

Why did the roman army deteriorate



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The Roman Empire stood in great power for many centuries. Rome was considered the center of civilization for years. The empire was beautiful and although it attracted many invaders, it was very well protected by the walls surrounding the empire and, of course, the powerful army.

Some people believed that the Roman Empire would last forever. However, it eventually deteriorated because of military decay. The Roman Military decayed because of over spending, military anarchy, the use of foreign troops, and a drop in the dedication of soldiers to the empire. When Marcus Aurelius installed the adoptive system, Rome became most powerful. However, the system was never reinstalled after his death, causing effective leadership in governing Rome to be lacking.

The Roman Emperor was the backbone of Roman stability and therefore the strength of the Roman army was crucial in ensuring the empire's stability. This stability was drastically altered when corruption and military decay began. During the Pax Romana period, the Roman soldier used his superior organization and training to conquer nations. He was extremely disciplined and professional. He and his army were literally the wall that protected Rome. Their fighting will power would allow them to remain on the battlefield no matter what and how long battles were needed for victory.

“ They would join the army at the age of eighteen. Their recruitment was localized and usually hereditary. They were not allowed to marry while on service. Their employment included police duties, checking and rounding up local raiders” [1].

“ The army had two purposes, first to fight wars of conquest and satisfy the emperors desires for glory, booty, and expanded territory. Second, to suppress the unrest in outlying provinces” [2]. In addition, during the Pax Romana, the citizens started to buy, buy, and buy. “ Rome was importing more goods than it was exporting. In addition, the army was not bringing any more loot from other lands. Moreover, the coins were devalued, copper, lead and other materials were added to gold, which caused inflation because merchants wanted more for the same product” [3].

In addition, Rome was using a lot of its money for the military to protect itself from invaders. “ Military spending left few resources for other vital activities, such as providing public housing and maintaining quality roads and aqueducts” [4]. This frustrated Romans, which made them lose their desire to defend the Empire. The empire had to begin hiring soldiers recruited from the unemployed city mobs, or worse, from foreign countries. Such an army was not only unreliable but also very expensive, which forced the emperors to raise taxes frequently and in turn led to increased inflation. This caused people to flee Rome.

This affected the Roman army because people were fleeing from Rome, and there were not enough people to enlist. All this seemed to be changing later in the empire with the emperors' change in attitude and allowing barbarous German tribes into the army. Emperors resorted first to the population of the barbarous regions of the empire, then to foreign barbarians. In the reserve army, the highest regarded men were the barbarians units. These officers occupied the highest ranks up to that of master of the militia. With all the

favoritism toward the German unit, the Roman soldiers began to feel inferior and secondary in their role of defending the empire.

The military commanders began to use their military troops to seize the throne and its governing power. They began “ neglecting its duty of defending its borders and disrupted the eternal life of the Empire” [5]. The Roman Empire was plunged into military anarchy and raided by barbarous Germanic tribes causing a major burden from an economic standpoint. Rome’s military power decayed as the Romans became very dependent on outsiders fighting in their armies and ruling over them. “ The civilized Rome came to rest too heavily on their technology and not enough on what had kept them powerful for hundreds of years, their military prowess” [6].

Foreign emperors, feeling pressure from all directions, attacked Rome, which depleted army and citizen morale. The personal dream of imperial leaders was never capable of re-stabilizing the Empire after the invasions. For instance, Constantine created a “ substantial field force where he recruited many regiments from Germany. He greatly increased the German generals” [7]. “ Aurelius also introduced the German element into the Empire.

He established a precedent for settling Germanic peoples, barbarians to the Romans, in Roman territory to try to secure peace” [8]. He felt the only way to preserve the Empire was to host all those who wished to live within its territory. These German units under Roman commanders did not easily fall to the traditional Roman discipline and command. Their reluctance to submit to Roman rule caused Rome to lose the tactical superiority that it had once enjoyed over the German barbarians.

This loss of tactical supremacy destroyed the elite. “ The destruction of the elite handed over power to a new oligarchy of the newly wealthy and of high officials who came from barbarous elements of the population” [9]. “

Conquered nationalities had in no way lost consciousness of their origin and many were the means of resistance to the unifying will of Rome” [10].

Although they continued to fight in well framed units, the overall will to train and discipline required for fighting was almost unnoticeable. Emperors continued to play a negative role in allowing foreigners to take control. Jones mentions that the “ emperors disarmed the citizens and trusted the defense of the empire to mercenaries” [11].

