

Perish 156

Chapter 156: The Surprise Attack of the Roman Army_2

"How do we ensure safety?"

"We have the Women's Guard."

"You have too many people in the Female Camp; the Guard won't be able to care for everyone properly."

"Then, let's call a few Centurions to secure the shores for us," Acronis interjected.

Maximus immediately opened his mouth, ready to voice his objection.

Acronis quickly added, "We were all born as female slaves; we don't fear being seen. Besides, we are all brothers and sisters here—I trust the soldiers guarding us won't cross the line."

"...Alright then, I'll agree," Maximus reluctantly answered.

When Maximus' order was relayed to the camp, the soldiers burst into excited cheers, scrambling for the chance to guard the Female Camp.

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Early the next morning, Maximus was awakened by Akegu: "Leader, Hagux has urgent news!"

Maximus jolted upright, sitting up in an instant: "Bring him in quickly."

Hagux hurried into the command tent, his expression anxious: "Leader, my subordinates just reported that a large number of Roman soldiers suddenly appeared near Castellum!"

Maximus was now wide awake, startled out of his drowsiness.

Although he had never visited Pisenum before, he had memorized its map thoroughly. He clearly remembered that Castellum was a coastal town situated between Ascoli Port and Atennum, even closer to Atennum.

"Didn't you report yesterday that the area ahead had been quiet with no enemy activity? How has an entire Roman Army suddenly emerged?!" Maximus instinctively questioned, his tone sharp due to his urgency.

"Leader, I assure you, my men absolutely did not slack off yesterday. They continuously scouted the towns along the way, with observation posts as far as seventy to eighty miles out at Ascoli Port. Thanks to the convenient coastal roads and the lack of resistance from local residents, we dared send reconnaissance riders that far. We truly detected nothing unusual! If my men hadn't strictly carried out their tasks and gone scouting at dawn today, we wouldn't have uncovered the enemy this early!" Hagux argued, his voice rising in protest.

Maximus calmed himself slightly, softening his tone: "How many enemies are there?"

"My men prioritized reporting back quickly upon discovering the enemy, so they didn't have time to assess the numbers thoroughly. However, they left people behind to continue observing. We should receive a more detailed report very soon."

"Akegu, notify the Bugler to sound the copper horn immediately!"

"Casius... you and the others, go and inform the three Legion Commanders about the enemy presence! Tell them to gather their troops quickly!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Also, bring Quintus and Flanitnus here immediately!"

"Woo! Woo! Woo!..." The urgent blare of the copper horn pierced the air, rousing the previously silent camp into motion.

Upon arriving at the command tent and hearing Maximus' briefing, Quintus and Flanitnus immediately sensed the gravity of the situation. Bending down, they scrutinized the map.

Flanitnus, his expression severe, pointed out, "Castellum is only twenty miles from us. Under normal marching conditions, it would take the Roman Army at least half a day to arrive. However, their appearance there now clearly indicates they're aiming for us.

If they've prepared in advance—ditching supplies, traveling light, and moving swiftly along the coastal roads—their speed would dramatically increase. In roughly three or four hours, they could reach us.

Leader, we now have only two options. Either we retreat immediately to link up with Spartacus' forces... But just preparing to move our troops would take significant time, and our cumbersome Supply Team would slow us down further. If the enemy catches us while we're marching, we'll face serious trouble! Or—"

He emphasized, "We gather all our soldiers and form defensive lines along the river to repel the Roman Army's attack. Simultaneously, we must notify Attutmus and Spartacus, urging them to bring reinforcements immediately.

Attutmus' forces aren't far from us; they should be able to arrive before the Roman Army does. Together, our combined troops would number close to forty thousand. Additionally, the river serves as a natural barrier, enabling us to confront the Roman Army directly!

Though Spartacus' army is farther away, he'll undoubtedly push his troops to the limit to reach us. By the time he arrives, the Roman Army will likely be very fatigued. Then, Spartacus can launch a flank attack, allowing us to secure a decisive victory!"

By the time Flanitnus finished speaking, he was visibly excited. Maximus, however, remained calm and turned his gaze to Quintus, his Staff Officer: "Quintus, what's your take on this?"

