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Winning Hearts and Minds: Tactics of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the Early Roman Empire

Wesley C. Cline
Gettysburg College

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Abstract

The most common strategy for "Romanizing" a province was through developing connections with elites in the indigenous society coupled with (in many cases) the inclusion of regional gods into the Roman pantheon. These ties were cemented as Romans adopted the provincial religious deities and the sons of prominent locals were sent to Rome for the finest education of the day. This system allowed for relative stability in the provinces, particularly when the Roman provincial governor was sensitive to local customs. What about those indigenous people whose goals conflicted with those of Rome? How does one combat a monolithic power with the most formidable army yet seen? This paper will examine three different revolts- all with varying outcomes- in the first few years of the Imperial Period to analyze the tactical and strategic successes and failures of the insurgents and how they were combated by the Empire. These specific examples are chosen for their differing outcomes and their approximate relation in time (All three were fought within 60 years). In analyzing these the answer of how to successfully rebel against the early Roman Empire will be deduced, as well as how to defeat an insurgency, something many modern countries still grapple with.

Keywords

Ancient Rome, Insurgency, Rebellion, Warfare, Antiquity

Disciplines

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Comments

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Winning hearts and minds:

Tactics of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the early Roman Empire

Wesley Cline

The Roman Empire is commonly thought to have been one of the most successful nations to ever exist with regards to territory and diplomacy. Ruling almost all of the “known world,” the Imperial government in Italy controlled areas as far as Britain and Iran for a period of almost 450 years. While turbulent at times, the stability of the empire was strongest during the “Pax Romana (Roman Peace)” spanning from the beginnings of imperial rule under Augustus in 27 BCE to the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 CE. During this era some 70 million people were under Imperial jurisdiction.¹



(Image of the Roman Empire at its greatest extent)

¹Mattern, Susan. “Counterinsurgency and the Enemies of Rome,” *Makers of Ancient Strategy*. Princeton University Press, (2010) p.163

The Pax Romana references a lack of substantial internal struggle amongst Roman politicians and generals, not a lack of conflict. This era saw extensive conquest expanding the empire, naturally leading to tension with the newly subject peoples. The regions of Northern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa saw particularly vicious violence. While this resistance was often fierce, it is worth noting that the Romans excelled at incorporating new cultures into their vast empire. The most common strategy for accomplishing this was through developing connections with elites in the indigenous society coupled with (in many cases) the inclusion of regional gods into the Roman pantheon. These ties were cemented as Romans adopted the provincial religious deities and the sons of prominent locals were sent to Rome for the finest education of the day.² This system allowed for relative stability in the provinces, particularly when the Roman provincial governor was sensitive to local customs. What about those indigenous people whose goals conflicted with those of Rome? How does one combat a monolithic power with the most formidable army yet seen? This paper will examine three different revolts- all with varying outcomes- in the first few years of the Imperial Period to analyze the tactical and strategic successes and failures of the insurgents and how they were combated by the Empire. These specific examples are chosen for their differing outcomes and their approximate relation in time (All three were fought within 60 years). In analyzing these the answer of how to successfully rebel against the Roman Empire will be deduced, as well as how to defeat an insurgency, something many modern countries still grapple with.

In 73 BCE a gladiator named Spartacus attempted to escape Italy with a few other men around Capua, some 118 miles from Rome.³ These ex-gladiators introduced a reign of terror to

² Mattern, Susan. "Counterinsurgency and the Enemies of Rome," *Makers of Ancient Strategy*. Princeton University Press, (2010) p. 164-167.

³ Baldwin, Barry. "Two Aspects of the Spartacus Slave Revolt." *The Classical Journal* 62, no. 7 (1967): 289-94

the peninsula, attacking and killing thousands of Roman citizens. Their force swelled to 70,000, and they subsequently defeated multiple Roman garrisons and two consular armies, an incredible feat at the time. Rome was exposed. If Spartacus marched his men on the city, just a few days away, the populace would be subjected to incredible acts of savagery with the members of the government likely to be massacred. Determined to avoid this fate, the legislative body charged an ambitious politician named Marcus Licinius Crassus with an army of 40,000 men as a last-ditch effort to defeat the rebellion. After varied initial results, Crassus and his men annihilated the forces of Spartacus, crucifying all 6,000 prisoners along the major roadway between Capua and Rome.⁴ This revolt, while not one of the three being examined in this essay, is critical to contextualizing the actions of counterinsurgency taken by the Roman government going forward. The close proximity of this uprising to the Capital left many with a sense of paranoia for rebellions, particularly those orchestrated by “inferior” peoples. The brutality manifested in Crassus’ decision to crucify all captives would serve as the pillar upon which the Romans built their responses to insurgencies.

