

Fighting for the Empire: Military Morale in the Fourth-Century Roman Army

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ABSTRACT

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A thesis presented to the Graduate Program in Ancient Greek and Roman Studies

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The fourth century was a turbulent period for ancient Rome that necessitated drastic structural and compositional changes in the military in order to stabilize the Empire amidst persistent threats both internal and external. The resulting entity, the late Roman army, often found itself derided by contemporary authors as being ineffectual and undisciplined with decidedly problematic morale. As military morale is a decisive component for combat effectiveness, its maintenance at a sufficient level is imperative. When examining various institutions, relationships, and events encountered by the army and its soldiers during this time, trends in the factors that affected morale are revealed and the question of whether morale was truly at issue can be addressed. This work discusses in-depth citizen recruitment, the use of barbarian troops, infrastructure and strategy, leadership, and the effects of victory and loss in order to understand the different factors that influenced the morale of the army during the fourth century, both positively and negatively. The conclusion summarizes the various problems detected, asserts that morale was problematic, and attempts to address the origins of the troubles with morale.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Military Morale in the Fourth Century.....	1
Defining Military Morale.....	4
Rome and Its Army in the Fourth Century: An Overview.....	8

Chapters

I. Citizens and Recruitment: Manpower, Aversion, and Conscription.....	12
II. Soldiers and Barbarians: Romanization and Rebellion.....	20
III. Protecting the Empire: Life in Towns, Life Along the Borders.....	35
IV. Officers, Extortion, and Discipline: Soldiers and Their Commanders.....	45
V. Rome at War: Victory, Loss, and Consequences.....	59
VI. The Problem of Morale: Conclusions.....	67

Bibliography

Ancient Sources.....	73
Modern Sources.....	74

Introduction

Military Morale in the Fourth Century

When Vegetius writes in *De Re Militarii* on the causes of the decay of the Roman legion, he describes the contemporary soldier and subsequently reveals a disaffected and undisciplined individual.¹ The author later tellingly devotes an entire section of his work to the improvement of morale among troops. His advice on the matter is sound and his treatise is a plea for reform in an army which during the third and fourth centuries (the latter being the purported time of the work's authorship) underwent a significant breakdown in the seemingly invincible militaries of the Republic and early Principate; competent leadership, discipline, and combat effectiveness were all severely affected by the state of the Empire and the nature of its army during the late period. In the quest to reinvigorate an armed force seemingly on the decline and an Empire on the verge of collapse, Vegetius' attention to the mentality of soldiers is appropriate and shows the author recognized overall military morale as problematic in consideration of Rome's present troubles.

Certainly events preceding and during Vegetius' writing of the work give cause to consider the state of the army's morale, especially during the fourth century, a period rife with constant brutal civil wars and devastating barbarian invasions on several fronts of the Empire. The mere mention of the conflicts faced by Rome during this time would seem to bring to mind images of a demoralized military, incapable of maintaining any sort of stabilizing effect on a rapidly declining empire. This picture is not entirely false. The fourth-century army's changing composition and infrastructure accompanied by crises internal and external doubtless affected the overall mentality of its soldiers. Yet as Rome lost battles, the Empire also won them.

¹ Vegetius, *The Military Institutions of the Romans*, Book II, trans. John Clark, ed. Thomas R. Philips (Westport: Greenwood Press) 1985, p.39

Fourth-century Rome survived to become fifth-century Rome.² If the fourth century, then, can be understood as a period of great misfortune and success, destruction and renewal, the question of morale becomes how and to what degree, precisely, did the realities of this period affect the morale of its army. Was military morale truly an overriding problem? Thus the object of this work is not to discuss whether military morale during the fourth century was “good” or “bad,” “high” or “low.”³ Rather, I attempt to address what factors would have influenced morale and subsequently assess if the effect was positive or negative.

Morale, we should note, is difficult to quantify, especially when applied to an institution as compositionally diverse as the late Roman army. The military was a massive entity composed of many different peoples and ethnicities, spread across a wide area of vastly contrasting terrain, creating numerous “microclimates” of individuals.⁴ Yet soldiers were still soldiers, serving the same empire during the same era and would have faced similar issues and conditions that can be assessed in their relation to morale.

Furthermore, this is not a diachronic work; the paper does not proceed to assess morale year by year, as this will not suit my stated purpose and would take far too long. A synchronic approach allows for an analysis of the conditions that influenced the late army’s morale positively or negatively and grants me the ability to consider the topic in the fashion I believe best suited for such an evaluation. I have chosen to break down my work into chapters that correspond to various relationships a fourth-century Roman soldier encountered during his service. Each section discusses the influence on military morale of important events, institutions,

² This statement assumes the traditional date for the fall of Rome, 476 CE.

³ Such generalizations, anyway, are ineffective for they dismiss variations in the topic in favor of a neat categorization. A century is a long time; military morale, much like the Empire itself, would have experienced ups and downs.

⁴ The term “military,” “army,” and other variants are used interchangeably in this paper. The navy is not specifically addressed but most topics discussed here would presumably apply to it as well.

conditions, and interactions. My hope is that proceeding in this manner overarching themes and trends within these relationships can be detected and will aid in determining whether morale within the army was problematic during the fourth century. The Empire and its army were complex entities in the late period; the issue of military morale is similarly complicated and deserves an examination of the several factors that contributed to its varied state in the fourth century.

Defining Military Morale

Major Frederic Evans, writing in during World War II, noted:

*In total war, psychological factors are of equal importance to the material means and physical efforts required to wage the struggle. Morale is a condition which we ignore at our own peril.*⁵

One hundred and fifty years earlier Napoleon similarly and famously stated that morale amongst soldiers is worth three times more than tangible military material. Baynes called it “the most important single factor in war.”⁶ The necessity of positive military morale has long been understood, and is always a considerable factor in combat effectiveness and deciding victory. The Romans, just as much as later military men like Evans and Napoleon, appreciated morale as vital to success. Commanders gave inspiring pre-battle speeches. Rituals and traditions fortified the nerves of soldiers. Men were actively discouraged from doing anything that might dampen their spirits.⁷ Troops took great pride in their standards and personal weapons. Caesar praised his men for battles hard fought and won and mentioned by name valiant soldiers like Titus Pullo and Lucius Varenus in his *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*.⁸ Romans certainly knew the worth of an army with high spirits.

For a factor that has long been accepted as critically vital in combat, morale, as a concept, proves difficult to define, partly because the term is widely used in various contexts. In modern usage morale is often applied as a synonym for one’s feelings, happiness, satisfaction, or overall mood.⁹ The term defined as such, however, is more appropriate for a civilian population and

⁵ Evans, Frederic, “Some Factors Affecting Military Morale,” *Royal United Services Institution*, 87 (1942) p. 243-248

⁶ Baynes, John, *Morale: A Study of Men and Courage* (London: Leo Cooper, 1987) p. 6

⁷ Whitby mentions commanders were told to forbid their men from chanting the *Kyrie Eleison* because it was “mournful.” (Whitby, Michael, “Morale: Late Empire,” *The Encyclopedia of the Roman Army*, ed. Yann LeBohec (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2013))

⁸ Gaius Julius Caesar, *Commentaries on the Gallic War* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1846), 5.44

⁹ Manning, Frederick J., “Morale and Cohesion in Military Psychiatry,” *Military Psychiatry: Preparing in Peace for War*, ed. Russ Zajtcuk (Falls Church: Office of the Surgeon General, 1994) p. 3

particularly ill-suited for the discussion of an ancient army. The military, during any era, is a unique institution and morale defined within its context must be similarly specific. Thus before discussing morale any further we must understand the term in its military function.

Modern authors are surprisingly helpful at providing a definition applicable to the Roman army. Although long recognized as a significant consideration in military affairs both on and off the battlefield, after the worldwide large-scale conflicts the twentieth century saw an increasing interest in the systematic analysis and study of morale and its role in warfare. Though such analyses concern themselves with contemporary armies, the concepts and topics addressed are universal and timeless in warfare, and thus of much use in this paper. In his essay on the subject, Brigadier General James A. Ulio states of morale:

It begins with the soldier's attitude towards duty. It develops with the soldier's command over himself. It is a spirit that becomes dominant in the individual and also in the group...A cause known and believed in; knowledge that substantial justice governs discipline; the individual's confidence and pride in himself, his comrades, his leaders; a unit's pride in its own will... ”¹⁰

Grinker and Spiegel summarize morale as “the psychological forces within a combat group which compel its men to get into the fight.” They go on to elaborate that “good” morale necessitates “feel[ing] confident, satisfied, united, and eager for combat activity.”¹¹ “Poor” morale thus means soldiers are “dispirited, dissatisfied, disorganized and shy of combat.”¹² Manning catalogues numerous definitions of morale (including that given by Grinker and Spiegel), and finally concludes his working definition as:

*...the enthusiasm and persistence with which a member of a group engages in the prescribed activities of that group.*¹³

¹⁰ Ulio, James A., “Military Morale,” *American Journal of Sociology* 47 (1941) p.321

¹¹ Grinker, Roy L. and John P. Spiegel, *Men Under Stress* (Philadelphia: The Blakiston Company, 1945) p. 37

¹² Grinker and Spiegle, p. 37

¹³ Manning, p. 4

Despite differing length and terminology, the underlying concepts in all of these definitions are the same. A soldier, as an individual and as part of a group, has a duty and that is to perform the functions and tasks (the “cause”, “fight,” and “prescribed activities” respectively) required of him by the army. Morale, therefore, is the motivation to accomplish the purposes the military requires of its soldiers.

With this working definition, the determinants for the level of morale can be identified; modern studies on the topic are, again, helpful and in agreement (for the most part) on what these factors are. Agents of morale include (but are certainly not limited to¹⁴) cohesion, leadership, cause, and health. Each of these factors are categories under which fall a myriad of other concepts affecting morale (e.g., under cohesion is social support, under health, food and sleep).

Is this definition acceptable for discussion of the Roman army? Certainly. Soldiers in the fourth century, as any, had duties required of them by the army and the Empire that necessitated sufficient motivation to perform. The factors laid out as major influences on morale are timeless in warfare and thus similarly applicable. The definition does not deal in subjective abstract feelings, but rather addresses concrete concepts occurring within military society that have effects which can be detected and analyzed.

Understanding military morale thus defined, its importance becomes overwhelmingly clear: morale “provides mental resilience to face the most arduous and dangerous situations.”¹⁵ Fourth-century Rome certainly had many such situations. Without positive morale, combat and everyday practical efficiency is detrimentally affected; the army cannot adequately perform its functions. In the case of the Roman army during the fourth century, its primary (perhaps only)

¹⁴ Manning quotes Munson as saying, “Every physical thing entering into the environment of the soldier, and the expressed state of mind of every person with whom he comes in contact, affects his morale.” Manning, p. 6

¹⁵ Southern, Pat and Karen R. Dixon, *The Late Roman Army* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) p. 168

responsibilities were defending the Empire against both civil and foreign disturbances. Morale, positive and negative, duly affected its ability to accomplish both of these duties.

Rome and its Army in the Fourth Century: An Overview

An army is not a solitary institution born out of the ether. The military and the society it swears to protect are interrelated; the attitude of one reflects the attitude of the other, since both form responses based upon reactions to the shared culture and nationalistic ideas around them. Thus the army in the fourth century was a product of the world around it. The fourth century was a troubling time, with many of its problems originating in previous similarly chaotic years, and some exposition is necessary to understand what, exactly, Rome faced, as events directly impacted the army's morale. The nature of the army itself deserves a brief overview as issues relating to morale correspond to its infrastructure, strategy, and function.

Rome in the fourth century had two major problems: continual internal political upheaval and barbarian invasions along the frontiers. Tracing the origins of these troubles necessitates briefly going back to the third century. The crisis of 235-284 saw the near collapse of the Empire as over twenty claimants attempted to secure the title of Emperor. The civil wars among emperors, usurpers, and pretenders ushered in further disasters and the Empire found itself rife with problems of invasion, secession, plague, and economic collapse. Romans in the third century rediscovered the power of personal armies in a way not seen in hundreds of years. Barbarians discovered the Empire's domestic problems were opportunities for raids. Rome, in a way, would never truly recover from these events, as they either simply continued or had reverberating consequences in the next century.

Emperors starting with Diocletian increased bureaucracy in an empire that had recently discovered its former system of government and defense was no longer adequate. The Empire was much too vast, too prone to internal disputes, and its borders too weak. The division of power based on an East and West separation distributed responsibility for civic and military

matters geographically to curb these issues. For the remainder of the fourth century Roman government would vacillate between the rule of one man and power-sharing between various individuals based upon an East/West division.

Despite repeated attempts to curtail the ambitions of usurpers and barbarians, neither would ever go away and the fourth century witnessed a constant mix of both. The division of power and increased bureaucracy at the beginning of the fourth century had given hope to stabilizing the Empire internally, but in actuality perpetuated an anarchic environment. Rome's civil troubles certainly did not help its foreign problems. The constant power struggles were great incentives to barbarians who saw the opportunity to raid the Empire while the Romans were occupied fighting one another. Barbarian threats loomed in several corners of the Empire.

The fourth century was chaotic, but not entirely stagnant. Culturally it experienced something of a rejuvenation; even while facing empire-wide problems with domestic succession and barbarian pressures, the East had risen as a significant center of culture in the Roman world. The Edict of Toleration, issued in 311, officially ended Christian persecutions and granted practitioners the right to worship freely, provided they do nothing adverse against the Empire and pray for the safety of the emperors and Rome.¹⁶ Constantine and Licinius composed the Edict of Milan two years later, granting freedom of worship to all religions and promising the return of confiscated property to churches.¹⁷ Constantine himself converted to Christianity and his successors subsequently followed the religion, save Julian, famously styled "the Apostate."

¹⁶ "The Edict of Toleration," *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, trans. University of Pennsylvania Dept. of History, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (1897-1907)) <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/edict-milan.asp>

¹⁷ "The Edict of Milan," *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, trans. University of Pennsylvania Dept. of History, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (1897-1907)) <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/edict-milan.asp>

The beginnings of the fourth-century army were much the same as those of the fourth century itself: the military anarchy of 235-284. During the crisis the army had been politicized in a way that subverted its strength;¹⁸ a weakened military combined with Romans continually occupied fighting other Romans was a dangerous mix, and it allowed major invasions by tribes along the Rhine and Danube, as well as incursions by Sassanids in the East. The primary objective of the Empire in its final centuries became survival, both against foreign entities and its own people. Accordingly the military needed modification to fit its new survivalist functions, and emperors such as Diocletian and Constantine duly turned their attentions to this task. The Imperial army underwent dramatic changes; the main bodies of the late military were the *comitatenses*, mobile field forces, and the *limitanei*, the frontier units. *Limitanei* were placed in forts along the outskirts of the Empire to deal with barbarians and within the interior the *comitatenses* could be dispatched to handle disturbances both foreign and domestic.