Still engrossed in the map, Quintus seemed lost in thought until Maximus called him back to the present. After a moment's reflection, Quintus replied, "Why the Roman Army suddenly appeared around Castellum is likely due to one reason... The Roman forces stationed at Ascoli Camp may have sailed to Castellum Port under the cover of darkness via Ascoli Port. The distance between the two cities by sea is quite short, and with lighthouse guidance, the route is safer and more efficient than traveling overland.

That said, transporting such a large number of troops would require enough ships. I suspect the Roman Governor likely mobilized warships from Brindisi's naval base. For him to orchestrate such an effort shows his determination to defeat us."

Quintus fixed his serious gaze on Maximus, adding, "Leader, Flanitus' suggestion was clear, but I want to stress something: the morale of our soldiers isn't particularly high right now. If we choose to retreat, they may lose all fighting spirit. The Governor would swiftly pursue us, leading to total collapse!"

Maximus stroked his chin involuntarily, lowering his head as he fell into deep thought. This posture was partly to hide the faint frustration stirring in his heart: Two Roman veterans who usually bicker now united around one argument—no retreat, fight the enemy! Meanwhile, his first instinct upon learning of the Roman Army's approach had been to retreat and regroup. Spartacus' rebellion might achieve ultimate victory, but it shouldn't come at the expense of his own forces suffering devastating losses... Yet retreating now indeed posed great dangers. If a total collapse occurred, an entire year's painstaking efforts could be destroyed...

Under Quintus and Flanitus' piercing gaze, Maximus deliberated intensely, his hands behind his back forming tight fists that dampened with sweat. Finally, he gritted his teeth and declared, "You both... make good points. The Roman Army seeks to destroy us entirely—I'll show them that my forces aren't sheep to be slaughtered. We're an unyielding rock! This battle, we'll fight them head-on!"

Maximus' words resonated with determination. Flanitus passionately responded, "The Leader is absolutely right! This Roman Army underestimated us—they've endured a sleepless night, only to march twenty miles at a rapid pace to reach us. They won't have the strength to fight us decisively. Meanwhile, our soldiers have undergone rigorous training and are eager for a battle to prove themselves. They'll make the enemy pay dearly!"

Quintus added, "Before the Roman Army arrives, we must organize our defensive formations. To do so, we need detailed information about the Womans River's terrain—where the waters are deep, where

they are shallow, which areas are easy to ford, which areas are difficult... I believe that Marsi man who recently joined us is familiar with this terrain. We should summon him and thoroughly inquire."

Chapter 157: The Battle That Decides Life or Death

Maximus nodded and turned around, saying, "Akegu, go immediately and summon that... the man called Demolius for me!"

As he watched Akegu leave the military tent, a thought arose in Maximus's mind: Although both Quintus and Flanitnus made reasonable arguments, this passive compliance with their demands felt utterly terrible! Perhaps in the future military councils, I should include more civilian officials like Volenus. This way, diverging viewpoints could emerge, allowing me to make decisions more deliberately...

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Cneius Cornelius Lentulus Crodianus, born into one of Rome's distinguished families, had a relatively easier task compared to the less privileged Governor Publilius when executing the plan to eradicate the rebel army. His mission required him to merely guard the Ascoli line and wait for Publilius to pursue the rebel army across mountains and rivers into the encirclement. They would then launch a joint attack, utterly annihilate the rebels, and share the glory of victory.

However, when news arrived that Publilius had single-handedly destroyed one faction of the rebel army, Crodianus could no longer sit still. The original agreement was for everyone to act together, yet here was Publilius secretly claiming part of the victory. Now, all of Rome sings praises for your gallantry while scorning me as a coward for keeping my troops immobile! And you had the audacity to say those filthy slaves were ferocious and stubborn, causing significant losses to your forces, thus advising me not to act recklessly... Do you take me for a fool? To watch helplessly as you seize all the remaining battle merits, reducing me to a laughingstock of Rome?!

Crodianus was furious, but he did not openly confront Publilius. Instead, he devised a cunning plan: first, send a letter to Publilius, assuring him that he would continue executing the agreed strategy and asking him to rest assured. Meanwhile, he closely monitored the rebel army's movements and secretly developed his own independent strategy to annihilate the rebels. Leveraging his status as Governor and the prestigious influence of the Cornelius family, he commanded Brindisi's fleet to fully cooperate with his actions...

At this moment, as he rode his warhorse advancing with his troops, he was still delighting in the ingenious maritime maneuver executed last night. Although there had been minor hiccups along the way, overall the operation went smoothly. When the rebel army is destroyed, this will surely become a tale relished by Rome's citizens, and it will greatly elevate his prestige.