September of 9 CE quickly devolved into a nightmare for the Roman Imperial government. In Germania, a province supposedly pacified years before, a Germanic chieftain named Arminius shepherded a Roman army of three legions with auxiliary support, approximately 10,000-20,000 men, into an ambush where he slaughtered them almost to a man, including the Provincial Governor, Publius Quinctillius Varus.⁵ In addition to the ambush, Arminius ordered every Roman garrison across the Germanic countryside to be overwhelmed and put to death. He then brought his army against the Roman forts along the Rhine,

⁴ Daugherty, Gregory N. "A New Crassus as Roman Villain." In *STARZ Spartacus: Reimagining an Icon on Screen*, edited by Augoustakis Antony and Cyrino Monica S., 69-84. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017.

⁵ Dio, Cassius. *Roman History*. Book LVI, Chapter XVIII.

overwhelming all but one, whose defenders eventually fell back beyond the river into Imperial territory.⁶ The entire provincial military presence had been eviscerated in a matter of days. Fearing a march on Rome, Emperor Augustus hastily ordered various new legions to be assembled with retired soldiers and civilian conscripts.⁷ At the head of this army was Germanicus, the step grandson of the Emperor. Tasked with finding and killing Arminius, he led his troops into the forests where Varus's army had been slaughtered.⁸ Various inconclusive engagements spanning almost four years led to the battle of Idistavicus, where Arminius and his army were routed with extraordinarily heavy losses. Despite this victory, Germanicus and his legions failed to capture the rebel commander. The final battle of the revolt was fought at Angrivar Barrier. Despite almost luring the Roman forces into a trap, it would end as a triumphant Roman victory. Arminius himself escaped with an element of cavalry, but his army was annihilated, largely a result of the “black flag” raised by the Roman command staff.⁹

Soon after Angrivar Barrier, Arminius was assassinated by members of his own tribe for fear that he had regal ambitions. Despite this death of Rome’s most wanted man, the Roman Emperor recalled all troops in Germania and held them along the Roman side of the Rhine. It was now made clear that this was a boundry of the empire to be fortified, not expanded.¹⁰

Why did the Roman Emperor, at this point Tiberius, concede that the best course of action was to abandon the province despite having defeated the majority of the rebellion? Why abandon Germania if the insurrectionist leader is dead? What tactical decisions by Arminius led

⁶ Dio, Cassius. *Roman History*. Book LVI, Chapter XXII.

⁷ Dando Collins, Stephen. *Legions of Rome*. St Martin’s Press. New York, 2010. P. 225-257

⁸ Tacitus. *Annals*. Book I, Chapter LX-LXII

⁹Dando Collins, Stephen. *Legions of Rome*. St Martin’s Press. New York, 2010. P. 270

¹⁰Benario, Herbert. “Teutoburg.” *The Classical World*. Vol. 96 No. 4.

to this being the only successful insurgency of the Early Imperial Era? The answer is found by analyzing two other unsuccessful revolts.

In 17 CE the Roman Provincial Governor of Africa (modern North Africa) began receiving reports of an unusually large and tenacious group of brigands that appeared to be growing exponentially. These highwaymen were led by Tacfarinus, a former soldier in the Roman auxiliary corps who had recently deserted.¹¹ It was rumored that these men were training and arming themselves as if they were Roman legionnaires. This band of rebels began raiding villages and military outposts with unquestionable success. Garrisons stationed at these forts were wholly overwhelmed with the speed and size of Tacfarinus' militia. This initial success led to a significant portion of the Musulamian, the nomadic tribe Tacfarinus was born into, joining his ranks. The local Moors also joined, swelling the ranks to approximately 30,000. Intent on defeating what was gradually becoming a small army of seemingly nefarious individuals, the Roman Provincial Government dispatched the 3rd Augusta Legion with its auxiliaries, numbering perhaps as many as 10,000 men, to stamp out the insurrection.¹²