In terms of strategy, the late Empire used these forces and others¹⁹ to employ what Luttwak famously asserted as a defence-in-depth system, wherein the internal mobile strike forces supplemented a permeable screen of border units along the perimeters of the Empire.²⁰ Over time the number of *comitatenses* grew and the strength of the frontier forces shrank. The *comitatenses* became regional field armies located in strategic locations throughout the Empire; while these could provide relief against foreign incursions, they were also bases of power for ambitious generals.

¹⁸ Cromwell, Richard S., *The Rise and Decline of the Late Roman Field Army* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, 1998) p. 5

¹⁹ Such troops included the *comitatus praesentalis*, *scholae*, *palatini*, and specialists like archers and artillery; going into each the specific of each type is beyond the scope of this paper.

²⁰ The term and its effects on morale will be discussed at length in a later section. For more information presently on defence-in-depth see: Luttwak, Edward N., *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) p. 127-190

Command posts were held by *equites* and men who rose through the ranks based on merit or fealty, be they Roman or barbarian in origin. Whole regiments of barbarians known as *foederati* were commanded by their own tribal leaders. The military's organization and hierarchy was complex, and units were created, disbanded, reformed, integrated, and moved around as needed. Romans were reluctant to be recruited, and conscription was enforced. To offset low citizen enlistment, the military was supplemented by increasing numbers of barbarians. The army's size would have varied during the century, but it consistently remained insufficient to manage effectively the pervasive troubles of the Empire.

I

Citizens and Recruitment:

Manpower, Aversion, and Conscription

Manning quotes Richardson from his book *Fighting Spirit* as saying:

*“[It is] not numbers or strength bring[ing] victory in war, but whichever army goes into battle stronger in soul, their enemies generally cannot withstand them.”*²¹

Numerical strength in warfare is undoubtedly important, but is not the sole determinant in victory. An army with the spirit to persevere can accomplish amazing feats in battle. Such achievements, however, are largely contingent upon the soldiers' morale. A small army with good morale is able to fulfill Richardson's statement: they can overcome a stronger enemy. Conversely, a large army with deficient morale can be defeated by a numerically inferior force. In the case of Rome's fourth-century armies, troop strength had reverberating consequences for morale. Deficiencies in the availability of voluntary citizen manpower resulted in the compulsion of individuals estranged from military culture and markedly disinclined towards service, meaning within the Empire Rome was conscripting unwilling men. The inadequate number of citizens brought about recruiting an increasingly large number of barbarian troops. Each of these circumstances had repercussions on the morale of the army.

Numerical strength cannot be decisively ascertained for the late Roman army and there is much debate on the topic; estimates range from about 300,000 to 600,000.²² Whatever its number the military's citizen component alone was insufficient for its dual mission of protecting the borders and keeping internal strife at bay. Rome faced continual problems with its ability to

²¹ Manning, p. 2

²² A.H.M. Jones proposes 600,000 based on the *Notitia Dignitatum*; Duncan-Jones and much recent scholarship argues for a substantially lower number. Elton supplies the figures mentioned here. Elton, Hugh, *Warfare in Roman Europe AD 350-425* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) p. 128

recruit within the Empire based upon two main interconnecting obstacles: a marked decline in available manpower and dwindling interest in enlistment. The combined issues prompted Diocletian to institute an annual conscription. Romans went to great lengths to avoid the enormously unpopular levy. If the number of citizens in the army was so egregiously low it demanded enacting a law that despite open opposition was enforced throughout the fourth century, then the manpower problem must be addressed. Why were citizens not enlisting in the fourth century?

During the Republic Rome's soldiers were citizen-farmers levied for specific campaigns when necessary. After a conflict ended, the army was disbanded and its soldiers returned home. The military was formally professionalized through the late Republic and early Principate; "soldier" was now an occupation, one with pay and benefits and the legions and *auxilia* were sufficiently staffed by men who joined of their own volition. Serious problems with the volunteer system, however, arose during the third century. The anarchy of 235-284 left many of Rome's borders fragile and they continued to be unsecure into and during the fourth. This instability diminished the capacity to recruit in many regions; the frontiers of Gaul, Noricum, Pannonia, and Raetia had been long favored areas for enlistment that suffered much during both the third and fourth centuries.²³ Conflicts in these areas had significantly decreased their populations and Rome was thus unable to draw its usually large amount of recruits from the regions. Plague had similarly depopulated several areas of the Empire. Though evidence exists that population size experienced an increase in the East during the late fourth century, the political situation in the West precluded any such similar event.²⁴ The population at large can be surmised to have remained in a generally reduced state. Leibeschuetz notes a seemingly endless

²³ Cromwell, p. 6

²⁴ Cameron, Averil, *The Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press: 1993) p.114

amount of land available for allotment to settling barbarians in the fourth century, further suggesting a significant population drop.²⁵

Other problems with manpower originated in the third century. The frequent debasement of currency during the crisis caused rampant inflation that continued into the fourth. Laws enacted by Diocletian attempted to rehabilitate the weakened economy by tying people to hereditary occupations. Sons of soldiers and veterans were required to enlist, providing a steady source of recruits. Yet the laws also exempted a significant amount of the population from service. Constantine later freed the clergy from military obligations. After such exemptions the available population for recruitment was largely comprised of Rome's rural poor: vagrants, small-farm peasants, and the tenant farmers of *latifundia*, large agricultural estates owned by the wealthy.²⁶ Problems, nonetheless, arose from these populations as well. Landowners were reluctant to release the *coloni*²⁷ to the army, and often paid a commutation tax in place of sending men for the levy. The government welcomed the money but still needed the manpower. When landowners were pressed to provide actual recruits, they often sent the weakest and least useful of their tenants. Given the shortage of manpower, the army's refusal of such undesirable men is hard to imagine, even with the strict standards in place for recruitment.²⁸ At the end of the fourth century, Theodosius I declared what professions were not suitable for military service, among them bakers, cooks, and tavern keepers.²⁹ The purpose was to recruit only those with respectable occupations who would presumably make the best soldiers. The decree, however, could hardly have helped with the military's struggling numerical strength, and indeed, in times of absolute

²⁵ Liebeschuetz, J.H.W.G., *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) p. 11

²⁶ Cromwell, p. 7

²⁷ That is, the tenant farmers of the *latifundia*.

²⁸ Restrictions existed on matters beyond a Roman's occupational status. Vegetius suggests correct ages and heights for recruits. Decrees listed in the *Codex Theodosianus* changed the set standards for both.

²⁹ *Codex Theodosianus*, ed. Theodore Mommsen and Paul M. Meyer, 7.13.8, <http://droitromain.upmf-grenoble.fr/Constitutiones/codtheod.html>

desperation, such as the revolt of Gildo, the Empire implored its citizens to provide slaves for enlistment.³⁰ Rome, through depopulation and its own legislation, lacked Romans to fill its ranks.

The problem with recruitment, however, was not simply a lack of physical numbers due to depopulation and stringent legislation. The majority of Romans in the fourth century were mentally averse to the idea of service. Over the previous centuries the average citizen had grown increasingly separated from the military. The army itself and the change it underwent over the course of the Empire were partly to blame for this. The creation of a professional, standing military alleviated the burden of soldiering from the majority of Romans who were more inclined to agrarian and commercial pursuits, by and large the backbones of the Roman economy. Military service was favored by those lacking other occupational options and hence attracted men without households and families that depended on them; these were the volunteers entering the army of the early and mid-Empire.

By the fourth century most Romans had grown up without a firm connection to the military. The everyday concern of Rome's rural peasants, who made up most of the pool of available men, simply was not warfare; they had families to feed and needed to care for their lands and homes. The thought of serving far away with the high likelihood of never coming back was thoroughly unappealing. Letters to and from enlisted soldiers in far-off outposts tell as much; the creature comforts of home were much missed in foreign environments:

³⁰ Southern and Dixon, p. 67

*ram tibi paria udon[um
t. ab Sattua solearum [
duo et subligariorum [
duo solearum paria du[o* ³¹

Contact with friends and family, for business or private matters, was made difficult by the extreme distances; answers, if there were any, did not come quickly:

*Chrauttius Veldeio suo fratri
Contubernali antiquo pluri-
mam salutem
et rogo te Veldei frater miror
quod mihi tot tempus nihil
rescripsti a parentibus nos-
tris si quid audieris aut
Quot in quo numero
Sit et illum a me salutabis
[s]uerbis meis...* ³²

The hesitance to join the military is certainly understandable from the point of view that it was an unfamiliar institution which guaranteed danger and removal from home, and given the realities of the fourth century's constant warfare it was quite possible a soldier might never return to civilian life. This is not a situation unique to the late Empire, but rather one pervasive in the history of warfare. Indeed similar circumstances (invasions of one's homeland, civil war) often have quite the opposite effect: they encourage men to enlist in order to protect their homes and country. War gives them a cause for which to fight. Liebeschuetz mentions that many Romans might not have been aware of the magnitude of the problem.³³ Citizens in certain parts of the Empire would not have seen or experienced the conflicts that were so pervasive in other

³¹ ...[I have sent (?) you].../ pairs of socks from Sattua/ two pairs of sandals and/ two pairs of underpants/ two pairs of sandals... The vindolanda tablets date from the 1st and 2nd centuries, but the sentiments in them would have remained the same with soldiers during later periods. Alan K. Bowman, *Life and Letters on the Roman Frontier: Vindolanda and its People* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 139)

³² *Chrauttius to Veldeius, his brother and old messmate, very many greetings. And I ask you, brother Veldeius – I am surprised that you have written back nothing to me for such a long time – if you have heard anything from our parents or about...in which unit he is and greet him from me in my words and Virilis the veterinary doctor...* Ibid., 132f. Though many of the ancient sources cited in this paper have been previously translated, all translations herein are my own.

³³ Liebeschuetz, p. 20

areas. Without a firm connection to the Empire's problems, Romans lacked the ideology to bring them into battle. Without cause, there was no motivation. Southern and Dixon make the point that those who unfortunately were privy to war on the home front were more immediately concerned with safeguarding their lands and households; enlistment would only have carried them to distant postings and conflicts in regions further afield.³⁴ In this case, citizens didn't lack an ideology or understanding of the "greater cause" of preserving the Empire, they simply had other beliefs more important and immediate to them. Protecting home, a physical, tangible building or piece of land, meant more than the idea of defending an unknown border.

Other circumstances caused further discouragement from service. Memories of the disasters of the third century were none too distant and their effects still felt. The continual warfare of the fourth century itself would have been similarly off-putting. Romans were no longer fighting glorious and enriching imperial battles, but rather killing each other and barbarians along the frontiers. The armies themselves carried terrible reputations. From the crisis onward the military inclined towards being undisciplined, and soldiers could expect to face corruption and extortion from ambitious commanding officers.³⁵ Pay and compensation were terribly problematic. The army promoted a hostile internal and external environment in which a recruit could never be sure whether he would receive his pay or food or be robbed of both by his commanding officer. The compositional dynamic of units was shifting heavily in favor of barbarians soldiers. The military and civilians were constantly at odds; billeting in towns brought the two populations uncomfortably close. The army took advantage of its position of authority and created chaos among the civilian populations; clashes between the two were frequent and violent. Witnesses to and victims of these brutal interactions would not have been

³⁴ Southern and Dixon, p. 69

³⁵ Cromwell, p. 5

eager to join the troops they openly loathed. The faintest knowledge of any of these factors would cause great hesitation and discouragement from enlistment.

In terms of its citizens the Empire was facing a serious crisis regarding its ability to field an army, and one that was freely willing to do so. “Soldier” was not appealing as an occupation to most citizens and the available population for such had diminished since the preceding centuries. Still, the military was “Roman” and citizens were needed at some capacity for the ranks. The Empire turned to compulsion to procure men from within its borders and despite their hesitations citizens were legally required to serve if drafted; individuals from the available segments of society were thus duly conscripted.

Legislation appearing during the fourth century demonstrates just how unpopular the army was and the lengths citizens were willing to go to avoid the levy. Self-mutilation is the subject of several laws gathered within the *Codex Theodosianus*; men were so aggrieved at the thought of service they willingly cut off their thumbs to evade it. Valentinian ordered men who did this to be burned alive.³⁶ Years later, after experiencing heavy battle casualties at the end of the fourth century, Theodosius insisted that even men missing thumbs were required to serve.³⁷ Rome had realized that any man, despite his physical condition, was of some worth to the military. Desertion in the initial stages of enlistment was also rampant enough to merit no less than three decrees from the fourth century listed in the *Codex Theodosianus*.³⁸ Maiming and desertion are undoubtedly extreme measures; each affected an individual’s life long after the initial act. The readiness to take such drastic measures highlights the extreme unwillingness to join the military and “willingness” is a concept repeatedly mentioned in relation to morale. A soldier must be willing to do his part in what he believes is a worthwhile cause. Roman citizens,

³⁶ *Codex Theodosianus*, 7.13.5

³⁷ *Codex Theodosianus*, 7.13.10

³⁸ 7.18.9.1, 7.18.4, 7.18.6. A fourth, 7.14.1, dates from 403. Southern and Dixon, p. 69

however, preferred to disfigure themselves and risk death to avoid something they undoubtedly found in no way worth their while.

Manpower shortage and aversion to service were two interrelated problems Rome faced that were troublesome for the morale of its army's citizen component from the very onset of enlistment. Both factors necessitated the use of conscription from a small section of the population. According to Richardson the low number of citizens would not be an obstacle as long as the morale of the troops was sufficiently high, but Rome's citizens were reluctant and antagonistic towards military service. An unwilling recruit certainly would have lacked the motivation required to effectively perform within the military. Sullivan notes the change an individual must undergo to become an efficient part of a group is hard for conscripts.³⁹ One disaffected recruit was not an issue, but the levy was annual and the aversive mood extensive within the population. Rome was continually drafting and filling its civilian ranks with individuals who wanted no part of the army; their ability to form a cohesive unit effective in battle is doubtful. Men united in demoralization are not truly united at all, and they do no good in achieving the goals of their army for they have no concept of a goal or role for themselves within an organization of which they are members under duress. Thus in terms of citizens, a low standard for morale was set from the beginning of a soldier's military career: his recruitment. American troops fighting in Vietnam described themselves through helmet logos as "UUUU" – the unwilling, led by the unqualified, doing the unnecessary, for the ungrateful.⁴⁰ Comparing modern attitudes to the ancient world is problematic, but a fourth-century citizen soldier may have understood the sentiment quite well.

