



The Commanding Officer, Agricola, drew up his troops so that eight thousand auxiliary infantry soldiers were in the centre of the battlefield. Three thousand cavalry soldiers were spread out on each side. The Roman legionaries were positioned in front of the palisade as reinforcement should the others be defeated and pushed back.

To impress the army and cause fear amongst our soldiers the British warriors were drawn up on higher ground, so that their front lines were on the level ground. The rest, on a gentle slope behind them, seemed to be towering higher and higher above us. The war-chariots, noisily manoeuvring, filled the plain between them and ourselves. Their numbers were greater than ours.

Agricola was worried that the enemy might attack from the front and at the sides at the same time so spread out his ranks. This meant that the line of soldiers was less densely packed. Most of his staff wanted him to call up the legions, but he was more confident than they and deaf to all their warnings. He sent away his horse and took up his position on foot in front of the auxiliaries.

The battle began. The Britons, with their long swords and short shields, showed determination and skill in evading and brushing aside the Roman missiles. They launched dense volleys of spears, until Agricola ordered four battalions of *Batavi* and two of *Tungri* to bring things to the sword's point and hand to hand fighting. This manoeuvre was familiar to the soldiers from their long service in the army but difficult for the enemy. The British shields were small and their swords, without points, made it difficult for them to fight in close lines and at close quarters. When the *Batavi* began to fight hand to hand,

THE EVIDENCE OF TACITUS : BATTLE OF MONS GRAUPIUS

to strike with their shield bosses, to stab the enemy in the face, and push their line uphill, the other battalions, stirring themselves to copy their charge, started to slaughter the nearest British warriors. In their haste to take the victory they left behind them many only half killed, or even unhurt.

Meanwhile, the squadrons of cavalry took a hand in the infantry battle. And here, though they caused momentary panic, they found themselves brought to a standstill by the close ranks of the enemy and the unevenness of the ground. It began to look very little like a cavalry action as our troops were pushed forward by the weight of the horses. Again and again straggling chariots, the horses terror-stricken and driverless, charged wildly in panic.

On the hill-tops, away from the fighting, the rest of the Britons had been laughing at the small numbers of our men. They began, little by little, to move down the hill and surround the edges of the conquering army.

The British strategy was turned against them. At the General's order the Roman squadrons moved from the front of the battle and attacked the enemy from behind. After this began a grand and gory drama of pursuit, wounds, capture, and butchery for the captives. The enemy fled in armed hordes before our smaller numbers, in some cases, they charged unarmed, and sacrificed their lives to the gods rather than face capture. Everywhere there were weapons, corpses, lopped limbs, and blood upon the ground.

Sometimes even the defeated showed courage. As they came to the forest, where they were on their home ground, they rallied round and began to surround groups of our pursuing troops. If Agricola hadn't been there and ordered his

strong, light-armed cohorts to comb the woods with the help of his dis-mounted cavalry, then the renewed bravery of the Britons might have lost us the battle.

Be that as it may, when the British saw the chase taken up by our soldiers, they broke away and scattered without a thought for each other, making for their distant hill-forts.

The enemy lost ten thousand men; on our side we lost three hundred and sixty.