The two armies met on an open stretch of land, positioned directly opposite one another. There would be no hiding or flanking actions, this was a traditional fight in close ranks, favoring the Roman fighting style. Imperial Governor Camillus formed the 3rd Augusta in the center of his line, flanked by cavalry and auxiliaries. Tacfarinus ordered an enveloping frontal assault, likely believing his 3 to 1 odds would carry the day. He was dreadfully wrong. Once in close combat, the disciplined Roman legionnaires decimated the African army, forcing them into full route. His

¹¹Dando Collins, Stephen. *Legions of Rome*. St Martin's Press. New York, 2010. P. 271

¹²Dando Collins, Stephen. *Legions of Rome*. St Martin's Press. New York, 2010. P. 272-273

army virtually obliterated, Tacfarinus went into hiding. Camillus was celebrated with a triumph in Rome.¹³

Despite optimism from the Imperial government, Tacfarinus was far from vanquished. The next year he recruited or retained enough followers to renew quick assaults on towns and outposts. Frustrated at the resurgence of a mere deserter, the Roman government dispatched a second legion, one considered highly experienced in European warfare, to the province. These men formed the 9th Hispania, led by a close friend of the emperor, now African Governor, Lucius Apronius.¹⁴

Apronius understood the task before him was to defend Roman interests in the region, however these were quite numerous. He kept the 3rd Augusta at their command center in the city of Ammaedra while the 9th Hispania was immediately dispatched to various outposts across the province further inland.¹⁵ This did not do much to curtail Tacfarinus and his men. At the speed which the Africans raided villages, Roman legionnaires had virtually no time to react, assembling for combat shortly after the raid had finished. One detachment of the 9th Hispania attempted to chase down the insurgents but was quickly attacked as the raiders wheeled around, outnumbering the 480 young recruits, possibly by the thousands, and forcing them to hastily retreat behind the safety of their walls. This display of cowardice did not sit well with the Roman Governor. If a detachment of legionnaires was so unnerved at the thought of the insurgents' capabilities that they refused to fight, all hope of victory was lost. The view of the rebels as a rag-tag unstructured group would need to persist. He immediately ordered every tenth man from

¹³ Tacitus. *Annales*. Book II, Chapter LII.

¹⁴ Tacitus. *Annales*. Book III, Chapter XX.

¹⁵Dando Collins, Stephen. *Legions of Rome*. St Martin's Press. New York, 2010. P. 274-275.

the detachment flogged to death.¹⁶ The Imperial government was becoming weary. It was time to resort to "hard war."

Tacfarinus, in a continuation of previous guerilla tactics, led his men away from the Roman camp instead of conducting a siege. Oddly, perhaps emboldened by the quick flight of the first garrison, perhaps sensing some opportunity which has not come down to us, he soon began an assault on a different Roman fort at Thala. Despite outnumbering the defenders, perhaps more than 10 to 1, the Roman garrison valiantly repulsed the attack.¹⁷ Now greatly reduced in number with substantial casualties, Tacfarinus led his forces along the coast to make camp. A local informant promptly ferried this information to the Romans, who immediately detached auxiliary cavalry and light infantry, along with the fitter men from the 9th Hispania, to ambush the rebels. The Imperial forces assaulted the camp, slaughtering a great many rebels and driving Tacfarinus and his few surviving soldiers into the barren desert. Believing this ambush had crippled the rebellion, Governor Lucius Apronius was awarded triumphal honors in Rome.¹⁸

Yet again the celebration was premature. Just months later, Tacfarinus gathered enough supporters to go back on the offensive, conducting guerilla attacks against targets sympathetic or directly controlled by Rome. A commonly raided target were towns of Africans loyal to Imperial authority, seemingly to coerce more tribes to join the uprising while simultaneously exposing the lack of Roman military support for these villages. The renewal of attacks coincided with the end of Governor Apronius' term, leading to a period of apparently unchecked insurgency. This emboldened Tacfarinus to send ambassadors to Rome, asking the Emperor to grant a full pardon

¹⁶ Tacitus. *Annales*. Book III, Chapter XXII.

¹⁷ Tacitus. *Annales*. Book III, Chapter XXI.