³⁹ Sullivan, Harry Stack, "Psychiatric Aspects of Morale", *The American Journal of Sociology* 47 (1941), p. 293

⁴⁰ Manning, p. 8

II

Soldiers and Barbarians:

Romanization and Rebellion

The title “Soldiers and Barbarians” is perhaps misleading. In the fourth century barbarians were soldiers and had been for quite some time. Rome had been enlisting foreign men since the early Empire, and they were used frequently in campaigns during the second and third centuries.⁴¹ What changed in the fourth century, especially in the latter half, was the number of barbarians in service. The increasing number of foreign soldiers in the military is often pejoratively labeled as the barbarization of the Roman army and is frequently cited as a deciding factor in the decline of the army and subsequent fall of the Western Empire. Ancient sources both praise and demonize barbarian soldiers, and the effect of foreign servicemen on morale is similarly variable.

“Barbarian” is a catchall term that, to the Romans, denoted many different peoples. A barbarian was any individual hailing from “areas beyond the Empire’s direct administrative control,”⁴² and thus someone who had minimal or no exposure to Roman culture. Such people included the Germans, Celts, Persians, Goths, Berbers, and all the smaller individual tribes therein. When citizen manpower diminished and most of those available were reluctant to join the army, barbarians were numerous and in many cases enthusiastic for service. The warlike culture of many tribes, especially those from beyond the Rhine and Danube, made them particularly suitable for military duties and they were eagerly recruited in lieu of scarce Romans. Labeled variously as *laeti*, *gentiles* and *foederati* (depending upon the exact nature of their

⁴¹ Southern and Dixon, p. 50

⁴² Elton, p. 136

relationship to Rome),⁴³ they were either integrated into Roman troops or comprised whole units; by the end of the fourth century foreigners comprised a significant portion of the military.

Barbarians were recruited in various ways. Many were volunteers, as a military career offered exactly what they sought: a chance to be Roman and join the Empire. A large part of the barbarian military culture focused upon raiding, an important part of which was the procurement of Roman goods. The continual raids of the fourth century and migrations into Roman territory were not incursions of conquest; barbarians looked across the borders at Roman civilization and liked what they saw: a standard of living much higher than their own. The army afforded them a Roman lifestyle and the opportunity for advancement to some of the most powerful ranks within the military; in the latter half of the fourth century Germans and Franks were abundant in officer positions.⁴⁴ Men like Arinthaesus, Merobaudes, and Bauto served at the highest level of command as *magister militum*.⁴⁵ As we shall see, the army was an extremely effective agent of Romanization.

Romanization is a complex concept that changed over time in conjunction with shifts in the Empire. Put simply, the term refers to the spread and merging of Roman culture with non-Classical civilizations.⁴⁶ During the period of the early Empire, a conquered land and its people would find themselves imposed with Roman cultural ideas via building projects, administrative structure, the Latin language, art, and literature. The army, often stationed in the newly conquered regions, was imperative in this process. The military's close contact with locals helped to disseminate and popularize the culture of the conquerors, and within the army

⁴³ *Laeti* were barbarian peoples within the Empire who held a military obligation to provide recruits for the army as part of their settlement. The classification as *gentiles* is hard to define, but seems to refer to free tribes both within and outside the boundaries of the Empire. *Foederati* were acquired as part of a *foedus* (treaty) which required them to serve Rome when called upon for campaign. Units of *foederati* were often drawn from a single tribe, but they could also consist of bands of men united under a single leader.

⁴⁴ Liebeschuetz, p. 8

⁴⁵ The title *magister militum* denotes the senior military officer under the emperor.

⁴⁶ Ermatinger, James W., *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004) p.1

itself, barbarian recruits were subsumed into a Roman institution that enforced its society's values and ideas upon its constituents.

Although many recruits were volunteers, large numbers of barbarians were also acquired as part of peace settlements with the Empire. Ammianus records the Quadi after defeat by Valentinian as promising recruits to Rome in exchange for peace.⁴⁷ The impressing of prisoners of war was also common; Zosimus notes Constantine, when preparing for a campaign, called upon men he had “won by spear.”⁴⁸ Theodosius used surviving Greuthungi, captured by his general Promotus, in his war against Maximus.⁴⁹ However they were procured, barbarians by and large were placed within the regular army, until dire circumstances in the late fourth century called for other arrangements. Laws against non-citizens joining the legions had disappeared in the third century and Romans and barbarians served alongside one another. Such integration was both a method for Romanization and a way to move potentially dangerous men far from their homelands and associates. Recruited individuals could expect to be placed under a Roman commander: Julian, in a letter to Constantius explaining the events in Paris in 360, suggests mingling his *laeti* with Constantius' own troops.⁵⁰ If an officer was not a native Roman, he was most certainly a man like Arinthaesus, Merobaudes, or Bauto, thoroughly Romanized.

Vegetius makes what might be an oblique reference to barbarians in the military when he comments that an army drawn together from different parts is sometimes disposed to mutiny.⁵¹ Recorded instances do demonstrate that contention amongst the troops occasionally surfaced; Zosimus tells of a unit from Egypt being sent to replace part of a Gothic force and when the two

⁴⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Ammianus Marcellinus in Three Volumes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950) 30.6.1

⁴⁸ Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, trans. James J. Buchanan and Harold T. Davis (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1967), 2.15

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.38f

⁵⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, 20.8.13

⁵¹ Vegetius, 3.4

groups crossed paths a brawl ensued.⁵² The natural inclination might be to suspect that occurrences such as this were commonplace and barbarians placed among Romans would cause a decrease of unit cohesion. After all, they were different, outsiders; they dressed distinctly, wore their hair differently, and spoke different languages. The superficial differences, however, disappeared quickly. The army took in its recruits and indoctrinated them; non-native enlistees, like Roman citizens, received both their clothing and weapons from the state. Once similarly outfitted, there would have been little physically to distinguish a Roman from a barbarian. Vegetius describes the recruitment process and the subsequent steps an enlisted man took once deemed fit for service.⁵³ There is little reason to believe the process was different for barbarians. Upon joining the military all recruits could expect subjection to the same preliminary period of tests of strength and endurance (the *probatio*) and, once past these, would receive the military mark, be enrolled in an official registry, and swear an oath of fealty.⁵⁴ This process was further indoctrination, advancing a barbarian farther into Roman military culture. From the beginning of his service, a barbarian recruit was treated like a Roman and expected to act as one.

After initial recruitment the process of integration and Romanization continued. Barbarians served under Roman or Romanized commanders; orders were given in Latin. Their new comrades, the citizen soldiers, also spoke Latin. Accordingly barbarian recruits quickly had to learn the *lingua franca*. Those in the East presumably picked up Greek as well. Serving for a period of twenty years, they certainly had the time to do so.⁵⁵ Elton rightly notes during such

⁵² Zosimus, 4.30

⁵³ In his treatise Vegetius freely draws from different eras in Rome's history; there is little reason to doubt, however, that certain parts of the process such as swearing the oath and being enrolled in the military's registry changed significantly over time.

⁵⁴ The exact nature of the military mark in the later Empire is unknown; suggestions range from a tattoo, brand, or dog tag. Southern and Dixon point to fourth-century court precedings that indicate the mark might have been an "identity disc", similar to a modern dog tag. Southern and Dixon, p. 74-75

⁵⁵ Terms of service for the late army in general are uncertain and Burns notes a distinct lack of a set "pattern of service." (Burns, xiv) Southern and Dixon discuss a bronze tablet from 311 that states *vexillationes* and legions

tenure in the military a barbarian's ties to his past lessened significantly.⁵⁶ Units were moved around the Empire and a recruit could not always expect to stay close to home, wherever that may have been. The army and Rome now commanded his loyalty; they trained, paid, clothed, and fed him.

If a barbarian could be Romanized, then he could also integrate into a cohesive unit. His presence may have caused disturbance at first, but over time he was just as Roman as anyone else. The amount of tension his initial arrival provoked is also questionable. Rome had a long-standing tradition of using Germans, Gauls, and Goths in the military; barbarians were not an uncommon sight. Germans had in fact been preferred for the elite troops of the *scholae palatini*⁵⁷ from Constantine's reign onward.⁵⁸ Soldiers recruited around the same time who go through training together and subsequently fight together form a significant bond. In the heat of battle, it could hardly matter where the individual who may save your life was born; what mattered was their ability to fight well and on the same side. Barbarians joined the army, Romanized, and united with fellow soldiers under this shared military experience.

The army, therefore, from the very beginning of a barbarian's recruitment promoted horizontal bonding between citizens and non-Romans. Horizontal bonding is a military term denoting the "binding [of] members of the same leadership level" and is an essential element of cohesion.⁵⁹ Soldiers must be able to work together in order to accomplish their missions. Similar backgrounds certainly aid in the initial promotion of a strong association among soldiers, but the longer men spend together in service the less important the outside civilian world

were eligible for *honestia missio* after twenty years; they would receive full veterans benefits after twenty-four. (Southern and Dixon, p. 87) Elton states emphatically that soldiers served for twenty years or more. Elton p. 141

⁵⁶ Elton, p. 140

⁵⁷ The *scholae palatini* were both palace guards and shock troops. Constantine formed their ranks after disbanding the praetorian guard.

⁵⁸ MacMullen, Ramsay, *Corruption and the Decline of Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) p. 201

⁵⁹ Manning, p. 12

becomes; who you were before the army declines in significance. The shared experiences in military culture and on the battlefield are the agents that continually create powerful bonds and hold men together in a unique brotherhood. Barbarians thus integrated in a two-fold manner; they became like their citizen counterparts through Romanization and also formed connections with other men based upon the communal experiences of life in the army. Grinker and Spiegel summarize as follows:

*Friendships are easily made by those who might never have been compatible at home, and are cemented under fire...*⁶⁰

Sullivan, as previously noted, remarked that cohesion required change on the part of individual soldiers; assimilated barbarians are perfect examples of this. Change within the army did not move in only one direction; certain foreign customs were appropriated by the Romans themselves. Ammianus notes the *barritus*, a Germanic war cry, as being used by Roman troops before battle to fortify their nerves.⁶¹ Units proudly bore barbarian names. Trousers and long hair became fashionable.⁶² Military Romans were using barbarian culture for their own purposes and taking pride in it. Weapons, standards, clothing, and traditions had long been symbols of personal and regimental pride among Roman legions, and now such things were taking on distinctive non-Roman flavors. Here the complexity of Romanization is glimpsed. Returning to the term's definition, "the spread and merging of Roman culture with non-Classical civilizations," the fusion of cultures becomes clear. Romanization was never a one-way process. Foreign customs and ideas were mixed with their Roman counterparts to produce hybridized items and ideals that were useful to those who would wield them. What exactly it meant to be Romanized was also changing. As more and more of the Empire's influential men, in both the

⁶⁰ Grinker and Spiegel, p. 22

⁶¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 30.7.10

⁶² So much so that Honorius eventually outlawed barbarian clothing and long hair in the city of Rome. Elton, p. 145

government and the military, came from provincial or barbarian backgrounds, they helped to proliferate their local form of Roman culture, which carried barbarian and foreign elements.⁶³ As the army incorporated barbarian soldiers and leaders, it fitted their advantageous, practical, and popular concepts into its existing structures. Romanization, in all its complexity of two-way cultural appropriation, was highly beneficial to military morale. In the fourth century, barbarian versions of many hallowed Roman items bolstered the spirit of citizen and non-native alike; soldiers unified under the same sacred traditions and institutions.

The army had other traditions as well: its ingrained religious structure surely had consequences for morale among its soldiers, especially upon cohesion. The *Feriale Duranum*, a calendar of religious festivals celebrated by the military in the year 226, demonstrates the pervasiveness of religion in a soldier's life and its strict structure. Helgeland, Daly, and Burns note the order of religion was meant to synchronize worship among various units across the Empire; religion advocated cohesion. The structure of army religion also had a Romanizing effect on foreign troops.⁶⁴ Whether they held the same beliefs was irrelevant; soldiers had to participate because of the comprehensiveness of the system. When Christianity became the state religion, the army's festival observances changed accordingly; religion in the army was no less extensive. Did religion become problematic for barbarians when it turned to Christianity? The answer may be complicated. By the later half of the fourth century Germans, Goths, and Vandals had converted; they nominally shared the same faith with the Romans. The barbarians, however, were Arians, and thus heretics.⁶⁵ Disputes over orthodoxy were common, heated, and divisive in the fourth century. Just how divisive it would have been in the military is hard to

⁶³ Ermatinger, p. 2

⁶⁴ Helgeland, John, Robert J. Daly, and J. Patout Burns, *Christians in the Military: The Early Experience* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) p. 48-55

⁶⁵ Ferrill, Arther, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: The Military Explanation* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1986) p. 64

gauge. Men could participate in the program simply through lip service, thus avoiding confrontation. Yet for this to happen soldiers first had to willingly engage in such duplicity; Tertullian mentions the account of one soldier who would not.⁶⁶ Julian, though he reverted the official state religion to paganism, issued a decree for religious toleration and bade Christian church leaders to allow adherents to worship as they pleased. What effect legalities had on actual practice is debatable. A law did not automatically lessen hostilities between Nicenes and Arians. Julian's sole reign was brief, and subsequent emperors returned to Christianity. Debate and division over orthodoxy continued; Theodosius issued the Edict of Thessalonica declaring Nicene Trinitarian Christianity as the state religion of Rome in 380.⁶⁷ The military presumably would have had to adhere to this legislation in regards to its religious program and so would any barbarian (or any other individual), at least in a nominal sense. Religion in the army thus had the ability to be both uniting and dividing for citizen and barbarian soldiers alike; it unified men by synchronizing them with a thorough program of worship yet could be alienating through doctrine.

Barbarians troops integrated into the regular army provided little in the way of detrimental effects upon cohesion. They Romanized and bonded with fellow soldiers through everyday military life and combat experience. The process of assimilation and unification continued with the next generation. Sons of tribal soldiers were hereditarily tied to the profession, just like their citizen counterparts; they grew up as Romans and entered the army as such, continuing the process of Romanization begun in the previous generation. Barbarians may have started out as "others" but became a fully integrated part of the army, imprinted part of their

⁶⁶ Tertullian, *De Corona*, XI, <http://www.tertullian.org>

⁶⁷ *Codex Theodosianus*, 16.1.2

own cultures upon its institutions, and through their sons provided an important source of continued recruitment.