He was even contemplating how to showcase his glorious achievement upon returning to Rome when a reconnoiter reported from the front: "Governor, the rebels have arrayed themselves on the opposite bank of the river!"

The rebels hadn't fled!... Crodianus's first reaction was joy. Earlier in Castellum, upon hearing reports from his subordinates that enemy cavalry had been scouting, he had pressed his troops to march faster out of fear the rebels might escape.

Hearing this news, he let out a deep sigh of relief and immediately issued an order: "Notify the entire army to slow the marching pace!"

"Yes, Governor!"

Crodianus turned to address Bubius: "These rebels are remarkably bold. Do they actually think they can withstand my assault?!"

Crodianus's staff Bubius responded with disdain: "Governor, lowly men often lack self-awareness. They may believe the Womans River serves as a barrier, forcing us to attack them via that stone bridge, which favors their defense and allows them to endure until their reinforcements arrive... However, while the rebel main force is not particularly formidable in combat, their sheer numbers could pose a significant trouble if they reach us before we've crushed this contingent."

"No need to fret; the rebels won't hold out that long. They will become my first ripe fruit of victory!" Crodianus said confidently with a grin. He then shouted loudly, "Messenger, go summon Antonius immediately."

Antonius was this Roman Army's cavalry commander, a veteran of many years fighting rebellions on the Iberian Peninsula. Despite Rome's frequent defeats to Sedulius before Pompey's arrival, Antonius demonstrated commendable battlefield performance. Furthermore, as a client under the patronage of

the Croidianus family, Crodianus purposefully transferred him to his own legion as his deputy, hoping Antonius's considerable war experience could help ensure their victory.

"Antonius, those rebels haven't fled; they're stationed on the opposite bank, preparing to resist our attack. Looks like we can proceed with the second plan." Crodianus seemed relatively courteous toward Antonius: "I will pin down the enemy downstream at Womans River while you lead the rear troops through the mountain trail, striking at the river segment that is shallow and easily fordable. How does that sound?"

"I will carry out your orders." Antonius had no objections because he had been involved in drafting this strategy: "I only have one request—hand over all the crossbow cannons to me."

"That, of course, is no problem."

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There were only two bridges spanning the Womans River.

One was a stone bridge, over 30 meters long and 4 meters wide, located to the north of Mateninum City, roughly one mile from the river's mouth, connecting the coastal road. East of the bridge, the Womans River was deep and muddy, making it unsuitable for wading, while heading further west, the river grew shallower and narrower.

The other was a wooden bridge, less than 20 meters long and 2 meters wide, linking the southern mountain path in the river's midsection. The river here had a depth reaching only up to the knees, with a gravel riverbed that made it quite easy to wade.

The two bridges were approximately eight miles apart.

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Maximus's army took the stone bridge as their base, with the First Legion and Second Legion extending northward along the river. Based on the Womans River's depth, their formation gradually transitioned from sparse to dense, while the Third Legion remained as the reserve force in the rear.

Attutmus's army centered around the wooden bridge, spreading out along both flanks of the river, leaving some soldiers as reserves.

The formations of the two armies did not connect, leaving a gap of over two miles. This gap was at a winding stretch of the Womans River, prone to flooding during high water, with large areas of muddy shoals on both banks.

"Captain, I'm part of our team, too. Why haven't I been issued a weapon?!" complained Casaridaoa at the back of the ranks.

"Shut up! I've told you countless times—if you keep whining, I'll kick you out of the team!" Stags impatiently yelled.

"Captain, don't be so harsh! Hey, young guy, no need to rush. Want a weapon? It's simple—wait until we're all dead, and you can pick one up at will—"

"Ramdolos, you damned jinx, are you cursing us to die early?!"

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"... Everyone, shut up! There's movement across the river!" Stags's roar abruptly silenced the commotion in the ranks, turning all eyes toward the front.

They saw Hagux leading several rebel cavalrymen galloping wildly along the coastal road on the opposite side. Behind them, a full squad of Roman cavalry was in hot pursuit.

The rebel cavalry, upon reaching the stone bridge, began shouting loudly, "The Roman Army is coming! The Roman Army is coming!! ..."

Their cries carried over the stone bridge, resonating above the rebel army's formation along the riverbank, causing a wave of unrest.