¹⁸ Tacitus. *Annales*. Book III, Chapter XXI.

for his insurgents (himself included) along with land and money. If refused, he promised to wage warfare so vicious that Africa will never know peace.¹⁹

This was not taken well in Rome, particularly on account of emissaries traditionally being sent between belligerent states, not between rebels and a government. This was a deliberate insult to the Emperor and Roman sovereignty. One cannot help but think of the commonly utilized modern trope, “we don’t negotiate with terrorists” when imagining the reply from the Imperial Palace. The proposal was swiftly rejected (the emissaries likely executed) and the new Governor of Africa, Junius Blaesus, was instructed to offer amnesty to all in the rebellion, except for their leader.²⁰ Lessons learned in the revolt of Spartacus shaped the Roman understanding of what keeps a rebellion alive: its leader. The message was clear, the strategic objective was the elimination of Tacfarinus.

Exacerbated, this was the moment which the Roman tactics of counterinsurgency took their most aggressive turn in Africa. Governor Blaesus sent three separate columns of troops after Tacfarinus, simultaneously stopping attacks by the rebels against allied tribes and trapping Tacfarinus’ army in the desert. All three columns linked up deep on the African (now Tunisian) plains and began a series of forts, trenches, and walls. Blaesus sent out cavalry on raids intent on causing havoc and taking captives, notably Tacfarinus’ brother. The rebels were now enveloped by a semicircular string of Roman defenses and running out of provisions. Tacfarinus, having served in the Roman Army, was fully aware that Imperial forces retire from the campaign and enter winter quarters around October. He was confident in his ability to hold out until then. To

¹⁹ Dando Collins, Stephen. *Legions of Rome*. St Martin’s Press. New York, 2010. P. 278.

²⁰ Tacitus. *Annales*. Book III, Chapter LXXIII.

his horror, Governor Blaesus ingeniously kept his men in position through the winter, starving out many of the rebels.²¹

After a year had passed, Blaesus' term as governor had ended, and he subsequently recalled his troops from their forward positions and left the province with the 9th Hispania. He was, now somewhat predictably, given triumphal honors in Rome.²² The Roman government, yet again, believed Tacfarinus' rebellion was incapacitated and the few that remained would disperse. It is quite likely that many rebels took the amnesty offered by the Imperial government, further dwindling their numbers. In reality Tacfarinus now was gleefully facing a massive reduction in Roman manpower, allowing him to move more freely than he had for the past two years. The ranks of the rebellion swelled, leading to the siege of Thubuscum.²³ This town, while fully supported by the Provincial Government, was by no means impenetrable. The new Roman Governor, known as Dolabella, immediately set out to relieve the settlement. Flanking the African rebels, his army easily put Tacfarinus' to flight, but the Governor had no intention of letting up. Dividing his army into four columns, Dolabella harassed the rebel rearguard with cavalry closely followed by his infantry divisions. Riding hard and fast, the remaining rebels fled into the African countryside. Roman cavalry was able to track their course initially, but soon lost their trail as the marching infantry was substantially slower than the fleeing rebel force. The Romans had learned from their previous battles, dividing the force piecemeal would play into the rebels' hands, therefore the cavalry stayed close to their respective infantry columns. Dolabella was clear, despite not having a definitive location of the insurgent base, scouts would be sent constantly to determine where the last breath of the rebellion was hiding. Word was soon passed

²¹ Tacitus. *Annales*. Book IV, Chapter XXIII.

²² Tacitus. *Annales*. Book IV, Chapter XXIII.

²³ Tacitus. *Annales*. Book IV, Chapter XXIV.

on to the Romans, likely through a scout or local informant, that Tacfarinus and his remaining men had encamped at the partially destroyed fortress of Auzea. Sleeping out in the open, the entirety of the insurgency was annihilated in a single ambush. Sweeping into their camp, the Romans massacred the rebels almost to a man. Tacfarinus died by charging a group of legionnaires who promptly impaled him with their javelins.²⁴ The revolt was dead.

These two uprisings have many similarities, most notably the apparent goal of forcing the Roman government from a region, but their tactics differed tremendously. To properly analyze the successful and unsuccessful methods of insurgency in this era, we must turn our attention to England in 60 CE.