What of the morale of the barbarian soldiers themselves? Considering the impact of their recruitment only on Roman soldiers is horribly one-sided and dismisses a large portion of men entering the army during the fourth century. Something like culture shock may have occurred upon initial enlistment. Barbarians certainly were interested in Roman civilization and material goods, and most would have had some prior contact. Complete immersion, however, is quite different. Even when tribal peoples were conscripted as a group they were still placed within the larger Roman military society. The idea of having members of the same nation around may have been comforting, as was the army's adoption of some barbarian customs, but these things did not change the situation at hand; the barbarian unit was surrounded by Romans and Roman civilization. Though uneasy and initially unsettling for morale, the reality of the situation must have prompted quick assimilation. When the number of citizens and/or Romanized individuals was more even with the barbarian soldiers, assimilation would not have been so immediate or even occur at all, as we shall see later in the case of the *foederati* and other similarly recruited barbarians near the end of the century.

Sources suggest that barbarian troops, much like their Roman counterparts, disliked certain parts of service, which affected morale negatively. Postings far from home were just as unpopular with barbarians as they were with citizens and were equally problematic. The Empire, when pressed, could capitulate to their wishes for reassignment. Ammianus relates that Gallic troops whom Constantius attempted to deploy to Persia were so upset and distraught they revolted. This change of locale was a violation of their conditions of service, and Ammianus paints Julian, their commander, as sympathetic and hesitant to comply with the orders, and he

ultimately grants them permission to stay within the boundaries originally laid out in their treaty.⁶⁸

Elton demonstrates evidence indicating soldiers drawn from barbarian settlements in the Empire were treated no differently from Roman recruits.⁶⁹ They were recruited in the same way as citizens and required to fill the same obligations. The career paths of known soldiers followed those of their Roman counterparts.⁷⁰ MacMullen states that “no general...wanted Romans;” yet the counter can be made that these commanders, nonetheless, wanted their soldiers Romanized. They did well by their men’s participation in a positive group dynamic and balanced treatment reinforced this. Equal footing goes a long way to establish horizontal bonding and unit cohesion.

For the most part, Rome had little to fear from integrated individuals and tribes. The Empire held their loyalty. Many barbarians had little or no sense of a national identity, and no qualms against fighting one another. Ammianus mentions Sueridas, Colias, and their troops initially looked on at the wars among other Gothic tribes and Rome with only indifference.⁷¹ Yet these mercenaries later revolted and slaughtered the citizens of Adrianople; their story provides a good example of the causes for most recorded barbarian-soldier mutinies. Rome did indeed hold the loyalty of such individual men; the Empire paid and provided for them. This amicable and mutually beneficial relationship, however, was predicated upon Rome’s continuation as a responsible employer. Consequences could be disastrous if barbarians were not adequately supported by their relationship with Rome. Barbarian rebellions from within the army were not the result of secret nationalistic sentiments and a desire to overthrow the Roman government. Barbarians in the army wanted to be Roman, retained limited connection to their homelands after

⁶⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 20.4.1-11

⁶⁹ Elton, p. 132f

⁷⁰ Elton, p. 149

⁷¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 30.6.1

enlistment, and had little overall national identity. Rebellion occurred when the Empire took advantage of or mistreated them.

Sueridas and Colias were prepared to leave their station peacefully by order of the emperor, and they only turned violent against the populace when treated unfairly and threatened.⁷² The Theruingi, whom Valens hoped to use as *laeti*, rebelled against their Roman escort because the corruption of soldiers violated their agreement with the emperor and they were near death from starvation.⁷³ Claudius Silvanus declared himself emperor after seeing no other alternative, given the intrigues against him.⁷⁴ In these cases (and others) the Empire and the army fomented rebellion by engendering negative morale amongst its barbarian soldiers. Rome cruelly violated treaties, withheld basic needs, and treated its soldiers improperly. Barbarians didn't rebel because they were barbarians; their uprisings were the result of not being regarded as Roman. During and after military service, non-native soldiers often identified themselves and were identified by others as Roman. Silvanus could not return to his native Franks for fear that they would kill or betray him as a Roman.⁷⁵ Elton notes the gravestone of a soldier who identifies himself as "Francus civis, Romanus miles."⁷⁶ Such an identity was a critical part of their cohesion within the army, and the military could destroy it with mistreatment. As long as the Empire kept up the morale of its barbarian troops, all was fine; the moment it could not, negative consequences ensued.

The issue of morale among barbarians becomes more problematic in relation to units of *foederati*. Such troops were acquired under terms of a treaty and only campaigned for the Empire when needed; given their transient nature, they were not considered part of the regular

⁷² Ammianus Marcellinus, 30.6.1

⁷³ Ibid., 30.5.1

⁷⁴ Ibid., 15.5.15

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Elton, p. 141

army. By the end of the fourth century, however, the government was subsidizing whole barbarian tribes, and the use of *foederati* increased dramatically. The short-term nature of these units and their isolation as wholly barbarian contingents significantly decreased, if not completely removed, the incentive to Romanize. Any oaths sworn were to their barbarian generals; the need to learn Latin or Greek was gone. Barbarians in these troops stayed barbarian despite Roman employment.

The interest in *foederati* concerns how their relationship to the Empire and army influenced their morale. *Foederati* posed little concern to the Empire as long as they returned to their normal way of life after being dismissed.⁷⁷ Problems started when disbanded troops turned against Rome and toward brigandage. Why would this happen? For the same reason it did not among integrated troops: loyalty and provision. The Empire commanded the fealty of its troops and provided soldiers of the regular army with benefits during and after service. *Foederati* were subsidized only when on campaign and were only nominally under the control of Rome. Due to the short-term nature of their contracts, the Empire had no vested interest in maintaining a high level of morale for these units: there was no cohesion between the *foederati* and Roman regiments, the Empire didn't provide for them as they did with standing troops, once a campaign was over *foederati* shared no common cause with Rome, and their leadership was strictly barbarian. Thus it became easy for them to turn against their one-time employers, and men like Alaric wrought chaos upon the Empire.⁷⁸ In terms of the standing army, the mutinies of the supposed federates would have been overwhelmingly negative upon morale. Allies were turning against each other and tearing the Empire apart.

⁷⁷ Cameron, Alan and Jaqueline Long, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1993) p.114

⁷⁸ Alaric was disgruntled at being passed over for promotion as the commander of a regular unit. Zosimus, 5.4

Alarming problems concerning contracted barbarian units arose from their increasing employment after the battle of Adrianople in 378. Defeat at the hands of the Goths inflicted devastating casualties that all but destroyed the core of the Eastern Roman army, taking with it many seasoned officers and veteran soldiers. The battle, however, did not end the conflict. The tribes were loose in the Eastern Empire, and though they posed little threat to the great walled cities, their presence and raiding was none-the-less unsettling and unacceptable. Managing the situation required rebuilding the army, which fell to Theodosius. Lacking sufficient numbers of Roman troops, the emperor unsurprisingly turned toward recruiting barbarians, a significant number of whom were Gothic in origin.⁷⁹ These recruits were integrated into Roman units; according to the earlier discussion in this chapter, this mingling should not have posed a problem for cohesion. With Theodosius' new army, though, cracks in Roman and barbarian-soldier relations start to appear. Now holding numerical superiority and belonging to a nation which recently trounced the Roman war machine, the Goths under Theodosius were reluctant to accept Roman authority and resisted the assimilation process previously embedded in the military.⁸⁰ Zosimus goes so far as to state the barbarian's intention in enlisting en masse was the supposed ability to take over the Empire from within the army.⁸¹ This period is also where we encounter the story of the Egyptian unit fighting their supposed barbarian comrades. Military camps are described as disorganized and chaotic, with no records being kept pertaining to either the Roman or barbarian soldiers. As such, barbarians were given permission to leave (permanently)

⁷⁹ These Goths having been previously settled within the Empire. Liebeschuetz, p. 28f

⁸⁰ Cromwell, p.27

⁸¹ This statement should be viewed with skepticism, but its implications about the number of barbarians brought into the army is important. Zosimus, 4.30

whenever they liked.⁸² The reformed army, thoroughly uncohesive, accordingly fell apart on the battlefield, and troops, Roman and non-Roman alike, deserted.⁸³

The influx of barbarian troops who did not assimilate and bond with their Roman comrades posed obvious problems for morale in terms of cohesion and discipline. These issues, however, did not end with Theodosius' resolution with the Goths in 382. The treaty under which Rome allowed the Gothic peoples to settle in the Empire was extremely pro-barbarian; they held a semi-autonomous state, were given land to farm, and owed military duty which would be served *en masse* under their own tribal chiefs.⁸⁴ With these terms the Goths formed irregular troops, not considered part of the standing army. Subsequent similar treaties with other tribes gave vast numbers of settling barbarians both pride in a newfound nationalistic identity and military superiority over the Romans.⁸⁵ Troops continued to be hostile toward Roman authority and training, causing repeated embarrassing defeats. At the end of the fourth century, the constant need for a large, operational army to face endless uprisings from ambitious generals and threats from hostile tribes necessitated the continued use autonomous and semi-autonomous barbarian units, no matter how unreliable they may have been. Theodosius had rebuilt the Eastern army based upon such troops and after the Battle of the Frigidus in 395, the Western army required much the same. Decimated, its military was reconstructed relying heavily on independent barbarian units. The problems engendered by their use would persist.

In the latter half of the fourth century, the morale of the army was severely affected by the introduction of vast numbers of barbarians. Tribal soldiers were intermingled with Romans,

⁸² Zosimus, 4.31

⁸³ Liebeschuetz, p.26

⁸⁴ Since the exact terms of the treaty are unknown, there is dispute over the precise nature of the military relationship between Rome and the Goths. The consensus does seem to be that when fighting for the Empire, the Goths retained some sort of authority over their own men. See Wolfram, p. 133, Heather, p. 162, Williams and Friell, p. 34.

⁸⁵ Cromwell, p. 27f

but their ever-growing numbers gave them little reason to integrate as effectively as their previous counterparts. Cohesion and discipline suffered, and the morale of the standing army declined. At the same time, however, the in-demand irregular troops of barbarians experienced an increase in morale. The Empire was granting undefeated and burdensome tribes favorable treaties that gave them a degree of independence, a sense of nationality previously unknown, and an air of military supremacy. The Empire, in desperate need of soldiers, had inadvertently diminished the spirit of its regular army, while inflating that of its troublesome barbarian federates. The dramatic increase of barbarians in the army after 378 had mitigated the assimilation process that in previous years produced a unified and combat effective military. A passage from Ammianus Marcellinus indicates that the desire to be Roman may have been waning even prior to the barbarian influx. Immediately before the battle at Adrianople, the Gothic general Fritigern sent an envoy to the Romans with the message that the Goths only wanted land to settle peacefully, and that the Empire could never hope to tame the barbarians or instill in them Roman customs without a great show of force.⁸⁶ The message was promptly ignored, but in hindsight seems prophetic. Rome would not be able to tame or assimilate the barbarians, yet it would still incorporate them into the military, and by doing so incite disorganization and inhibit discipline among the ranks.

⁸⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.12.8f

III

Protecting the Empire:

Life in Towns, Life Along the Borders

Structurally the army of the fourth century bore little resemblance to its Imperial predecessors. Familiar names like “legion” and “*auxilia*” still survived but only within the organizations of the two new main military bodies, the *comitatenses*⁸⁷ and *limitanei*.⁸⁸ Both were employed in the Empire’s defensive system, which needed to curb both internal and external disturbances. Luttwak describes the Empire’s strategy as that of defence-in-depth, yet the term and its variations⁸⁹ used in conjunction with the late army are controversial, as they imply the Empire maintained an overall “grand strategy”⁹⁰ in terms of safeguarding itself and that its mentality during the late period was, indeed, defensive. Rome need not consciously have settled upon any one defensive system and the term itself is modern, but the building and rebuilding efforts of the early fourth-century Emperors along the borders decidedly show concentrated efforts in protecting the frontiers. The division into border and mobile forces further reinforces Rome’s need for both anterior and interior units. The Empire’s posture may not have been wholly defensive, but implying it to be solely expansionist is also incorrect. Literary sources indicate campaigns into enemy terrain were mostly the result of retaliation, routing, and the brief resumption of preclusive defense.⁹¹ One necessarily does not need to style Rome’s policy in the

⁸⁷ These troops evolved from the earlier *comitatus*, companions of the emperor, who themselves became a mobile field army. *Comitatus* in the adjectival form means “attended,” “accompanied,” and as a noun “company,” “band.” The word itself derives from *comes*, “companion.”

⁸⁸ The name *limitanei* comes from *limes* (pl. *limites*). The word has several meanings, but all generally refer to the concept of borders and limits. In military terms, *limites* refer to fortified or defended boundaries.

⁸⁹e.g., elastic defense

⁹⁰ Here, grand strategy is understood to mean plans and policies purposely utilized in the protection and interest of a community.

⁹¹ Most territorial gains made through forward action in the fourth century typically were held tenuously or lost quickly. Their nature as part of any policy with goals of long-term expansion and subjugation is also questionable.

fourth century as “defence-in-depth”, but the basics of the Empire’s military strategy during this time should be discussed in order to examine the effects its utilization had on soldiers’ morale.

By the end of the third century, a forward defensive strategy largely was no longer a viable option for the Empire. Maintenance of a hard line of defense was expensive for Rome and spread the army thinly along the borders. If barbarians breached Rome’s perimeters there were no reserves to the rear capable of stopping them from further encroachment. The fourth century had the added problem of near-continual political upheaval. Troops were needed both to repel foreign invasions and put down usurpations; fourth-century Rome thus required a strategy in which static and mobile forces worked in conjunction to stabilize any threats. The division into *limitanei* and *comitatenses* did just that; soldiers were stationed in forts along traditional boundaries to hold off small-scale invasions and raids on the borders. Behind these troops lay further forts, signal towers, and outposts which provided a network of protection against outside invasions. The initial border forces could repel small bands of barbarians while larger armies that penetrated into Roman territory were met by the field armies. Before, during, or after engagement the first and subsequent lines of *limitanei* could send word to other border forces located further inland and the *comitatenses*. The *limitanei* fought the invaders from their forts either to stop them completely or merely slow them down until the mobile strike forces arrived. Though stopping barbarians on the border was always preferable, the strategy thus allowed for the possibility of incursions by substantial enemy troops which were handled by the *comitatenses*. The mobile units were independent of the borders until called upon; they also could, therefore, be quickly deployed to handle any internal problems when they arose. In theory, the system worked well to assuage the Empire’s manifold troubles.

In actuality, however, this strategy engendered complications for both the army and the Empire. The majority of soldiers compromised the *limitanei* who lived in forts and towns along the frontiers. The *comitatenses*, however, were generally billeted among citizens. A decree issued in 398 stated one-third of a host's home was allocated toward housing soldiers and officers could receive more; quarters were uncomfortably close.⁹² To citizens, the military was not fulfilling its protective duties; rather, it was imposing itself as a burden on the people. The consequences of billeting in relation to soldiers, citizens, and discipline will be discussed in the subsequent chapter, but for now the logistical problem of billeting is considered.