The soldiers guarding the bridgehead tightened their ranks under the commanding shouts of the team officers, preparing to intercept the Roman cavalry's advance.

However, the Roman cavalry approached cautiously. They didn't cross the bridge, instead pulling their horses around to charge into a field of wheat along the roadside, glaring across the river at the rebel army.

Soon, a golden-shining Eagle Banner appeared at the forefront of the coastal road. Following it was the glinting armor and imposing sight of the Roman Army, advancing fiercely like a winding red dragon toward the rebel army.

Accompanied by military bands, the Roman Army orderly left the coastal road, extending northward along the riverbank...

Gradually, the dense waves of flourishing wheat were replaced by proud and upright Roman soldiers. Looking across, the Roman soldiers colored the opposite riverbank in a sea of red, forming a dense, formidable presence.

The chatter of the rebel army steadily quieted. Many soldiers instinctively held their breaths.

Maximus felt a surge of unease himself, but upon noticing the unsteady glances of the soldiers around him, he realized that he had to act. Spurring his warhorse, he moved through the gaps in the formation.

At that moment, something unusual emerged among the Roman Army, which continued to pour from the coastal road onto the small plains across the river: thousands of disheveled, emaciated migrants—mostly elderly, women, and children—were being driven ruthlessly to the Roman army's forefront, crying and pleading.

The Roman soldiers cut away the ropes binding them and said something. Suddenly, these migrants screamed desperately for help, their piercing cries carrying faint mentions of various rebel leaders' names—enough for some rebel soldiers to realize that they were likely the southern refugees who had sought shelter with the rebel army but weren't formally accepted. These people had fled north before the Roman Army's arrival.

A sharp, horrific scream broke out as a Roman soldier stabbed a migrant's thigh with a short sword. What followed was a relentless massacre—the migrants were slaughtered one after another, causing the rest to flee frantically toward the opposite riverbank while screaming for their lives.

Thus, the killing commenced.

Roman soldiers began their hunt, stabbing with short swords or hurling javelins, while Roman cavalry drove their warhorses straight into the fleeing crowds...

In a matter of moments, the powerless, terrified migrants were reduced to only a few survivors, with corpses piling along the riverbank and blood flowing like a river...

The rebel army's ranks fell into turmoil. Many had pale faces; some attempted to charge out of formation to save the migrants struggling desperately in the river...

Team officers shouted loudly, working their hardest to maintain order.

Once the formation was somewhat stabilized, Maximus, accompanied by his attendants, rode to the riverside. Taking a deep breath, he addressed the rebel soldiers before him, pointing to the Roman Army across the river. "Brothers, why have we gathered here? It's because those Romans have taken our lands, killed our loved ones, enslaved us, and turned us into migrants—leaving us no choice but to pick up arms against them!

You've all seen it, haven't you? Begging for mercy doesn't work. They slaughtered those people like livestock, leaving them to die meaningless deaths! The Romans want to kill us all; we have no way out except to fight back like heroes! I know that if we fight, it won't be us who die like sheep, but those Romans who deserve death across the river! Tell me, isn't that right?!"

Maximus's last sentence was almost a full-throated roar, his outstretched arm trembling with passion. "Yes!! Yes!!!"

"Kill the Romans!!! Kill them!!! ..." The soldiers shouted furiously, replacing fear in their hearts with rage.

Given the army formation stretched over three miles long, Maximus's voice couldn't reach everyone. He rode along the riverbank, repeating his words at intervals while his attendants echoed him loudly. The soldiers' cries surged westward like waves, and by the end, Maximus had shouted himself hoarse.

"Governor, it seems this group of rebels has... strengthened their morale." Bubius, a staff officer, leaned close to Crodianus and quietly remarked.

Crodianus sneered, "Even chickens and ducks scream loudly before their deaths. This is nothing but the struggles of the dying. Look carefully—while their front ranks wear armor and look decent, their rear is a chaotic mess, nothing more than a rabble. How could they possibly be a match for us!"

"Should we order an attack now?"

Crodianus hesitated briefly. Although he'd ordered the massacre of migrants to intimidate the enemy and provoke an attack, the rebels ultimately managed to hold their formation, which made him cautious. River-crossing attacks were not easy.

"Let the soldiers rest and recover their strength. We'll wait for Antonius to reach the target before launching a combined assault." Crodianus responded.