The revolts of Tacfarinus and Arminius both were vicious and bloody, but they paled in comparison to the true savagery of Boudica's revolt. After a Roman magistrate refused to uphold guidelines left in the will of the Iceni King Prasugatus, namely, that the King's two daughters would rule jointly with Rome, a massive revolt ensued. There are multiple theories among ancient historians as to what was the impetus for insurrection in addition to this clear disregard of the king's will. Some argued it was financial loans called back early by Rome while others posit that it was the unusual harshness of the magistrates in the Provincial Government. Whatever the tipping point, it appears that the rebellion began with a disregard for the Iceni King's will coupled with some offensive action by the Roman Provincial Government. The widowed Iceni Queen, Boudica, gathered warriors from her tribe and, aided by the neighboring Trinovantes, inaugurated a spree of almost incomprehensible violence.²⁵

²⁴ Tacitus. *Annales*. Book IV, Chapter XXVI.

²⁵ Dio, Cassius. *Roman History*. Book LXII, Chapter VI.

The city of Camulodunum (modern Colchester) was a Roman military colony, meaning that veteran legionnaires would be awarded land within its boundaries once their 25 year contracts were up. Residing on land seemingly stolen from the Iceni, housing and protecting men who had served the Empire, it was a prime target for psychological purposes. Their target selected, Boudica and the other tribal chieftains made plans for when to strike. While the Roman Governor was campaigning against Druids in Wales with the bulk of his army, the insurgent coalition decided to land the first blow.²⁶

Sweeping in from the North and South like a horde of locusts, over 120,000 British tribesmen overwhelmed the city. Sparing neither Roman nor Briton, the entire population of Camulodunum was massacred over the period of two days, with a valiant final stand made by a gaggle of defenders in the Temple of Claudius. Ancient historians describe the horrors inside the city that awaited those taken alive. Crucifixion, hangings, and mass executions by fire are just some of the least severe tortures inflicted.²⁷ The rebellion had struck a substantial blow, sending a clear message that any Briton who so much as tolerated the Romans was effectively a traitor, and would be punished accordingly. There was no middle ground.

A handful of messengers were able to ride out of the city to request reinforcements from nearby garrisons. The Roman force at Camulodunum was exceptionally small due in part to the bulk of the provincial army campaigning in Wales and the presumed pacification of the region. One rider reached the headquarters of the 9th Hispania, located in Longthorpe, some 100 miles North of Camulodunum. The commander of the garrison hastily conducted a forced march toward the city with 2,000 of his men supported by cavalry. Unbeknownst to the relief force,

²⁶ Dio, Cassius. *Roman History*. Book LXII, Chapter II.

²⁷Tacitus. *Annales*. Book XIV, Chapter XXXIII

shortly after beginning their march, the city fell. At a location near the now smoldering ruins of Camulodunum, all 2,000 infantrymen walked into a trap and were annihilated to a man.²⁸

The rebellion, perhaps now even more than 120,000 warriors, had annihilated a substantial portion of Roman military strength in Britain, forcing the Governor to return and attempt to salvage the situation. Retreating from Boudica, Governor Paulinus was able to scrape together approximately 10,000 soldiers from various legionary and auxiliary units stationed throughout the province. One senior officer, Poenius Posthumus, refused to send his 2,000 men from their temporary camp, likely out of fear after what happened to the 9th Hispania, a testament to the bogeyman Boudica had become in the Roman imagination.²⁹ Eager to continue damaging imperial reputation in the region, Boudica and her followers massacred and pillaged the cities of Londinium and Verulamium. The Roman civilian death toll now roughly exceeded 80,000.³⁰ These successes swelled the numbers of the rebellion, particularly with the promise of plunder, to approximately 230,000 soldiers, 23 times larger than the Roman force.³¹

Fearing that if he kept retreating his army would become surrounded, and realizing that every major Roman city and ally in the region were vulnerable, Governor Paulinus resolved to fight around modern Mancetter, forming his men in traditional close battle array. The Britons confidently marched to meet him, determined to rid Britannia of Romans. When Boudica's army charged like a swarm of bees, they were met by the legionnaires, not waiting in defense but actively charging forward in three close wedge formations. The heavily armored and disciplined Romans easily massacred the Britons, forcing a retreat which amplified the number of rebel

²⁸ Tacitus. *Annales*. Book XIV, Chapter XXXIII.

²⁹ Tacitus. *Annales*. Book XIV, Chapter XXXIV.

³⁰ Dio, Cassius. *Roman History*. Book LXII, Chapter I.