Units of *comitatenses* were placed within strategic locations in the Empire and their soldiers were housed in urban centers. The allocation of one-third of a residence to housing military men suggests that soldiers were placed in homes individually.⁹³ Soldiers were therefore separated and spread throughout cities, minimizing their interactions with one another. The distribution of troops as such caused breakdowns in both horizontal and vertical bonding. Horizontal bonding, noted previously, is that bonding of soldiers with their peers. Vertical, or hierarchical, refers to bonding between men and their leaders. Just like horizontal, vertical bonding requires constant interaction to cement trust, loyalty, and cohesion between officers and soldiers. Billeting fragmented these relationships through disorganization. Ferrill comments that the organization of the Roman army was part of what previously had given it a "psychological edge" over enemies.⁹⁴

For support, both social and combat, a soldier relied upon his primary and secondary groups. The primary group was the smallest and most intimate, comprised of men with whom he immediately served. Legions were much reduced in number during the fourth century, but the

⁹² *Codex Theodosianus*, 7.8.5

⁹³ Southern and Dixon, p. 83

⁹⁴ Ferrill, p. 26

smallest official unit in which a soldier participated was the century. Dependence upon comrades in these small units was critical for cohesion. If men in combat groups could not work together efficiently, could not rely on one another, then chances of success on a mission or in battle were hindered severely. When soldiers were spread out within urban environs their limited interactions didn't afford the ability for consistent training as a solid unit. Vegetius comments on this lack of drill and practice.⁹⁵ Their social interactions were similarly restricted. Although dependability and likeability⁹⁶ can be mutually exclusive in a military context, billeted Roman soldiers were inhibited on both accounts. Their haphazard distribution decreased their ability to become effective cohesive units through training and friendly interactions. Men could not be sure of how they or members of their primary group would come together on the battlefield.

As much as horizontal cohesion was inhibited, vertical bonding suffered similarly. Commanding officers were not only responsible for providing their men with discipline, but also promoted cause and engendered a connection to a soldier's secondary group. Manning states of leaders:

*By virtue of their additional membership in groups beyond the squad, platoon, or company...pass on to their subordinates the aims and goals of the service's higher leaders.*⁹⁷

Leadership thus advocates for the purposes of the whole military organization and impresses these ideals onto enlisted men. Commanders were responsible for giving their soldiers something for which to fight. During the fourth century a successful Roman officer should have stressed the importance of stabilizing the Empire to his subordinates. In preceding centuries commanding officers were stationed with their men in barracks and camps. Though they were

⁹⁵ Vegetius, 3.13

⁹⁶ Manning notes a Korean War study by Clark which implies soldiers differentiate between the two. Manning, p. 10

⁹⁷ Manning, p. 10

separated spatially by virtue of their rank, the location of their quarters, office, tent, etc. was well known to all and accessible. Polybius' description of Roman camps makes it clear that the layout did not deviate.⁹⁸ Soldiers knew exactly where to find their superiors. Men were also given rotating duties (such as the passing of the nightly watchword⁹⁹) that required them to be in the presence of their commanders on some sort of fairly regular basis. Officers thus lived and interacted directly with their men, serving as sources of inspiration and a constant reminder of the army's mission. This function, however, was broken down by the sporadic placement of men in towns. Officers were not accessible and were not a daily presence in a soldier's life. They therefore were not instilling a sense of Rome's purpose in the rank and file, nor were they generating loyalty to its cause. The ties to the secondary group, the military as a whole, were attenuated by this separation.

When stationed in towns, the situation for the *limitanei* would have been much the same; connections between the primary and secondary groups suffered from decreased horizontal and vertical cohesion. Morale declined accordingly. Circumstances were different, however, for soldiers living in border forts. Here, men constantly were surrounded by fellow soldiers and officers; cohesion, in the sense of simply knowing one's comrades, was not an issue. Problems with morale arose for the *limitanei* based upon the nature of their work and function within the military. Elton summarizes that frontier units had three primary duties: policing the borders (likened to "customs and excise"), gathering intelligence, and, most importantly, stopping small-scale raids.¹⁰⁰ The *limitanei* certainly did not lack a discernible goal; being on the front line with three important tasks, the border troops were well aware of their mission. The issue, however, was the feasibility of their tasks. Though they outnumbered the *comitatenses*, the border forces

⁹⁸ Polybius, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 6.26-6.34

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.35f

¹⁰⁰ Elton, p. 205f

were still spread thinly across the Empire's frontiers. Forts were not as large as they had been in preceding centuries and accommodated fewer men. Small units of soldiers were thus assigned the seemingly daunting task of protecting Rome as the first line of defense. For morale to be high there needs to be a "cause," but it must also seem attainable. *Limitanei* assuredly had a cause, but the motivation to carry it out is questionable. Numbers were stretched and even more men could be pulled off the borders to join the mobile units as *pseudocomitatenses*. Barbarians took advantage of undefended or lightly defended areas.¹⁰¹ With such great responsibilities and limited manpower, the mission of frontier troops might have appeared a futile and thankless task, especially since Rome's defensive strategy seemingly allowed large-scale forces to breach Rome's perimeters. *Limitanei* were only to prevent the incursion of small raiding parties; anything larger had to be dealt with by the *comitatenses*. In regards to sizeable barbarian armies, therefore, assumption of defeat on the part of frontier units was built into the system. Rome, and the *limitanei* themselves, knew the border troops were only useful up to a point.

Fortifications are known to inflict a so-called "Maginot Line" syndrome upon soldiers.¹⁰² The *limitanei* may have fallen subject to such a mentality and the thought certainly bears consideration in relation to morale. The Maginot Line's illusion of invincibility greatly demoralized the French after the Germans wholly bypassed it during World War II.¹⁰³ The military syndrome to which the fortification system has since lent its name refers to the deterioration of "offensive drive" in troops stationed in border forts by emphasizing the security of static defensive positions against the insecurity of open battle.¹⁰⁴ These fortifications create a

¹⁰¹ Ammianus mentions troubles with Franks entering the Empire through unguarded areas of the frontier. (Ammianus Marcellinus, 17.2.1) Zosimus says barbarians had unrestricted access across nearly the entirety of the Rhine. Zosimus, 3.3

¹⁰² Luttwak, p. 134

¹⁰³ Mihai, Hareshan, "The Maginot Line Syndrome?" www.nineoclock.ro

¹⁰⁴ Luttwak, p. 134

false sense of security that alleviates the perception of need for any sort of preemptive action.

MacMullen confirms this when writing about the “civilianization” of Roman troops. The author says that being assigned to “guard duty” in forts, men learned “nothing of tactical maneuvers or exercises and could only stand on the defensive.”¹⁰⁵

“Maginot Line” syndrome may seem in direct contrast to the prior statement that defeatism was already built into Rome’s defensive strategy by suggesting that strongholds created a feeling of safety, but the existence of “Maginot Line” syndrome among troops is easy to imagine in conjunction with the system’s inherent negativity. Troops who had fought barbarians first-hand could certainly develop defeatist attitudes; they knew the shortcomings of the system. Men who had not seen such dangers could easily feel secure in their strongholds. One’s sentiment depended upon one’s experience and thus changed over time. “Maginot Line” syndrome fed into the deficiencies of the defensive strategy especially since it was tough on morale anyway.

Often the mere presence of the army along the borders was enough deterrent to barbarian tribes, and soldiers easily could have become complacent living within protective fortifications. If the obligation for offensive maneuvers was absent, soldiers were terribly ill-equipped to handle any sort of invasion force, large or small. Holing up in a fort was not going to protect the Empire. Barbarians were well aware of their inadequacy with sieges; they lacked the technology and stood little chance of actually starving out a well-supplied Roman garrison. The forts were not the targets, but rather obstacles to be passed, and once by them the responsibility to handle the situation fell upon other garrisons and the field armies. “Maginot Line” syndrome thus aided in fomenting the defeatism imbedded into border policy; soldiers weren’t prepared to handle invasions because they didn’t expect them to be a problem. Fortifications had removed the

¹⁰⁵ MacMullen, p.176

motivation to prepare offensive strategies. In the face of invasions they were not equipped to handle the *limitanei* and civilian populations took refuge in their forts and towns, awaiting the arrival of the *comitatenses*, which could take weeks or months.¹⁰⁶ Luttwak notes that “the demoralizing effect of fortifications could be counteracted by appropriate training and adequate leadership,” but (as will be demonstrated in the subsequent chapter) Rome had difficulty maintaining both.¹⁰⁷

A final note should be made on disparity between the *comitatenses* and *limitanei*. Southern and Dixon explain that a decree from 372 listed in the *Codex Theodosianus* demonstrates the best recruits went into the *comitatenses* and less desirable men served in the *limitanei*.¹⁰⁸ Border troops were considered of lower status and paid less than the mobile units, and they generally lived in poorer conditions in areas of the Empire not as prosperous as those inhabited by more elite units.¹⁰⁹ Soldiers, Manning says, anticipate war to be “the great leveler” and thus expect to possess the same level of comfort within the military as their fellows.¹¹⁰ Relative deprivation is a condition related to this sentiment, defined as the experience of being deprived of something to which one believes oneself entitled.¹¹¹ Relative deprivation is extremely harmful to morale when there is a perceived inequality among soldiers, be it in basic needs or combat. Elton claims precedence probably did not exist among the *limitanei* units, so among the border regiments themselves relative deprivation was most likely not an issue for morale. Frontier soldiers lived and worked in the same level of comfort (or discomfort), and this level was what they expected from their position. Contention, however, could arise between the

¹⁰⁶ Elton, p. 215

¹⁰⁷ Luttwak, p. 134

¹⁰⁸ The law is 7.22.8. Southern and Dixon, p. 36

¹⁰⁹ Treadgold, Warren, *Byzantium and Its Army 284-1081* (Stanford University Press, 1995) p. 149-157

¹¹⁰ Manning, p. 7

¹¹¹ *Relative Deprivation: Specification, Development, and Integration*, ed. Walker, Iain and Heather Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

limitanei and mobile units because of the differences between the two forces. *Comitatenses* were held in higher regard, paid better, and stationed in more desirable locations. The development of bitter sentiments or jealousy on the part of the *limitanei*, who were daily on the front lines of the Empire, toward the less obviously imperiled *comitatenses* is not hard to conceive.

These bitter attitudes could run the other way as well. The *limitanei* have been perpetually characterized as ineffectual, and this may have produced some resentment from the elite *comitatenses*, who were called to the borders when the stationed troops faced a situation they could not handle. Were the frontier units truly deserving of such a negative assessment? The effectiveness of the *limitanei* is a much-debated topic and an in-depth examination of them is beyond the scope of this work. The constant incursions of foreign armies into the Empire during the fourth century would seem to suggest their inefficiency, but it must be remembered that the *limitanei* probably were not expected to hold off such forces completely, and ancient sources cite many examples of the *limitanei* fighting bravely against small raiding parties, as was their most important function.¹¹² That they could be called upon to form *pseudocomitatenses* is also telling. If the border units were truly ineffectual, there would be no reason to have them fight with the elite strike forces. Increases in pure numbers meant little if troops were not capable soldiers and the *limitanei* must have been somewhat efficient if allowed to join the *comitatenses*.¹¹³ That these forces could fight successfully does not necessarily preclude the previous assertions on problems with their morale. Rather, it demonstrates that men were capable of accomplishing their military duties, but the defensive system of the fourth century was able to predispose soldiers towards low morale based upon the interrelated defeatism and

¹¹² e.g., Ammianus describes border units as fighting with “valour” Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.7.7

¹¹³ Status as *pseudocomitatenses* could be either temporary or permanent. Some such troops were eventually subsumed into the mobile units themselves.

complacency. Problems with morale along the border were the result of an amalgamation of issues in which the deficiencies of the strategic system played a major role.

IV

Officers, Extortion, and Discipline:

Soldiers and Their Commanders

*ἀλλ' εὐδοξία μὲν ἀντὶ χρημάτων ἦρων οἱ ἡγούμενοι, τὰ δὲ τῶν στρατιωτῶν οὐδεὶς ἦν ὁ ἀφαιρησόμενος. Οἱ δ' αὐτοὶ καὶ ἰσχυροὶ καὶ ἀνδρεῖοι καὶ τεχνῖται πολέμων...*¹¹⁴

The preceding chapter touched upon the importance of leadership for military morale. Commanders are a soldier's connection beyond his primary group to the secondary group, the military organization as a whole. A soldier's loyalty must go further than his immediate comrades; he needs to believe in the purpose of the army and that he has an important part within it. Leaders promote these ideas as representatives of the larger military organization. When soldiers were billeted in cities the connection to their officers could get lost and weaken ties to the identity as part of a larger parent organization with an intended purpose and mission. The problems with leadership, though, went far beyond a lack of actual physical interaction. Late Roman authors lamented the prevalence of incompetent and corrupt officials who let their men become undisciplined. Libanius, in the above quote, yearned for the days when commanders were honorable and their men trained warriors. Problems at the top of the army trickled down and created pervasive issues for morale at all levels of rank.

Corruption in the military was not a new phenomenon. Dishonesty and exploitation had always been present to some degree in the Roman army, but the difference in the fourth century was their prevalence. Though corruption had long been a part of military life the root of its pervasiveness seems to have been the third-century crisis. As ambitious claimants fought for the purple they relied on the loyalty of personal armies made wholly devoted to them through bribes

¹¹⁴ *Then the officers desired honor instead of money, and no one would steal the belongings of the soldiers. And the men themselves were strong and courageous and artificers of war...* Libanius, *Libanius: Selected Works*, trans. A.F. Norman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977) 2.40

and booty. These armies made and unmade emperors and continued to function in this capacity in the following century. The military politicized in this manner generated deficiencies in reliable leadership from officers. Such men were negligent in the health, training, and discipline of their troops; this lax attitude carried into the fourth century. Military reforms of the late emperors, meant to eradicate the issues within the third-century armies, sometimes only increased the problems. Regional field armies became power bases for ambitious men and sources of revenue for high-ranking officials. Roman currency was egregiously debased in the third century and continued to be unsteady during the fourth. The army provided nominal compensation to its men, but the draw for officers was the opportunity to collect revenue through extortion. If a man commanded an army, he had a constant source of income. Thus the motivation for attainment of higher rank in the fourth century was predominantly monetary gain. Officers concerned themselves with using their soldiers as sources of income in manifold ways, thus generally ignoring their duties to both Rome and their men.

