



# The Logistics System of the Roman Armies

## FROM THE ARCHIVES



M1910 Equipment

### M1910 Equipment Board

Much like it was of paramount importance for the Roman Legionaries to carry a significant amount of equipment, It is also important for the American Army. The Model 1910 infantry equipment board decided on the Army uniform and pack prior to WWI right here on Rock Island. Overall the most important innovation of the board was to design an ergonomic kit that allowed the Soldier to carry a full load with the least amount of stress on the body.

## MONTHLY TRIVIA

- 1 After the Marian Reforms, on average how much did the gear and equipment weigh that a legionnaire carry?
- 2 The famous Roman Gladius was adopted from what modern day country in the Third Century BCE?
- 3 On what date was Julius Caesar assassinated?

### ANSWERS FOR MARCH 2023 QUESTIONS

- 1 At what age did Alexander achieve the rank of General?  
➤ 20
- 2 What famous individual did Alexander study under?  
➤ Aristotle
- 3 How did Parmenion leave Alexander's service?  
➤ Assassinated by order of Alexander.

Caesar and the Romans when the Gallic reinforcements arrived at Alesia



As Alexander the Great and his empire grew eastward in the mid third century BCE, a new civilization along the River Tiber in Italy began gaining strength and slowly expanding. Roman expansion from the Republic to the Empire relied on logistics and utilized it as an offensive and defensive weapon along supplying its Army. The civilization of Rome existed from 753 BCE to 476 ACE so there is an evolution of their logistical doctrine, but the advantage gained by Rome's logistical capabilities directly correlated to their dominance of the ancient world.

One common principle rang true as the core of the Roman logistics system from republic to empire, the strong fortified basecamp. The Romans raised the use of tactical and operational bases to a fine art. Particularly, is the Roman army's practice of building a fortified camp every day, partly to defend the army itself, but also to serve as a tactical base for logistics. Roman operational bases, especially in their form as "winter quarters" (*hiberna*) effectively supported military operations over long periods. It is this Roman staying power, more than any tactical advantage, that led to Roman success over the long term. Effective use of bases and depots was a vital and lethal instrument in the Romans' arsenal. Julius Caesar famously walled in the city of Alesia in 52 BCE, upon learning a Gallic relief force was on its way, he quickly build a second surrounding wall to protect his legions. It was imperative to have the supplies and manpower to create these daily camps on the march or the larger base of operations and that fell to the common soldiers.

While the Roman soldier had always been solid engineers, a very famous reform by Gaius Marius around 100 BCE would allow the romans to become the premiere army of the ancient world The Roman army also was the first to use the individual soldier as a load carrier beyond his weapons and armor. The development of the Roman pack system set the Roman legionary apart as a soldier and not a warrior. The use of the soldier to carry a significant logistical burden signifies the way that the Romans viewed warfare systematically, even on the level of the private soldier. Some Roman logistical practice was quite different from that of other militaries, either ancient or modern. They carried engineering tools, cooking supplies, weapons, armor, and several days rations giving them the nickname of Marius' Mules. The *contubernium* of eight Roman soldiers normally prepared and cooked their own meals from issued grain, rather than relying on a central kitchen. This meant that the army did not have lengthy supply lines and massive baggage trains but was very mobile and flexible.

Both in the Republican and Imperial periods, the Roman state developed efficient means of obtaining staple foodstuffs on an enormous scale for the army's use. The Romans' ability to move these supplies was dependent to a large extent on the technology and infrastructure of the civilian transportation system. Particularly in the movement of provisions overseas and rivers, the Romans normally utilized civilian ships under contract. There was, however, a symbiotic relationship between the army and the network of sea and land trade which grew around the empire. War was itself a catalyst for the growth of trade and the development of the infrastructure necessary to support Roman logistics. The army's demand for supplies was certainly an important element in creating and maintaining the Mediterranean wide marketplace. The standing fleets of the imperial period suppressed piracy so successfully that



there was hardly any threat of piracy. This was important in fostering trade—but the navy's primary purpose was to protect the transportation of the army and its supplies. A similar process involved roads and overland transport. The Romans had been building roads since the fourth century BCE, and the roads and the garrisons which guarded them certainly facilitated overland trade by suppressing banditry. However, the roads' primary function was to supply the Roman army. The Romans indeed combined foraging, requisition, and supply lines into the best organized logistical system the west would see for another 1500 years. While their skill at arranging supplies, and using it as a strategic and tactical tool, is not the only reason for Roman military success, it is clearly one of the major factors.

*"The Romans blended all these methods [of supply] efficiently into a far-reaching and flexible logistical system. Supported by carefully organizing supply and service forces and a net of well-engineered roads to speed movement and communication, they carried their own stores, drew on local resources and established fortified depots.."*

Stanley Falk– Former Chief Historian of the Air Force

## Women's History Month

During Women's History Month, the Department of Defense (DoD) joins the nation in celebrating the vital role of women — not only in American history but also in our future.



Since the beginning of Women's History Month in 1987, there have been countless achievements and sacrifices of women across all branches of the military and the DoD.

During Women's History Month, we honor the generations of women who, through their unrelenting service to our nation, have shaped America's history and future.



History is being made every day at this command.

Headline Photo: "The Roman siegeworks at Alesia"

1.Roth, Johnathan P., The Logistics of the Roman Army at War (264 B.C.-A.D. 235) Brill, Boston, 1999

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