Valens was a clear example of the corruption in the higher class of the empire. He was active in suppressing the lives of officers by depriving them of their portions, clothes, and military equipment. Favoritism towards the barbarian units of the army and corruption towards the state and its people is ample reason why such a revolt in the Roman army occurred. Towards the end of the empire, the Roman army’s qualities deteriorated.

The legions failed to defend borders; the army began to consist predominantly of the peasants (citizenship issue). The change in the soldiers’ attitude explains the lack of loyalty to Rome and the lack of military leadership. The war against the Germans led to terrible financial burdens on the Empire. “ To obtain funds for the military, emperors confiscated goods, exacted forced labor, and debased the coinage by minting more currency without an increase in the supply of precious metal” [12]. Because of this, the citizens withdrew their loyalty from Rome which deeply affected the middle class.

“ The Roman state went bankrupt in the third century because it was incapable of continuing to pay its officials and it was incapable of paying its armies without recourse to confiscation, monetary falsifications requisition in kind, and unpaid services” [13]. Another major move the emperor and his empire introduced to the citizens of Rome involved the citizenship issue. In approximately 212 AD, recruits had been picked from among provincials, who were attracted by the promise of free citizenship and its advantages. With citizenship no longer necessary for enlistment, the poor, weak class of the empire were drawn to the army because of the weapons and artillery” [14].

It seemed that the major reasons why lower class people were drawn to the artillery aspect of the army was so that they could benefit from the empire’s wealth. The resultant labor loss crippled Roman cities, farmlands, and economic trade. Another important factor in the decline of the military was the lack of recruits from “ Romanized” backgrounds. One problem was the granting of citizenship to all free men within the empire. Originally, non-citizens who served in the Roman army would be granted citizenship at the end of their enlistment. “ It was this desire of the provincials to acquire Roman citizenship that accounts for the fact that during the first two centuries, voluntary enlistment’s sufficed to keep the armed services up to establishment.

Certainly, the army would not have remained at full strength if it had depended on volunteers from those who already possessed the Roman citizenship” [15]. This showed the remarkable unwillingness to serve. Because of factors such as the “ free citizenship” offered by Rome and the <https://assignbuster.com/why-did-the-roman-army-deteriorate/>

lack of available manpower, Rome's army, which had been the symbol of its power, was left unorganized and nearly useless. Because of Rome granting citizenship, people no longer wanted to serve in the military. Eventually, the army found itself compelled to accept anyone who was willing to fight.

The army came to be composed of lowlifes from uncivilized backgrounds and barbarians. The newly enlisted soldiers, whose views differed immensely from those of the government, caused conflicts and turmoil since the army was generally the backbone of government. In History of the Later Roman Empire, it says that, " By the third century, the state had to rely on Germans to fight under Roman commanders. The Germans had no understanding of Roman traditions and no real attachment to either the empire or the emperor" [16].

Because of these problems, civil wars broke out in the third century, causing life in Rome to become very unpleasant. " A last effort to regain control and raise the standard of soldiers in the army was made by the government. It offered higher pay, free rations, more booty, and the right to legal wedlock to all those who enlisted" [17]. This attempt failed miserably, though. " The soldiers remained inadequate and uncivilized, due to their low social classes. These soldiers just wanted to fight and were not interested as to against who they were fighting-even themselves" [18].

It was at this time that the Barbarians saw their chance to attack, and they seized the opportunity. These attacks led to the fall of the Roman military. Another negative impact of the civil war in the fall of the Roman army was when emperors became afraid of their own troops and possible rebellion

against them. Therefore, the emperors, to remain on their throne, were sometimes obliged to buy their powers from soldiers and other militiamen. The lack of conventional loyalty and honor towards the emperor led to a character change in the Roman soldier. Before the Civil War, the Roman army was considered the greatest fighting force in the entire Western World.

In conclusion, the Roman army defeated itself. It began as a powerhouse, but by some uncontrollable and ignorant errors, it collapsed. It was violated internally by the emperors and their soldiers and externally by the barbarous tribes. The lack of soldier loyalty to Rome began with the lack of Roman loyalty towards soldiers.

By allowing citizenship to almost anyone, it negated the importance of the higher-class society in Rome. Almost anyone could be a Roman soldier, almost anyone could have access to arms, and almost anyone could use these arms in their favor. The allowance of the German entrance in the army introduced doubt in the minds of the veteran soldiers. Therefore, Rome hurt itself. One does not know if it could have continued its dominance, but one could clearly say that Rome's dominance brought its disappearance.