³¹ Dio, Cassius. *Roman History*. Book LXII, Chapter VIII.

casualties. The culmination of weeks of slaughter and planning ended in just minutes. The ancient historian Tacitus, whose father in law fought in the battle, gives the fatalities as 80,000 Britons to about 400 Romans.³² Boudica would soon commit suicide. Even if the statistics given by Tacitus are inflated, the Roman losses were exponentially smaller than those of the Britons.

Three separate revolts, all on different terrain, orchestrated by vastly different cultures, but with a common goal, to remove Rome's presence from a region. The only successful revolt was that of Arminius, who, despite his death, had forced the Romans to define their northern border as the Rhine.³³ What factors led to this revolt being successful while those of Tacfarinus and Boudica ending in crushing defeat? To answer this, we must first examine the relationship between Rome and her provinces.

When "Romanizing" a province, the standard procedure for the first few years was to gradually introduce Roman customs, including the Imperial government. In order to maintain peace in the province, Rome would forge tight knit alliances with key members of various indigenous groups, bribing them with money or special favors. This had many benefits, most notably that the population felt a sense of autonomy. The locals were therefore willing to join the Romans in battle when called upon, and these elites would theoretically be able to counter or reveal those planning insurrections.³⁴ In each of the three revolts there was a significant Roman auxiliary presence acting as counterinsurgents. Just as in the revolt begun by Spartacus years before, locals and members of the rebellion were bribed to reveal the insurgent camps and plans. In both the revolts of Arminius and Tacfarinus locals were utilized to reveal the planned ambush

³² Tacitus. *Annales*. Book XIV, Chapter XXXVII.

³³ Seutonius. *The 12 Caesars*. Chapter: The Deified Augustus.

³⁴ Mattern, Susan. "Counterinsurgency and the Enemies of Rome." *Makers of Ancient Strategy*. Princeton University Press. 2010.

at Angrivar Barrier and the rebels' camp at Auzea, respectfully.³⁵ Both of these battles were the concluding actions of each rebellion, highlighting the vital role placed on loyal indigenous peoples by Rome. In fact, even before Arminius ambushed Varus' men in Germania, a local chieftain named Segestes had revealed the plot to the Roman Governor, although Varus wrote it off as merely an attempt to slander Arminius, as both men were from tribes with a quarrelling past.³⁶ What of Boudica's rebellion? It appears that there were no leaks of information to the Roman authorities, in part due to the secret meetings among the warrior Queen and her conspirators, aided by the small number of nobles from only two tribes. What must be concluded is that the role of auxiliaries and local cooperation to Rome was important for counterinsurgency, but certainly not a prerequisite for defeat of a rebellion. How then, did Arminius' revolt prove successful while Tacfarinus' and Boudica's end in vicious slaughter? For that, military actions must be considered.

In all three revolts the Romans were never defeated in a conventional battle, even when outnumbered 23 to 1. Boudica's army was annihilated, Tacfarinus' various armies were crushed when on open ground, and Arminius' entire force was massacred. The only major Roman defeats came from unconventional warfare. The Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, where between 10,000-20,000 Roman soldiers and auxiliaries were slaughtered by Arminius, was successful because it was an ambush along a narrow path, forcing the legionnaires to fight unconventionally and in congested ranks.³⁷ Boudica and her British warriors successfully eliminated 2,000 men from the 9th Hispania in what likely mirrored the ambush of Varus. The only true Roman strategic defeats

³⁵ Tacitus. *Annales*. Book I, Chapter XXI. Tacitus. *Annales*. Book IV, Chapter XXVI.

³⁶ Wells, Peter. *The Battle that Stopped Rome*. W. W. Norton and Company. 2003. Chapter 1.

³⁷Wilbers-Rost, Susanne, Birgit Grobkopf, Achim Rost, "The Ancient Battlefield at Kalkriese." *Sickness, Hunger, War, and Religion: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. (2012). P. 91-111.

during Tacfarinus' rebellion came from planned ambushes by cavalry against isolated Roman garrisons. Therefore, the first major facet of a successful insurrection against Rome was engaging in unconventional warfare.