Maximus had just returned to the rear of the formation when scouts galloped in from the west. "Report, leader! A large Roman force has appeared on the far side of the Womans River wooden bridge!"

Maximus gazed solemnly at Quintus. "It seems Rome truly intends to launch their first attack from there."

Quintus replied with slight unease, "Let's hope Attutmus and his men can hold their ground!"

"Keep monitoring the situation to the west and report back immediately!"

"Understood!"

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Attutmus stared gravely at the Roman Army arranging its formation across the river, his brows furrowed deeply. He realized the enemy outnumbered his forces significantly. The thought of asking Maximus for reinforcements crossed his mind but was swiftly suppressed. The Roman Army stationed at the Ascoli Camp was already superior in strength, and Maximus likely wasn't faring easily either. Regardless, the Romans had encircled them from both sides, leaving no choice but to fight.

Seeing the Roman Army's formation complete, he immediately ordered messengers to notify the team officers of all units to prepare for defense.

Yet, the Roman Army did not commence their river-crossing assault right away. Instead, they began placing Crossbow Cannons in the formation ahead...

Chapter 159: Holding Off the Enemy Army Alone

"Report to the leader, the Roman army in the west has repeatedly bombarded Attutmus's troops with dozens of Crossbow Cannons, many of our brothers there feel panicked! ... Report to the leader, the Roman army in the west threw javelins while crossing the river, injuring many brothers! ... Report to the leader, the Roman army in the west has already engaged in battle with Attutmus's troops, their attack is fierce, and Attutmus's troops are slowly retreating, allowing most of the Romans to land..."

The repeated reports of the ally's situation from the reconnoitre made the brows of Maximus knot together.

"The Roman army in the west is attacking fiercely, I'm afraid Attutmus won't hold out for long..." Flanitnus reminded.

"Should we send reinforcements?" Maximus asked worriedly.

"Leader, I don't think it's necessary." Quintus calmly said: "Sending too few reinforcements won't make a difference; sending too many, and the Roman army on the other side of the river will surely notice. If they attack with full force, how would we defend? We have previously discussed what we should do if Attutmus's troops cannot hold off the Roman army—"

Flanitus immediately said in a deep voice: "I think now is the time to implement that plan early!"

Maximus was somewhat hesitant: changing the formation of a troop of over ten thousand people would take considerable time, and under the current situation, starting the implementation would mean there wouldn't be extra time to make new changes.

He subconsciously asked, "Can Spartacus really arrive in time with his troops?"

"Didn't Hagux, who just returned, already say that Spartacus personally promised to lead his army at the fastest speed possible to provide reinforcement!" Flanitus replied.

Quintus also quickly followed, "Spartacus is a smart man; he should know what's best for the whole army!"

In fact, Maximus knew all this, he just wanted a little psychological comfort at the moment. Finally, he made up his mind: "Change the formation, prepare to defend against the enemy's two-front assault!"

The young Attendants immediately rushed to deliver orders.

Soon, the horns and shouts of team officers sounded from each troop, and the soldiers who were resting in formation began to change their formations under the guidance of the officers:

The First Legion still lined up along the river, but the formation shrank, with the array less than a mile long;

The Second Legion abandoned the defense along the river, folding the entire formation to be perpendicular to the west side of the First Legion, with the line facing west;

The originally reserved Third Legion (4,000 in total) joined the left wing of the Second Legion, continuing to expand southward, and after reaching the hill behind the flat ground, lined up diagonally forward, reaching the top of the hill...;

When counting the sea to the east and the dozen-meter-high hill to the south, the defense formation of the rebel army was roughly a rectangle, encompassing the camp and Mateninum City.

After completing the formation, Maximus had a mobile unit by his side—the thousand-member Guard led by Pequot.

However, this unit couldn't move lightly, as it was also responsible for overseeing Mateninum City, and preventing the Romans from landing on the rear town's port or attacking the rear along the coastal road.

According to Quintus and Flanitnus' analysis, the coastal towns in the Fluentani and Umbria regions, which the unit had previously passed through, did not have major ports. Moreover, even if the Roman army forced a landing at these town ports, they faced the risk of being surrounded by the rebel army's main forces. Thus the possibility of them doing so was not high, but precaution was still needed.

Governor Crodianus saw the enemy across the river changing formation and seeming a bit chaotic, which made him itch to launch an attack, but he refrained after repeated dissuasion from his subordinates. However, his mood became anxious, and he paced back and forth on his Warhorse in front of the array.