If the army provided pay and rations, what was the impetus for rampant extortion on the part of commanders? The problem, again, was the currency. Officers and soldiers were entitled to an *annuum stipendium* but payment could be irregular.¹¹⁵ Rome suffered terrible inflation from the debased value of coinage, and when pay did come, it was nominal. Most compensation therefore was in the form of *annonae* (rations) and *capitus* (fodder); men also received donatives on the birthdays and accession days of imperial persons.¹¹⁶ Thus officers were paid and compensated, if sporadically, just as their men. Commanders, however, realized their positions could be even more profitable by extracting money and rations from the soldiers, hence the

¹¹⁵ Ammianus records Julian as noting his soldiers' anger when they did not receive annual pay. Ammianus Marcellinus, 20.8.7

¹¹⁶ Southern and Dixon, p. 77-82

pervasive exploitation. The army was only as lucrative as one made it, and soldiers paid dearly for their commanders' actions. Libanius describes the tribunes' process of extortion as such:

*ὁ δὲ λιμὸς οὐτός χρυσὸς ἐκείνοις πρὸς τῷ παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως ὅς διὰ τῶν χειρῶν τῶν στρατιωτῶν εἰς τὰς ἐκείνων ἔρχεται.*¹¹⁷

By the early fifth century *stellatura*, the deduction from a soldier's rations granted to tribunes, was codified, suggesting its practice in the fourth century was so extensive it needed to be legally regulated. Libanius does not equivocate when he says that as a soldier is pauperized, he is correspondingly demoralized.¹¹⁸

In his treatise, Vegetius emphasizes the importance of the preservation of soldiers' health and asserts that it was the officers' responsibility to maintain the wellbeing of their troops.¹¹⁹

Centuries later, good health, food, and clothes are still considered imperative to high morale.¹²⁰

Yet these were not priorities for many fourth-century tribunes, who actively debilitated their men through theft. Libanius provides a clear picture of the state of troops from whom pay and rations were withheld:

*...πεινῶντων καὶ ῥιγούντων καὶ οὐδ' ὀβολὸν ἔχόντων διὰ τὴν τῶν λοχαγῶν καὶ στρατηγῶν δικαιοσύνην, οἱ τοὺς μὲν ἀθλιωτάτους ποιοῦσιν αὐτοὺς δὲ πλουσιωτάτους.*¹²¹

Hunger could prove more troublesome than the enemy,¹²² and its alleviation, the provision of a filling and nourishing meal, is recognized as a remarkable treatment for battle fatigue.¹²³ Commanders cared little for adequately providing for their men in this capacity and

¹¹⁷ ...and such starving [of the troops] means gold for the officers, above and beyond the pay from the emperor which passes through the soldiers' hands into their own. Libanius, 2.37

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 47.32

¹¹⁹ Vegetius, p.70

¹²⁰ Manning, p. 7

¹²¹ [The soldiers] starve and shiver, and do not have even a coin on account of the justice of their commanders and generals who make their men miserable and themselves wealthy. Libanius, 2.37

¹²² Vegetius, p.71

¹²³ Manning, p. 7

sent soldiers into battle unfed.¹²⁴ Officers kept deceased soldiers on the regiment's records to continually draw their pay and food.¹²⁵ Men were hungry and sick; commanders, responsible for the wellbeing of their soldiers, were demoralizing their troops through exploitation and negatively affecting overall health while enriching their own pockets.

Further basic needs were similarly withheld. Theoretically troops were provided with a standard military kit consisting of a shirt, tunic, cloak, and boots. There is no mention of when these items needed to be replaced, but eventually the provision of clothing was commuted to monetary payment, meaning soldiers became responsible for procuring their own uniforms and subsequent replacements.¹²⁶ Yet pay was sporadic and when it did come several issues were at hand. Should a soldier spend his pay on clothing or should the money be allocated elsewhere?¹²⁷ Since the currency was so debased was the *stipendium* enough to cover such items? The likelihood of tangible money even passing into the hands of a soldier is questionable. Uniforms became tattered and inadequate and men went about shoeless.¹²⁸ Even armor was subject to such deterioration; troops are noted as going into battle defenseless and subsequently cut down by arrows.¹²⁹ In desperate situations, the army resorted to appropriating found and abandoned weapons.¹³⁰ Yet the quality of such weapons, since they did not come from the state's *fabricae* (government weapons factories), is debatable. Engaging in battle without proper equipment must have been terrifying, and troops were disposed to flight rather than fight.¹³¹ Besides providing protection, a man's kit was a source of pride and imbued a sense of identity by

¹²⁴ Libanius, 47.32

¹²⁵ Ibid., 47.31

¹²⁶ Southern and Dixon, p. 76

¹²⁷ Libanius writes soldiers had to spend money on their families; troops in the fourth century had gained the right to legally marry. Libanius, 47.32

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Vegetius, 1.12

¹³⁰ Zosimus, 3.3

¹³¹ Vegetius, 1.12

differentiating him from civilians thus establishing him as part of a distinctive group. Adulterating this part of a soldier's identity was problematic to confidence and cohesion. Vegetius implied the importance of proper attire by declaring that soldiers not appropriately outfitted could not be considered soldiers at all.¹³²

If an officer's sole concern was using his men for financial gain, then little attention was paid toward his true duties, the training and discipline of soldiers. Ancient sources duly comment upon the lack of both. The two are interrelated; thorough training encourages discipline and men need to be disciplined in order to train. Deficiency in one causes deficiency in the other. Vegetius fervently explains a commander's hands-on role as taskmaster. The officer must drill his men himself to instill in them skill and strength, to make sure they can perform maneuvers properly, and determine if they are adequately responsive to orders given verbally or by signals and music. If the soldiers are deficient in any area, they should be exercised until their reactions are perfect.¹³³ The insistence on perfection is sage advice; soldiers not properly trained were ineffective in combat, inclined toward cowardly actions, and easily broke rank to flee the enemy. Without practice and exercise the enemy needed to do little for the Romans to desert, and those who stayed behind were easily beaten because their minds and bodies were not prepared for combat.¹³⁴

Horizontal and vertical bonding deteriorated when training was insufficient or nonexistent. Soldiers require common experiences to bring them together in their primary groups; once recruited practice and drill are primary sources of small group bonding that forms cohesion within units. Men gain confidence in their preparedness and that of their comrades; this confidence allows them to stand their ground and fight bravely because they have been

¹³² Vegetius, 1.12

¹³³ Ibid., 3.11

¹³⁴ Libanius, 2.38

sufficiently trained and their fellow soldiers are dependable. This was problematic for the late army. Libanius says their disdain for drill made soldiers easy targets for the enemy; untrained soldiers were apt to flee battle, their minds and bodies incapable of handling the stress of combat.¹³⁵ Vegetius similarly summarizes that men who are ignorant of discipline are afraid of action.¹³⁶ Without proper horizontal bonding men lacked confidence and contemporary authors accordingly describe Roman troops with pejorative terms.¹³⁷

Men of higher rank seemed to have little in the way of horizontal bonding and cohesion themselves. Greed assuredly would have precluded close bonding among officers; they were each other's competition. Several accounts from Ammianus demonstrate dissention among commanders. In Book XXII, after the accession of Julian, the author describes a tribunal of officers as unjustly convicting several men who had previously been loyal to Constantius.¹³⁸ After the disaster at Amida, detractors of Ursicinus slandered him until he was eventually forced into retirement by the emperor.¹³⁹ Corrupt officials persuaded Constantius that his general Claudius Silvanus was plotting a coup against the Empire.¹⁴⁰ If officers held no loyalties to each other, their subordinates had little reason for faith in the commanders.

In terms of vertical bonding the effect of lax training and discipline has already been addressed somewhat: commanders were not effectively leading their soldiers, leaving them unprepared for battle. When time and energy were spent on extortion, leaders did not promote the overall goals of the military (maintaining the Empire) and fostered no connection to the secondary group (the army institution as a whole). Without vertical bonding, soldiers feel a lack

¹³⁵ Libanius, 2.38

¹³⁶ Vegetius, 3.4

¹³⁷ e.g., "*ignavus...et fractus*" Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.4.7, "*στρατιώτας τρέμοντας*" Libanius, 18.38, "*milite robur torpuit*" Claudian, *In Eutropium, Liber Posterior*, 160f

¹³⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 22.3.1f

¹³⁹ It should be noted that Ursicinus was Ammianus' employer and thus his account may be biased. *Ibid.*, 20.2.1-5

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.2.3

of motivation towards accomplishing the goals of their parent organization. Just as their commanders stopped performing their duties, the soldiers became equally apathetic. Untrained men had little conviction for military affairs and accordingly turned their attentions to other pursuits. Drinking was a noted favorite pastime.¹⁴¹ Men even took up additional occupations; they became farmers and tradesmen.¹⁴² “Soldier” became a secondary job, and a dead-end one at that. *De Rebus Bellicis* suggests soldiers were discouraged at the slowness of promotion.¹⁴³ Men who rose to high ranks only retired reluctantly creating impediments to advancement. Soldiers could use bribes to get promoted,¹⁴⁴ but given the nature of their pay, most probably did not have the means to do so. Deceased soldiers on official records posed a further problem; open positions appeared still occupied. This practice also kept troop strength down; units on paper seemed full, but in reality faced decreasing numbers.

Vertical bonding promotes a soldier’s confidence in his commanding officers and a fourth-century soldier certainly had good reason to doubt his superior. As often as the soldiers themselves are described in negative terms, officers are called much the same. Julian is said to have dismissed or put to death his incompetent tribunes.¹⁴⁵ Valens’ men, Lupicinus and Maximus, are described as reckless¹⁴⁶ and even the emperor himself declared his officers to be wicked.¹⁴⁷ Ammianus repeatedly speaks of Constantius as suspicious of Julian, and relates that Valens hastily commands his troops at Adrianople out of jealousy of his nephew Gratian. Commanders were just as apt to flee battle as their untrained men, providing little for their soldiers to look toward for admiration. Grinker and Speigel determine that an effective leader

¹⁴¹ Libanius, 2.38, 47.5

¹⁴² MacMullen, p. 175

¹⁴³ *A Roman Reformer and Inventor, Being a New Text of the Treatise ‘De Rebus Bellicis’*, trans. E.A. Thompson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952) 5.3

¹⁴⁴ Libanius, 47.33

¹⁴⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 24.3.1f, 25.1.9

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.4.9

¹⁴⁷ Zosimus, 4.22

who maintains a bond with his soldiers is militarily competent, courageous, just, and concerned with the welfare of his men.¹⁴⁸ Vegetius similarly states (several times) that a commander must be acutely aware of the disposition of his troops not only as a whole group, but also as individual men.¹⁴⁹ According to contemporary authors, many fourth-century commanders failed their men on these accounts.

If officers were neither disciplining nor inspiring their soldiers, what were they doing with them? Though negligent training made their men militarily ineffective, the commanders still utilized the troops for other more nefarious purposes. Extorting the soldiers themselves could only yield so much, but the men could be used to accomplish the same from citizens. In an era where pay was scant for both officers and rank and file, urban populations provided a tempting environment for exploitation. Towns not only were responsible for housing the army, but also had further obligations for providing food and other supplies. Yet commanders set their men to acquiring more than the amount cities were required to give; laws concerning just how much civilians had to hand over were vague and thus it was hard to distinguish between legal and illegal exactions.¹⁵⁰ Some generals moved their armies around purely with the intention of thoroughly exploiting a city, then moving on to the next one.¹⁵¹ The general Romanus, arriving in Lepcis to put down a local revolt, turned away from the citizens when they could not provide for his extravagant demands.¹⁵² Often when cities refused to make contributions to the army, commanders employed their soldiers much like common thugs to exact payment:

¹⁴⁸ Grinker and Spiegel, p. 46-47

¹⁴⁹ Vegetius, 3.11, 3.12, 3.16

¹⁵⁰ Southern and Dixon, p. 171; MacMullen, p. 160

¹⁵¹ MacMullen, p. 160

¹⁵² Ammianus Marcellinus, 28.6.5

*στρατιώης ἀγοραῖον ἐρεθίζει σκώπτων καὶ κνίζων ῥήμασι καὶ λαμβανόμενος καὶ ἔλκων καὶ ἐπισπόμενος...μὴ γὰρ εἶναι φωνήν ἢ χεῖρα τοῖς τοιούτοις ἐπὶ τὸν στρατιώτην...*¹⁵³

Anyone who did speak or act out against the troops was placed in prison and then paid a bribe (again, to the army) to be released.¹⁵⁴

Extortion of the general population was a vicious cycle. Officers employed their soldiers to exploit civilians and the soldiers, seeing the profitability of their actions, began to extort the people to fill their own pockets. Since the commanders themselves engaged in such outrageous behavior, the troops had little fear of repercussions for their actions and rampant plunder went unchecked. Such behavior sowed contention between the army and civilians. The population lived in fear of the soldiers and considered them a burden.

Proper punishment for these outrageous transgressions would have gone a long way toward curtailing such behavior, but as stated above, since both officers and their troops were involved, soldiers need not fear correction. Indeed, fair but firm disciplinary actions from commanders would have greatly aided in alleviating many problems the army faced with regulating its men. The imposition of rules and the responsibility to follow them generates feelings of acceptance as part of a community.¹⁵⁵ Placing men under the same set of strict regulations forms cohesive units because soldiers are held to standards that are equal within the military community. When under the same societal rules, soldiers view themselves as part of that society and bond horizontally with its other members, their comrades. The use of discipline commensurate to infraction is predicated on officers being both caring and attentive toward their men, implying a great deal of vertical bonding. Rules, punishment, and the discipline they enforce upon soldiers are highly valuable tools for sustaining for morale.

