 127-29.