



Roman Soldier vs Germanic Warrior: 1st Century AD (Combat)

Lindsay Powell

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From the annals of Tacitus we get a one-sided vision of the Romano-Germanic wars. More recent scholarship, including Osprey's Teutoburg Forest Campaign book, paints a more balanced picture. Yet, there's still a lot of ground to cover on the subject.

The reigns of Augustus and his successor Tiberius saw an epic struggle between the Romans and local peoples for the territory between the Rhine and Elbe rivers in what is now Germany. Following two decades of Roman occupation, Germania Magna erupted into revolt in AD 9 following the loss of the three legions commanded by Publius Quinctilius Varus to the Cheruscan nobleman Arminius and an alliance of Germanic nations in the dense forests of the Teutoburger Wald. The Romans' initial panic subsided as it became clear that Arminius and his allies could not continue the war into Germania Inferior on the western bank of the Rhine, and Imperial troops poured into the region as the Romans decided how best to resolve the situation.

In AD 14 Tiberius' adopted son, Germanicus Caesar, quelled a mutiny among Roman forces in the area, then took his men on a quick punitive raid into Germanic territory. In the following year he snatched the wife and father-in-law of Arminius and located the site of the 'Varian Disaster', where he oversaw burial of the bones of Roman dead and erected a cenotaph. In AD 16 Germanicus set out to engage his Cheruscan adversary and defeat him decisively with a view to tipping the balance of power in the region as a prelude to restoring full Roman control over territory between the Rhine and the Elbe. By that summer, the Germanicus had tracked down Arminius to a location on the Weser River in the region of modern-day Minden. An initial engagement - called the battle of Weser River - ended in a draw when a Roman cavalry charge was repulsed by Arminius' own cavalry and Germanicus withdrew his men. Having transferred his force across the river and camped for the night, he laid out a plan for a set-piece battle with his opponent at a place called the Plain of Idistaviso.

Idistaviso was the first battle the Romans won against Arminius since Teutoburg. It proved they could beat him. Despite his unique understanding of both Roman and Germanic strategy and tactics, Arminius' failure to anticipate the Roman defence in depth, compounded by dissimilarities in arms and equipment, and confusion on the ground, made this battle particularly vicious and bloody. Better led and disciplined, and with a robust battle strategy, Germanicus' men decisively defeated Arminius'. At the ensuing battle of the Angrivarian Wall the Romans crushed the Germans again.

Featuring full-color artwork, specially drawn maps and an array of revealing illustrations depicting weapons, equipment, key locations and personalities, this study offers key insights into the tactics, leadership, combat performance, and subsequent reputations of the Roman soldiers and their Germanic opponents pitched into a series of pivotal actions on the Imperial frontier that would influence Roman/German relations for decades to come.

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