¹⁵³ *A soldier rouses a market trader, mocking and verbally provoking and grasping him, and manhandles and draws him on...such persons must not utter voice nor raise hand against the soldiers...* Libanius, 47.33

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Manning, p. 10

The army was not devoid of commanders willing to dispense appropriate discipline, and under such men troops were quite effective. Ammianus Marcellinus describes at length the emperor Julian as a just man, an *indeclinabilis aliquotiens iudex* and *ensor moribus regendis acerrimus*.¹⁵⁶ When elaborating upon the emperor's administration of justice, the author says Julian's actions were without cruelty, that he made examples of a few men, and was more apt to threaten violence than actually use it.¹⁵⁷ Though strict, the emperor was not unnecessarily harsh and was beloved by his loyal soldiers.¹⁵⁸ Zosimus demonstrates an incident in which Julian's punishment of cowardly troops inspired the same men to feats of courage in a subsequent battle. When skirmishing with Germanic forces, emperor's six hundred strong cavalry was routed by the enemy and deserted the Roman infantry.¹⁵⁹ Julian allowed them back to camp, but as punishment forced the deserters to dress as women and paraded them around. During the next engagement, the same cavalry fought with noted distinction and bravery.¹⁶⁰

Rules and punishment are effective motivators when allocated fairly and properly, but can also be persuasive deterrents when exacted imprudently. Firmus, reminding Flavius Theodosius' troops of their commander's savagery, persuaded many to desert the Count amidst battle.¹⁶¹ Constantius, Valentinian, and Valens are all described in the varying degrees of their cruelty.¹⁶² Vegetius advocates the swift punishment of all military crimes (with rigorous application of the law) and the use of public examples to deter further offences, but he also stresses that an officer must know his men, their names, attitudes, and strengths.¹⁶³ Commanders need not be unusually cruel, indeed, they should be very familiar with their soldiers, but they

¹⁵⁶ "several times an inflexible judge," "shrewd censor of appropriate conduct," Ammianus Marcellinus, 25.4.7

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 25.4.8

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 25.4.10-13

¹⁵⁹ The footsoldiers, in the meantime, had actually won the battle.

¹⁶⁰ Zosimus, 3.3

¹⁶¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 29.5.48f

¹⁶² Ibid., on Constantius: 21.16.8-11, on Valentinian: 27.7, on Valens: 31.14.5

¹⁶³ Vegetius, 3.11

must exercise authority responsibly to maintain discipline. Vegetius, in suggesting both a familiar and authoritarian attitude, effectively argues for balance in the relationship between officers and their troops.

Such a balance may have been difficult to achieve when soldiers were placed in urban areas. With the haphazard distribution of men in cities, troops often found themselves without the direct supervision of commanding officers. Various offences could go unnoticed and unpunished, making any objectionable behavior more likely to be repeated. Contemporary authors certainly indicate much of the heinous behavior exhibited by soldiers took place while they were billeted, and Zosimus explicitly lays the blame for the troubled relationship between the military and civilians on Constantine, who had redistributed several troops from the borders into towns.¹⁶⁴ The attitudes of the leaders themselves must not be forgotten. Officers involved in illegal rackets were in no rush to castigate the soldiers they were using for nefarious purposes. The employment of their own troops for the exploitation of local peoples demonstrates that thuggish behavior was commended rather than condemned.

If a soldier might expect as bleak an experience in the military as was possible, one might suspect his eventual discharge and veteran's benefits provided motivation toward the successful completion of service. The anonymous author of *De Rebus Bellicis* proposes that men be honorably discharged at a specified point in their career to relieve military expenditure, with the added benefit that it would encourage more men to enlist because of increased prospects for promotion.¹⁶⁵ The author's plan for forced retirement begs the question of why some soldiers were not leaving the army, especially since so many recruits joined were conscripted and the conditions within the military itself were often hardly uplifting. The problems with pay and

¹⁶⁴ Zosimus, 2.34

¹⁶⁵ *De Rebus Bellicis*, p.113

rations have been noted, but while enlisted a soldier could at least expect to be compensated at some point in time. The promise of such things, even if sporadic and unreliable, may have been better than any reality a soldier faced outside of the army. Considering the background of many recruits, this scenario seems plausible.¹⁶⁶ That discharge is mentioned in conjunction with troubles in promotion implies that higher-ranking soldiers were the individuals unwilling to leave. If these men could add to their legal military compensation through illegal yet lucrative shakedowns, their hesitance to retire and abandon a relatively profitable trade is understood (though not, of course, condoned). The army was not ideal, but to some it was certainly better than the alternatives.

What could a soldier expect after the end of his enlistment? Upon receiving *honesta missio*¹⁶⁷ soldiers were granted benefits and privileges; veterans were exempted from the *capitatio* (poll tax) and at various points in the fourth century so were their wives and other family members. With Rome's system of taxation evidence for any immunity was necessary and soldiers were given a diploma at the end of their service as proof of their veteran status. Mann, however, suggests that the wording of such documents may have been troublesome in actually establishing what privileges a soldier received, and if a veteran's benefits were ignored, they were hard to reinstate.¹⁶⁸ Veterans also received land and livestock; *De Rebus Bellicis*' visions of soldiers farming on land they themselves had defended, as well as the author's statement that veterans would repopulate the frontiers suggests that such discharge benefits came from areas recently embroiled in turbulence, and therefore apt to repeat bouts of violence.¹⁶⁹ Though the

¹⁶⁶ Most available citizen recruits were the Empire's poor. See Chapter one.

¹⁶⁷ *Honesta missio* was an honorable discharge.

¹⁶⁸ Mann, J.C., "*Honesta Missio* and the Brigetio Table," *Hermes* 81 (1953) p. 498

¹⁶⁹ *De Rebus Bellicis*, p. 113

land grants were generous, the soil was usually of poor quality,¹⁷⁰ and “farmer” may well have been a less profitable occupation than “soldier.” As miserable as a man could be in the army, he was just as likely to be miserable out of it. Even in terms of his honorable discharge, the army appears to fail in successfully motivating a soldier. For many, there may have been little to look forward to as a veteran.

Southern and Dixon rightly summarize that blame for lack of discipline and motivation among soldiers lies with their superiors.¹⁷¹ Concerned primarily with acquiring wealth, commanders neither trained nor disciplined their men, who were thus unfit for battle and exhibited deplorable behavior among the civilian population. Such leadership had an overwhelmingly negative effect on the army’s morale. Slack training meant deficient cohesion and confidence; men were apt to flee battle, desert, or mutiny. Commanders provided little inspiration to their troops; they squabbled and plotted against one another and actively dissuaded vertical bonding. The soldiers themselves seemed of little concern, and their resultant odious behavior went largely unchecked. One wonders just how much Roman commanders even noticed the presence of their troops; such a notion is alarming for morale. Soldiers want recognition; troops need to know that they and their actions are important. Men during this time, like any, required a cause, yet their leaders were averse to giving them one.

Decrying the entirety of Roman officers as inept and corrupt and the whole military experience as deplorable is both unfair and untrue. Incompetent commanders were ubiquitous during this time, but by no means were they the only type in the army. Diocletian stabilized the Empire for a time after years of chaos. Julian was revered by his men. Valentinian listened to the wise counsel of his generals, who urged him to tackle the imminent threat of an Alamanni

¹⁷⁰ Southern and Dixon, p.88

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 172

invasion before dealing with the usurper Procopius.¹⁷² Flavius Theodosius was hailed as the savior of both Britain and Africa.¹⁷³ Inadequate leadership seems to have been most prevalent at the regional level and indeed, that was where enterprising men found themselves out of the eye of the emperor with an army of soldiers at their command and a bevy of citizens ripe for extortion.

¹⁷² Ammianus Marcellinus, 26.5.9-14

¹⁷³ Ibid., 28.3.1-9, 28.6.26, Claudian, *Panegyricus de Quatro Consulatu Honorii Augusti*, 288ff

V

Rome at War:

Victory, Loss, and Consequences

*Nothing succeeds like success in building confidence.*¹⁷⁴

Rome was struggling in the fourth century, but the Empire was not always fighting losing battles. To achieve victory, certain factors needed to be present and when they were, the late army looked just as impressive as the imperial expansionist military of preceding years. What conditions were necessary? Sound tactical planning, numerical strength, superior arms, and advantageous position all were important. Morale, of course, needed to be high. If the military's spirits are positive, Baynes says bad plans and conditions are immaterial; good troops are able to make something of any mission with which they are tasked.¹⁷⁵

To possess sufficient morale for combat effectiveness and thus secure victory, the army required adequate levels of the major determinants set forth in the introduction of this work: cohesion, leadership, cause, and health. If one was deficient, positive degrees of the others could compensate. Perhaps the greatest example of Roman victory in the fourth century is the Battle of Strasbourg, won by Julian and his troops in 357. The engagement was the high point of Julian's campaign against a confederation of tribes from *Germania Libera* who devastated and terrorized Roman Gaul. The victory allowed for the reestablishment of stronger defensive lines along the Rhine frontier and a restoration of control over the province, giving the entire Empire a sense of renewed stability amid years of disarray. The battle is a superb example of the positive effects of morale on combat, and the victory itself illustrates that the army, when spirits were high, was still capable of resounding success.

¹⁷⁴ Manning, p. 8

¹⁷⁵ Baynes, p. 94

Julian started his career as a Caesar untrained in military affairs, but quickly showed an aptitude for competent leadership during his campaigns in Gaul. Ammianus sings his praises as a general. Julian was courageous; he fought in the frontlines with his soldiers and discouraged them from retreat.¹⁷⁶ He shared their hardships, ate the same food, and sometimes even worse.¹⁷⁷ Julian was strict with justice but not cruel.¹⁷⁸ He condemned greed and made intelligent tactical decisions.¹⁷⁹ He was everything the inept, corrupt officers plaguing the fourth century were not.

The Roman forces at Strasbourg were thus in capable hands. Were the units cohesive? Julian is noted for varying the forms of his lines of battle and diligently planning to what posts his men were assigned. His soldiers could besiege and take cities under the greatest of dangers. Troops under Julian were obviously well drilled and trained.¹⁸⁰ The physical and mental health of his men was greatly important; Julian took care to select safe and healthful locations for camps.¹⁸¹ Before Strasbourg he requested his men eat, drink, and rest so they would be fresh for battle.¹⁸² The soldiers had confidence in him, loved him, even followed him without pay.¹⁸³ His soldiers were so dedicated that Gallic troops were convinced to leave behind their familiar terrain and campaign with him in Mesopotamia.¹⁸⁴ Julian himself gave his men a cause for which to fight.

Thus at Strasbourg, a tired, hot, outnumbered Roman army was able to defeat the Alamanni tribes; the soldiers' morale was excellent. Ammianus best sums up their spirit when

¹⁷⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 25.4.10f

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 25.4.12, 25.2.2

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 25.4.8

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 25.4.7, 25.4.11

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 25.4.11

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid., 16.12.9-12

¹⁸³ Ibid., 25.4.12

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 25.4.10

describing their actions after Julian requested the troops take respite at the end of their long march:

*Nec finiri perpessi quae dicebantur, stridore dentium infrendentes ardoremque pugnandi hastis inlidendo scuta monstrantes, in hostem se duci iam conspicuum exorabant, caelestis dei favore fiduciaque sui et fortunati rectoris expertis virtutibus freti...*¹⁸⁵

Morale continued to ride high after Strasbourg, and, encouraged by this great success, Julian pushed across the Rhine to take the fight to his enemies, further securing the Empire's permeable borders. The emperor then turned his eye to Persia, where he would ultimately perish after following tactical victories with ill-advised decisions.¹⁸⁶ Victory was attainable in the fourth century given the right circumstances, but loss more frequently seemed to follow and subsequently outweigh success.

The disaster at Adrianople possibly represents the greatest defeat of Roman troops in battle during the fourth century, and perhaps even in the history of the Empire, as the engagement is often cited as the death knell for the western provinces. The failure at Adrianople thus provides a useful foil to victory at Strasbourg, for as much as went right regarding morale at the latter went disastrously wrong at the former. Egregious mishandling of Gothic tribes, who should have become *laeti* under a treaty with Valens, precipitated the battle in Thrace. From the Goths' initial arrival into the Empire Roman soldiers abused the tribes by withholding provisions and practicing extortion. The exasperated Thervingi finally revolted and after several skirmishes the armies met outside Adrianople. The Roman troops, this time, did not have the advantage of a commander like Julian. Valens possessed none of the former emperor's natural aptitude for military strategy and though Ammianus commends the discipline of his troops, he

¹⁸⁵ [The soldiers] *did not allow him to finish what he was saying, gnashing their teeth with a hissing sound and showing their eagerness for battle by striking their spears and shields together, and entreated him to lead them against an enemy now in view, with the favor of God in heaven and their own confidence, and trusting in the proven valor of their fortunate leader...* Ibid., 16.12.13

¹⁸⁶ An example that good commanders can make bad decisions.

also notes Valens as greedy, cruel, unjust, and temperamental.¹⁸⁷ Though silence does not necessarily imply assent, there is no mention of the emperor's troops bearing great admiration for their leader. This is perhaps explained by their description as "a force made up of varying elements" supplemented by "a large number of veterans."¹⁸⁸ Valens' army quite possibly never fought together previously or under the emperor himself. If this is true, though the soldiers are described as neither contemptible nor lazy, they fought with men they did not know under an unfamiliar general.¹⁸⁹ Ammianus goes on to describe Valens rushing his men to battle out of envy for the successes of his nephew Gratian.¹⁹⁰ The soldiers were thirsty, hungry, and tired, and combat was thrust upon them without full deployment to battle lines.¹⁹¹ The thick smoke of fires set by the Goths made conditions worse.¹⁹² The Romans fought bravely but ultimately lost and were massacred. Low morale is not wholly to blame; the army made astoundingly bad tactical decisions and did not predict the arrival of a strong Gothic cavalry. Yet problems with morale were blatantly present. Leadership was incompetent and uninspiring. The soldiers were not physically fit for battle. Cohesion was perhaps at issue. That the origins of the battle lay in the shameless prior actions of undisciplined troops is telling. At Strasbourg, morale saw the military triumph, yet at Adrianople a similarly hot, tired, outnumbered Roman army was slaughtered.

Strasbourg's victory improved the army's position and its morale enough to pursue forward action across the Rhine where the military had continued success and further improvement in its spirits. Adrianople, however, had disastrous reverberating consequences for morale. Rebuilding the destroyed army required the enforcement of harsh recruiting laws

¹⁸⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.14.2-7

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 31.12.1

¹⁸⁹ ...*nec contemnendas nec segnes*...Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 31.12.10

¹⁹² Ibid.

(several previously mentioned) and the enlistment of large numbers of raw recruits. These soldiers took to the field in an army with the recent memory of two major defeats.¹⁹³ Morale was already dangerously low among what was left of the military, and the addition of untested and unwilling conscripts would not have improved the situation.¹⁹⁴ The greater problem was the urgent need for a large, operable military. The immediacy of the Gothic threat left little time for the proper training of an army largely made from freshly recruited individuals and rigorous training was forgone in favor of fielding men quickly. Incoming barbarian troops as supplements to the Roman soldiers provided further problems, discussed in Chapter two. Adrianople had not only caused a recruiting crisis, but also forced the creation of a patchwork army with untested mettle.

Strasbourg is certainly not the only example of Roman victory in the fourth century and Adrianople not the only defeat, but both illustrate well the effect of morale during and after battle. Strasbourg allowed the Empire to resume (even if briefly) a strategy of forward action into barbarian territory and reasonably secure a province formerly overrun by terror. The loss at Adrianople caused a recruiting crisis (in an Empire which notably already had one) necessitating the enactment of strict military legislation, the deployment of untrained soldiers, and the increased employment of barbarian troops. Success enlivened morale while failure discouraged it.