While the Roman military machine was virtually unstoppable in conventional warfare, it also had to police and defend almost the entirety of Europe and North Africa. Even with auxiliaries, this spread the Roman army exceptionally thin, yet another reason provincial governors relied so heavily on cooperation with local elites. When Arminius defeated the three legions in the Teutoburg Forest and eliminated every fort along the German side of the Rhine, he exemplified what could never materialize for Boudica and Tacfarinus, a decisive first strike against the provincial military forces. Boudica's ransacking of three major cities certainly is a decisive first strike, but the military presence was negligible, and the 2,000 legionnaires she slaughtered were less than half a legion, giving the Provincial Governor and 10,000 Roman troops time to prepare for an engagement. Tacfarinus raided Roman outposts and towns, but failed to utilize his almost 30,000 man force for a decisive first strike against any substantial military targets. His decision to make his first major move a frontal assault against Roman troops shows both a lack of awareness of his situation and the naivety of his tactics eliciting long term strategic victories. The second major facet of a successful insurrection in this era is a decisive first strike which immobilizes or defeats the provincial Roman forces.

The third and perhaps most important tactic in fighting a successful insurrection in this period was utilizing psychological warfare. One of the most important elements of this centered on keeping the rebellion's leader alive. In the case of Boudica, once she committed suicide, the rebellion was over with little resistance. Tacfarinus, despite having lost armies on three separate occasions, was able to utilize his reputation to draw others to his cause, replenishing his ranks.

Arminius was viewed as a bogeyman just beyond at the gates of Rome, patiently waiting to strike, a fear quite similar to that of the Spartacus rebellion.³⁸ This almost primordial Roman fear led to a large force being immediately conscripted to march on the Rhine. By attacking key targets, a leader can continue psychological warfare, but the rebellion itself is dead once its leader has fallen. It is much more terrifying for a ghost to lurk in the forests than lead a charge.

The fourth and final tactic to be utilized is an amalgam of the first and third, and the final step in the uprising; Survive, pestering the enemy when needed to remind him of your presence. Tacfarinus' revolt is a prime example of this principle being applied without the other three, therefore rendering it ineffective. Boudica attempted to fight a quick campaign but misunderstood the efficiency of the Roman military. Arminius mastered this concept, fighting for survival against the Roman army sent after him following his initial ambush. He understood that at this point he had eviscerated almost 10% of the entire Roman military, and therefore the troops sent after him would eventually have to be returned to their respective provinces (or homes in the case of the conscripts).³⁹ The Roman government could hardly afford to wage a war against insurgents in the Germanic forest for a prolonged period, and ultimately settled on fortifying the Rhine and declaring victory against Arminius and his revolt, despite the fact that the province was now free of direct Imperial control.

All three revolts sought to remove Roman rule, however the distinctions between their success largely seems to be a result of their commanders utilizing these principles. Arminius, a long time senior auxiliary officer, understood Roman tactics and was therefore able to combat them effectively. Boudica, apparently a good motivator, clearly misunderstood the quality of her

³⁸ Dornberg, John. "Battle of the Teutoburg Forest." *Archaeology*. Vol. 45. No. 5. (1992).p. 26-32.

³⁹ Wells, Peter. *The Battle that Stopped Rome*. W.W. Norton and Company. 2003. Introduction.

soldiers compared to the Roman legionnaire. Instead of opting for attacks which played to the strengths of the lightly armored Britons, she chose to envelop the Romans with a traditional charge, ultimately leading to disaster. Tacfarinus, a deserter from an auxiliary unit, attempted to train his followers as legionnaires, taking advantage of the instruction he had received during his service. It is clear that this training did not work well, as the inexperienced and overconfident rebels were routed against a vastly numerically inferior force. Tacfarinus did not understand the strength of his position, opting to emulate his enemy's strengths instead of his own.

The Roman reaction to insurgency was primarily based on the principle established after Spartacus' revolt: extreme brutality. In all three revolts it appears the Roman forces generally refused to take prisoners or at least massacred some who would be considered noncombatants by today's standards. This policy generally worked, except for when a leader utilized the four tactics that have previously been discovered as essential for success.

The Roman Army was certainly powerful, particularly during the early empire, but it had flaws. When properly exploited, a rebellion could turn the Imperial Army's strengths against them through deceit, mobility, and ambushes. In order to effectively launch a successful insurrection against the Roman Empire, a leader had to engage in unconventional warfare, launch a decisive first strike, utilize psychological warfare, and keep the rebellion alive long enough for financial and social pressures to force the Romans to abandon the campaign.

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