Finally, a rider came from the west: "Your Excellency Governor, General Antonius has already defeated the enemy. He dispatched a small part of his troops to pursue the rout and said that once the rest are organized, he would move downriver to join you!"

"You go back and tell him to hurry and not keep me waiting!" Crodianus sternly waved his right arm for emphasis.

"Yes!"

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Antonius confirmed the Governor Crodianus's order, but even if he sped up reorganizing and moving eastward, it was more than an hour later when his vanguard approached the eastern rebel army.

Seeing the allied forces appear, Crodianus, who was already very impatient, immediately gave the order to attack.

The horns blared long, and the northern Roman formation began to slowly move south, with the red tide gradually staining the Womans River...

The sound of the horns from across the river made Maximus's heart tighten, and as he looked at the long iron wall moving opposite, he couldn't help but mumble softly, "It's finally coming!..."

It was his first time commanding such a large battle, and the outcome of the battle would decide the life and death of the rebel army, so he couldn't help but feel nervous.

"Brothers, the enemy is attacking! All of you stand up and stand firm! Pick up your square shields and short swords, prepare to defend!..." The shouts of the rebel army team officers echoed in the array, followed by the responses of the soldiers, the sound of armor, and the clash of weapons intermingling.

Suppressing the anxiety in his heart, Maximus turned his Warhorse, raised his right fist high, and shouted loudly: "Victory to Free Italy!"

Chapter 160: Single-Handedly Holding Off the Enemy_2

"Victory!! Victory!!! Victory!!!!..." The soldiers' shouts spread rapidly, with him as the center, towards both wings.

Maximus passed through the array gaps, running back to the rear of the formation, just in time to meet Female Camp Captain Karina, who had been ordered to come.

"Report, Leader. I have brought 1200 young girls!" Karina still appeared calm, but the women behind her were all nervous and uneasy.

Maximus forced a smile: "Divide the girls into three groups, line them up behind the formations of the three legions respectively, to cheer and boost the morale of the fighting brothers!"

Saying this, he took a deep breath and shouted loudly, "Sisters, trust me, with your support, we will definitely achieve the final victory!"

Maximus's confident words dispelled some of the women's unease, and as soon as they calmed down, they started whispering to each other. Normally, this chattering would annoy Maximus, but at the moment, it made him feel at ease.

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The first place where battle occurred was the stone bridge.

Without the barrier of the river, the Roman soldiers formed four columns and quickly reached the center of the stone bridge. Then, at the team's officer's command, the Roman soldiers suddenly stopped advancing, slightly opened their intervals, and half-squatted...

"Javelins! Watch out for the javelins!" As soon as the rebel army officer's words fell, dozens of javelins fanned out and flew down from above.

Since the rebel army was facing the Romans, Quintus, Flannius, and other seasoned Roman veterans had provided targeted training, making the soldiers quite familiar with Roman tactics, and they quickly took cover under the shields.

The Roman soldiers' javelin attacks did not cause casualties nor disrupt the opponent's defensive formation, but their advance did not halt because of this. At the officer's command, they roared and charged at the enemy at the bridgehead.

The red iron tide surged towards the rebels' shield formation, forcing the frontline soldiers to retreat, causing the formation to bulge backward. The Roman soldiers continuously pushed towards the bridgehead, attempting to enlarge the bulge in the rebel formation and finally create a breach.

At this time, the rebel soldiers on both sides of the bridgehead, led by the officer, quickly pressed against the side of the bridgehead, their long spears thrusting through the gaps in the stone bridge railing, stabbing at the lower bodies of the Roman soldiers on the bridge.

The bridgehead was too crowded, and the Roman soldiers near the sides of the bridgehead could not pull out their square shields in time to defend their flanks. Amidst screams, one by one, the Roman soldiers were pierced and fell...

But behind them, Roman soldiers kept pushing forward, the narrow space made it impossible for them to form effective defenses until the Roman officers overseeing the battle at the rear noticed the anomaly and ordered a halt to the attack on the bridge. By then, a section of Roman soldiers had already fallen at the bridgehead, some trampled to death by their own people.

The Roman soldiers retreated awkwardly, and under the strict orders of the team officer, the rebel soldiers did not pursue but grinned from ear to ear, starting to have confidence in holding the bridgehead.