Winning or losing, Rome's continual battles induced war weariness across the Empire, affecting soldier and citizen alike. Though not all men witnessed constant combat, others engaged in more active areas would have suffered greatly from battle fatigue. The nature of the army also contributed to this problem. The use of legionary detachments was not new to the

¹⁹³ In Persia and, of course, at Adrianople.

¹⁹⁴ Williams and Friell, p. 30

fourth century, but the deployment of *vexillationes* from their parent regiment previously had only been temporary and after campaigns the units were dissolved and troops returned to their legions. In the fourth century entire regiments were not tied to specific armies and could be transferred based upon wherever they were needed.¹⁹⁵ Units were thus habitually pulled from parent armies and shuttled across Rome ad hoc, meaning certain regiments could face battle more regularly than others. Soldiers (particularly those who proved themselves strong, courageous, and useful) faced potential individual levying. Ammianus tells of a tribune of Constantius who visited Julian's army and "chose the strongest and most active of the light-armed troops, and made off with them."¹⁹⁶ The effects of continual transfer were detrimental for a number of reasons. Continual movement could weaken cohesion between regiments and the larger armies. Individual troops would also suffer from within the primary group. Transfer, moreover, was taxing physically and mentally on the soldiers. Even for the most seasoned veterans such pressures of perpetual combat were trying. Success in battle helped, of course, but Rome was losing on too many fronts and the strain of war forced men to "desertion, mutiny, cowardice, and insubordination."¹⁹⁷ As the fourth century wore on, demoralization from battle fatigue only could have worsened; Rome's leaders were dying on the battlefield and whole contingents of fellow soldiers were lost. Even officers began to despair; Southern and Dixon point out a passage from Ammianus describing Severus, a *magister equitum* as one:

*...bellicosus ante haec et industrius repente conmarcuit. Et qui saepe universos ad fortiter faciendum hortabatur et singulos, tunc dissuasor pugnandi contemptus videbatur et timidus mortem fortasse metuens adventantem...*¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Elton, p.211f

¹⁹⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, 20.4.4

¹⁹⁷ Southern and Dixon, p. 177

¹⁹⁸ *...who had before this been warlike and energetic, suddenly lost heart. And he who had often encouraged one and all to brave deeds, now was an opponent of fighting and seemed despicable and timid, perhaps fearing his approaching death...* Ibid., p. 177, Ammianus Marcellinus, 17.10.1f

Ammianus also mentions that Merobaudes induced a significant number of Richomer's troops to desert and stay behind in Gaul when they were desperately needed elsewhere.¹⁹⁹ Though these are but two examples, the sentiments might be indicative of a wider phenomenon. If so, then war weariness spurred commanders to forgo their responsibility of promoting motivation for the military's cause; instead, they were actively working against it.

Civilians were similarly exhausted; their taxes paid for the army and its continually draining wars. Defense along the frontiers turned Rome's previously static borders into permeable combat zones; any persons living in these areas faced the threat of both small-scale raids and larger invasions. These factors could not have helped the already contentious relationship existing between the army and civilians. Grinker and Spiegel note the attitude of an army partly depends upon that of the home front and the degree of backing received from them.²⁰⁰ Rome's army surely earned little to no sympathy or support from the civilian population with whom they held an antagonistic relationship.

In the fourth century soldiers, officers, and citizens were tired. Though victory could brighten spirits and renew a sense of purpose within the army, the feelings of euphoria were mostly temporary, as the Empire suffered terrible defeats that dragged morale back down with hosts of ensuing and worsening problems. The continual warfare was burdensome and fatigued the Empire and its people whether they reveled in success or wallowed in defeat.

Was the battle fatigue experienced during the fourth century truly any worse than that of earlier periods? Rome, after all, had never been a particularly peaceful empire. The fourth century is notable both for defeats and battles with horrific death tolls, like Adrianople and

¹⁹⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.7.4

²⁰⁰ Grinker and Spiegel, p. 48

Mursa, but the Empire suffered similar losses in previous centuries and was able to recover.²⁰¹

Rome was not unfamiliar with prolonged civil conflict; the third-century crisis had lasted some fifty years. Fourth-century Rome also did not collapse under the pressure of battle. So was there a true difference in war weariness that would have affected morale any more than in previous centuries? The question phrased as such is mostly irrelevant. Battle fatigue in general is a problem for morale, and our objective is not to compare one century's wars to another. The point is that war in the fourth century was pervasive, occurred on many different fronts, and far too many times was fought by under-strength troops with already low morale. The majority of these conflicts were not far removed from the borders of the Empire as many wars had been when Rome maintained an expansionist policy. Fourth-century wars were civil conflicts fought within the Empire and invasions that encroached upon imperial territory. War could be uncomfortably close, especially since pressure was on nearly every front of the Empire.²⁰²

Similar conditions had previously existed in the Empire's history, as Rome had rarely maintained several years of peaceful existence, yet in the fourth century the Empire truly subjected its soldiers and citizens to constant and debilitating warfare.

²⁰¹ e.g., Cannae, Carrhae

²⁰² The Rhine and Danube arguably saw the most action, but Persia was also a persistent problem. Revolts by Firmus and Gildo occurred in Africa. Britain continually faced raids by native tribes and was the sight of attempted usurpations as well. The Vandals and Visigoths would become problematic in Hispania.

VI

The Problem of Morale:

Conclusions

The questions posed in the introduction of this work asked what factors influenced morale in the fourth-century Roman army and if military morale was, indeed, problematic for the Empire. The answer to the first question, succinctly, is everything. Anything and anyone a soldier comes into contact with can affect his morale. Assessing morale based upon this reality, however, is impossible, and this work instead focused upon major institutions, concepts, and relationships in a soldier's career to determine if and how they affected his spirit. The second question, was morale problematic, can only be answered after addressing the first. Bearing in mind the conclusions about morale drawn from examining its influencing factors, can it be determined as an overriding problem for the fourth-century armies? Using the definition of morale previously set forth (the motivation to accomplish the purposes the military requires of its soldiers) and its main components contributing to a positive or negative level (cohesion, leadership, cause, and health) one can reasonably determine whether *esprit* was a problem.

The first issue addressed was that of citizen recruitment. Procuring adequate citizen manpower was a problem for the Empire, not only because of issues with physical numbers (due to population drop and restrictive legislation) but also Romans were largely unwilling to join the military for the reasons that were previously discussed. Citizens had little motivation to fight in the army that promised to take them away from home and be placed in a hostile environment from which it was likely they might never return. The cause of the Empire and its citizens were different; Rome needed to stabilize on a grand scale, while citizens were more concerned with their immediate home and lands. With conscription, the army took in reluctant recruits who

lacked commitment toward the greater purposes of the Empire. Unwilling men make unmotivated soldiers. Morale requires a soldier hold “a strong belief...in the goals and values and willingness to exert considerable effort”²⁰³ on behalf of the military organization. Such sentiments appeared lacking within the majority of the citizen population.

Barbarians have long been demonized as the downfall of the army and even of the Empire itself, but as long as foreign troops Romanized and assimilated, they proved little problem. Romanized barbarians shared the goals of the army and were effective constituents within cohesive units formed through training and combat experience. This statement, of course, assumes they were trained and considered dependable on the battlefield. As later chapters demonstrated drill, discipline, and combat efficiency were at issue in the fourth century. Yet if barbarians were provided with the necessary tools to make them good soldiers, then good soldiers they became. Problems with barbarians and morale arose from the Empire itself. When it did not care to motivate properly, integrate, or sufficiently provide for its men (and adequate provision was, indeed, at issue during this time), they duly revolted. Unintegrated troops, the *foederati* and others under similar treaties, were another matter. The Empire had never really bothered to assimilate or provide for them beyond their contracts; their only common cause was military service when required. If Rome fostered no bonds beyond this, then at the termination of a contract there was little reason for unity between the two groups. The Empire had promoted no cohesion with soldiers or officers of the standing army and only subsidized the *foederati* when under contract. Rome did not give the allied troops much motivation to fight for the Empire, but rather several reasons to rise against it, and their increasing numbers in the late fourth century did nothing to help the situation. Numerical superiority and semi-independence divided and disorganized the army.

²⁰³ Manning, p. 6

Rome's defensive strategy required a separation of border forces and central reserves that created disparity between the two groups based upon differences in mission, location, and provision. Elastic defense itself could generate a defeatist attitude and inhibited training for any necessary preemptive action along the borders. Billeting restricted vertical and horizontal bonding, concepts vital to cohesion. Continual warfare exhausted soldiers physically and mentally. Fighting for a cause would seem difficult when there was no end in sight to battle.

The pervasiveness of incompetence among the higher ranks most likely was the greatest threat to morale, as corrupt officers failed their soldiers on all counts of morale's major contributing factors. Officers were responsible for discipline through rigorous training in order that soldiers be effective in combat. Commanders, seemingly more concerned with the profitability of the army, allowed their men to become lax through minimal training. Cowardice, desertion, and mutiny were common. If soldiers were not trained then they were not efficient cohesive units in battle. Instead of promoting the "great cause" of the Empire and advancing significant bonds between primary and secondary groups, commanders used soldiers to enrich their own pockets through extortion. A soldier's health and well-being were generally disregarded (again, through exploitation). The officers themselves were simply incompetent leaders who gave their men little positive inspiration. Soldiers under such commanders, therefore, lacked the motivation and sheer ability to fulfill the purposes of the military organization. Ineffectual commanders produced ineffectual soldiers with troublesome morale.

If morale is, as Baynes states, the most important factor in war, then any affronts to it should be considered highly problematic, and even if morale is not the greatest determinant, its consideration assuredly is still merited. Every addressed topic concerning the army, recruitment, barbarians, strategy, leadership, and battle, produced some sort of negative effect on morale and

thus morale was indeed a problem for the military during this time. Saying that morale was at issue does not imply that it was wholly negative during all points of the fourth century, and this work has duly pointed out many factors that either produced positive morale or were irrelevant for its effect on troops. Although evidence suggests the prevalence of bad leadership, good commanders who trained and disciplined their men did exist. Success on the battlefield yielded upswings of spirit. Romans and barbarians were able to form cohesive units and positive cultural exchanges between citizen and foreigner occurred within the army. Positive morale was possible, just predicated on the military functioning in a practical and constructive manner. When it did (and occasionally, indeed, it did) morale was not at issue; troops could be extremely organized and effective. Unfortunately during the fourth century, the military's most frequent condition was not operating at an efficient level. Rome in early centuries was renowned for the discipline and success of its military. Men continually trained and lived together; they were well-compensated, fed, and received exemplary medical attention. Units were cohesive and victory expected. Morale fluctuated as it always does, but the consistency of these factors would appear to have made it considerably high in comparison to that of fourth century. Perhaps then, the lack of consistency can be blamed partly for the problematic nature of morale in the late period. The tools for positive morale existed, but sadly were outnumbered (e.g. efficient generals) or underdeveloped (e.g. adequate training).

Why would an empire, previously conscious of the positive effects of high morale allow the army's spirits to fall so low in comparison? First, we must concede that some individuals did, indeed, try to change things for the better. Diocletian and Constantine reformed the army based upon what they felt was in the best interests of Rome. The army had good commanders who took care of their men and were successful on campaign. Julian was able to execute

forward maneuvers (albeit briefly) that had not been seen in the Empire since the previous century. Yet such men were too few to significantly effect change upon the Empire for a prolonged period of time. Returning to the question of just how, exactly, Rome let its military morale slip, a tempting theory might involve the interrelation of private power and maintenance of the Empire. Power in any government always has been for sale to some degree, but was extensive during the fourth century (more appropriately the late Empire in general). In preceding centuries only certain classes of people in Rome held true influence, but as old restrictions in the government and military were removed²⁰⁴ and new ones added power became available to most anyone with the money or ability to wield it. The generals, commanders, and officers of the late army were partly a product of this system. High ranks were open to men through merit, money, or both. As discussed prior, once in power the concern of many of these men primarily was financial gain. The goal of the Empire, in the face of constant usurpations and foreign wars, was maintenance. If officers wanted to continue their profitable extortions, they needed the Empire and its army to continue as well. Maintenance only required enough men to field for fight, be they volunteer or conscript, citizen or barbarian. As long as Rome had men for combat, both the Empire and its officers had a short-term solution to their problems. Defeat, though certainly never preferred, was acceptable as long as it posed no serious threat to the Empire. Rome could survive battles, even disasters like Adrianople and the failed expedition to Persia, and commanders could continue to rake in profits. Succinctly, the army just needed men, any men; morale was not a concern as long as there were bodies to put to battle.

This is merely conjecture, however, and it cannot be overstated that good commanders existed, men who won battles and took care of their soldiers. Yet Rome's defensive strategy demonstrates the "acceptable defeat" mentality, while conscription of less than desirable citizen

²⁰⁴ e.g., The *Constitutio Antoniniana* granted all free men citizenship.

recruits and the eventual proliferation of *foederati* and other barbarian soldiers with the most tenuous of loyalties to Rome shows a willingness to use anyone for military service.²⁰⁵

Theodosius seems to have made the conscious decision to eschew rigorous training of his troops in favor of amassing a large force to counter the Goths. Though his motives were not financial gain, they most certainly were the maintenance of the Empire and the retention of his own power as emperor. Treaties made with barbarians demonstrate Rome was willing to make serious concessions to maintain any sort of military force. Finally, the corruption of generals and indifference toward discipline are indicative of lax attitudes in regard to involvement in actual military affairs. The Empire and the army, perhaps, simply did not care about the morale of its soldiers. Rome was no longer expanding, but there was no concept that the Empire was actively dying. No one in the fourth century could have known that the West would collapse in the fifth. Again, as long as there was an army, whatever its state, the Empire persisted.

Southern and Dixon note that, given the circumstances of the Late Empire, it is remarkable soldiers stood and fought at all.²⁰⁶ Yet they did and Rome continued onward. Problematic morale assuredly would have followed the army into the new century. Wars continued, the Empire divided, the use of strictly barbarian contingents increased, among numerous other issues. The problems that contributed to morale did not go away. Whether they changed for better or worse as the fifth century went along is the subject for another work, but the traditional date for the fall of Western Empire, 476, is telling. Problematic morale did not start in the fourth century nor end there, but during this time its pervasiveness certainly meant soldiers faced serious issues with a lack of motivation to perform their obligations to the army and the Empire, the irony being those two institutions had originated these problems.

²⁰⁵ Though part of this, of course, is due to Rome's pervasive manpower problems.

²⁰⁶ Southern and Dixon, p. 178

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