



Good day Worthy Knights

In this part 7, you will be presented with the military aspects of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Let us keep in mind that some numbers are sometimes grossly exaggerated, depending on who is telling the story....

The underlying causes of the battle were the rivalries inherent in Diocletian's Tetrarchy; from the Greek 'tetra' meaning four and 'arkhein' to command, to govern.

The Emperor Diocletian realising that the Empire was too large to rule alone, decided that there should be a senior co-emperor and two junior emperors. The detail of the various struggles for power which followed is not part of this topic.

When Galerius died in 311, the power struggle was still on. In the summer of 312, Constantine gathered his forces and decided to settle the dispute by force.

Constantine and Maxentius were engaged in open hostility with one another, although they were brothers-in-law through Constantine's marriage to Fausta, sister of Maxentius.

He had at his command eight Army Legions, composed of 40,000 well-trained and disciplined legionaries, stationed in the Northern Provinces of Gaul. We must remember that he had been elected as Caesar by his legions in Britain, while fighting the Picts.

For the curious ones, it is estimated that at that time, a Legion contained 4,800 men, comprising of 10 Cohorts, made up of 6 Centuries containing 80 Legionaries in 10 ranks of 8 men each.

Auxiliary and support units attached to the Cohorts or to the Centuries would increase the complement of a Legion to well over 5,000. We will look at this topic in a future part.

Contrary to his advisors and by means of a forced march, Constantine's Army crossed the Alps at the pass of Mount Cenis.

The Mount Cenis is a massif and pass, 2083 m in Savoie (France). It was the principal route for crossing the Alps between France and Italy until the 19th century. Being a pass in the Alps, the Mount Cenis was used in several notable incidents. Apart from Constantine's descent to Italy, it was also used as the main passage by which Charlemagne crossed with his army to invade Lombardy in 773 and later on by Napoleon for his Italian campaign.

Constantine emulated Julius Caesar by using Gaul to support his advance on Rome. He also copied Rome's most famous enemy in the speed of his attack south. Hannibal had also demonstrated that an army could cross the Alps swiftly and remain effective.

Early October, Constantine had already seized Susa before Maxentius was even aware of his presence in the plains of Lombardy.

He easily overran northern Italy, winning two major battles: the first near Turin, the second at Verona,

Pressures began to mount on Maxentius. When his shattered army had tried to retreat into Turin, that city had closed its gates against it and gone over to Constantine. Maxentius had placed his faith on a new weapon on the battlefield, heavy armoured Clibanarii cavalry, which the Persians had employed with great success against conventional Roman armies such as Constantine's.

Constantine, however, demonstrated Alexander's flexibility, by dividing his forces in the face of the cavalry's charges letting them pass between his smaller units and striking them as they rode through his formations.

Maxentius' best and loyal general, Praetorian Prefect Rufus Pompeianus, was the garrison commander at Verona.

Constantine again defeated Pompeianus' heavy cavalry at Brescia. Maxentius' army formed a longer line of battle at Verona, poised to envelop Constantine's small force. So good was the training of Constantine's soldiers, however, that they went from a line two ranks deep into a single, broader line just before engaging Maxentius' men, and prevailed, killing Pompeianus in a battle that lasted until nightfall. Maxentius' secret weapon and his best general had proved useless against the latest claimant for the title of emperor.

Remembering the 'quickness' (*celeritas*) that had given Rome to Julius Caesar, Constantine moved swiftly towards the capital, with an army barely one-fourth (?) of the size Maxentius had at his own disposal

Constantine reached Rome at the end of October 312 approaching along the Via Flaminia. He camped at the location of Malborghetto near Prima Porta, where remains of a Constantinian monument in honour of the occasion are still extant.