When the Roman soldiers paused their assault on the stone bridge, the long Roman Army formation to the north had already entered the river. Soon, due to varying water depths and widths, the entire line became winding and crooked.

To occupy the defensive points as much as possible and prevent enemy flanking maneuvers, the rebel army's riverbank defense was relatively thin, with a thickness of only four rows. After the Romans went into the river, only two rows were at the riverbank, equipped as the most elite soldiers of the troops, while the other two rows retreated 20 meters back.

Casaridaoa was among them. Positioned at the back of the line, he witnessed a myriad of javelins thrown by the Romans in the river stick all over the mud in front like the dead grass of winter, sending chills down his spine.

He couldn't help but shiver, then heard the centurion urgently shouting, "Quick! Move up! The enemy is about to land!"

Casaridaoa ran forward with his comrades, stopping midway to bend down and pick up a javelin: Damn, the tip is bent, but it can still be used as a stick.

Just as he merged into the formation, he heard the screams from the front, so harrowing that he couldn't help but feel a shock in his heart, followed by the excited shouts of his nearby comrades.

Although the downstream of the Womans River was slow-flowing, the knee-deep water and muddy riverbed made the Roman formation advance slowly, with uneven lines. But the soldiers couldn't stop on their own to regroup, so pushed by the comrades in the rear, they had to keep moving forward.

Due to years of erosion by river water, the riverbed and riverbank were in a trapezoidal shape, and the Roman soldiers who had reached shallow water did not dare to use their mud-covered legs to charge up the sloping riverbank towards the enemy, as it might lead to falls. Therefore, they cautiously progressed forward.

Meanwhile, since the rebel army on the bank had sufficient preparation beforehand, the Roman javelin attacks did not cause major losses or panic. The entire line was tight and orderly.

The first battle along this line was led by the rebel centurion Stags, and having learned Roman tactics, the rebel army also inherited the Roman military tradition, with the centurion of the team leading from the front left during combat.

Born a slave, Stags had joined the rebel force after their glory at Vesuvius last year. He had since participated in the surprise attack on Pompey, the assault on Canosa, a surprise attack on Sarabia, and several battles attacking manors, making him a seasoned veteran with considerable combat experience.

He first stood still; when the Roman soldier holding a shield was two steps away, he suddenly took a big stride, his left foot stepping into the mud to stabilize himself, and his square shield slammed fiercely into the opponent's square shield.

The opponent instantly lost footing, his body losing balance, his upper body exposed beyond the shield.

Stags leaned forward, quickly thrusting his short sword in his right hand, stabbing the enemy's face viciously.

The Roman soldier screamed, falling backward, knocking down the comrade behind him, both rolling into the river.

The nearby rebel soldiers, witnessing this, cheered and applied the same tactic to deal with the enemies in front of them.

For a moment, restricted by the terrain, the Roman Army could not exert its strength and fell into a disadvantageous position.

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Not all the Roman troops crossing the river were obstructed at the banks. Due to the rebel army's change of formation, the defense line along the river was greatly shortened, allowing over half of the northern Roman army to cross the Womans River without hindrance and then regroup southward.

Since the Roman army that had just arrived from the west was also located here, currently resting, the two Roman forces inevitably mingled and generated some confusion.

Perhaps eager to fulfill Governor Crodianus's attack orders or underestimating the rebel army's attack capability, the legion commander of the northern troops ordered the units to continue eastward, avoiding friendly forces first, and then forming up.

As a result, when they reformed their lines, they were only about 200 meters away from the rebel formation.

This situation was soon discovered by Flanitus, who was observing enemy movements at the front. He immediately hurried back to the rear, "Leader, the enemy troops that have crossed the river are too far forward, and they are now mixed with the enemy troops that have arrived from upstream. We should attack immediately while they are still forming!"

Maximus looked in the direction pointed by Flantillus, seeing instead a long wall composed of his own soldiers.

"Previously, we were most worried about the western line being too broad without terrain advantage. If the enemy strengthens their attack on the west, it will be hard for us to endure for long. Now the enemy's negligence gives us an opportunity we shouldn't miss!"

Quintus, also somewhat excited, said, "Let the Second Legion initiate an immediate attack, pursue, engage the enemy, prevent them from successfully reformatting, so that their numerical advantage cannot be realized, and also avoid casualties from javelin throws."