



Auxiliary Soldiers



The stone fort at Gelligaer was an Auxiliary Fort. Although it was under the command of the 2nd Augustan Legion and the control of the Legion's commanding officer, the garrison at Gelligaer was not composed of Legionaries.

Auxiliaries (from the Latin word "auxilia" – to help) were not usually Roman citizens. In fact, the chance to become a citizen when they retired was a major incentive for enlistment. This is probably why they were almost entirely volunteers.

An Auxiliary usually served for 25 years before being granted Roman citizenship. To prove citizenship, the soldier would be given a "diploma" – an inscribed bronze. It was also after this retirement and granting of citizenship that he was allowed to marry although there is evidence of informal arrangements, often with local women, prior to that point.

It has been suggested that many Legionaries, who had to be citizens, were the sons of former Auxiliaries.

The Romans were very realistic about their capabilities. They knew they could not excel in every mode of fighting and so they supplemented their own ranks with men from conquered areas who excelled in other techniques. Silure men, quite possibly from the area of Gelligaer, were apparently used to form light cavalry units. Auxiliaries did not, however, normally serve in their own home areas. Presumably, there was too much of a risk of divided loyalties in the case of a revolt.

There is no evidence to prove where within the Roman Empire the Auxiliaries in Gelligaer came from. Wherever they came from, they would have received their military orders in Latin.

In general terms, this allowed the Romans to strengthen their own position by using the strengths of the people they had conquered. Auxiliary units could include archers, cavalry, slingers, spearmen and more general light infantry.

Auxiliaries were paid less than Legionaries and they didn't look the same. The most obvious differences were in the shape of the shield which was usually oval and the variations in colours of the tunics. Red was most common for Legionaries but green and off white seem to have been quite common with Auxiliaries.

There was little difference in the swords and daggers used by both but, while Auxiliaries did use throwing javelins, only the Legions used a pilum (plural, pila). Instead of just having a metal point like ordinary javelins, pila had long iron shanks tipped by a pyramidal head.

Soldiers had to pay for their own equipment and there is evidence of helmets having been used by more than one owner.

About half of the Roman army was actually made up of Auxiliaries such as the ones stationed in Gelligaer.