

## VIRIATHUS VS ROME

Viriathus is a name I had not come across before, but reading about him in, he is certainly someone I won't forget. Viriathus was a shepherd, born in Lobriga [Lorica after the Roman occupation], modern Loriga, in Portugal.

Viriathus was one of Iberian's greatest military leaders. He succeeded in defeating the Roman army on several occasions, until he was eventually betrayed. The story of how he came to hate the Romans is an interesting one. The time is circa 151 BC. The Romans have successfully occupied. To the west is a region called Lusitania, between the Guadiana and Douro rivers, taking in much of present-day Portugal. The Romans had never succeeded in occupying Lusitania, but the Lusitanians, due in part to lack of good arable land, constantly preyed on neighbouring tribes for food and materials. Rome did manage to take control of these neighbouring tribes, the Vettones and Celtici, but the Lusitanians continued the raids regardless.

After a period of frequent clashes when the Lusitanians repeatedly agreed to and then violated peace accords, Rome lost patience in 151 BC and launched a full-scale attack under Servius Sulpicius Galba.

Again the Lusitanians sued for peace. Galba replied that the poverty of the Lusitanians' native soil made it impossible for them to desist from raiding for long, so he proposed a whole-scale resettlement on three fertile plains.

On an agreed date in 150 BC the Lusitanians gathered in three separate groups to await resettlement. Galba insisted on disarming them, weapons being superfluous for an agrarian way of life. Then, with the nation in three separate, unarmed groups, Galba ordered the Roman army to surround each group in turn and massacre everyone there - men, women and children. It was an atrocity that sickened even the brutal Romans. He avenged treachery with treachery - an unworthy Roman imitating barbarians. (Appian, *Hispania* 10 [60].)

One of those to escape was a shepherd by the name of Viriathus, and he had something of a grudge against Rome.

4 years later and Lusitanian guerrilla raids on Roman forces were growing more frequent. Eventually in 147 BC they invaded Turdetania, run by the Roman propraetor Vettius. The Lusitanians were no match for the Roman legions and were pushed back to a fortified town where they were besieged. It was here they were given terms for surrender, with terms that looked a lot like Galba's terms 3 years previous. Viriathus suggested a plan for escape, and was duly elected leader. The plan was basic enough, bring out everyone, line up for battle, let the Romans line up for battle, and then run like hell. It worked, the Romans were unable to catch them. His army met at a rendezvous point in Tribola, and the Romans followed. Viriathus set up an ambush and it worked - the Romans got caught between a cliff edge and the Lusitanians. 4,000 of Vettius's army of 10,000 were killed, including Vettius.

The new Roman commander then bribed the neighbouring Celtiberians to fight the Lusitanians. But short work was made of the Celti, they were all slaughtered.

Viriathus then went on to plunder modern-day Toledo. As you can imagine, all this seriously pissed off the Romans.

There then followed a series of defeats for the Romans.

In 146 BC the Romans sent another army, commanded by C. Plautius. Viriathus ambushed and destroyed this army while they set up camp. He then went on to pillage and then destroy large parts of Segobriga.

In 145 BC the Romans sent another army, 15,000 foot soldiers and 2,000 cavalry, commanded by Quintus Fabius Aemilianus. They also sent an army commanded by Claudius Unimanus, which Viriathus duly slaughtered. On hearing of that army being destroyed, Fabius decided on a different tactic. The Romans refused to face the Lusitanians in open battle. By 144 BC Fabius decided to do battle, and drove the Lusitanians back, but the damage to Roman prestige for not doing battle earlier was done. The Celtiberians rose against Rome, and thus began the long and bitter Numantine War.

Q. Pompeius was the next general to try against Viriathus, he failed miserably, returning to camp after losing 1,000 men.

By 142 BC another Roman army had arrived, commanded by Fabius Servilianus. Rome was getting really pissed off, so this time they sent two full legions, 16,000 men, 1,600 cavalry and elephants.

Servilianus was successful, he besieged Viriathus in Erisone and retook several cities that had been under Lusitanian control. But Viriathus managed to smuggle himself and a large number of forces into the city. The following morning they attacked the Romans, and drove them towards a valley that Viriathus had earlier fortified. Servilianus was thus surrounded, and faced annihilation. He duly surrendered unconditionally, but Viriathus accepted, and demanded Roman forces withdraw from Lusitania, and recognise their independence, Viriathus was to be considered a friend and ally of the Roman people. No one knows why Viriathus let them off so lightly, but it is thought that if he had killed the whole army, Rome would never forget, and would keep sending armies until he was destroyed. So the Roman senate ratified the settlement.

The Romans did send a new governor to the region, Servilius Caepio, brother of the defeated general. Caepio was astute, but hated by the men who served under him. He tried to provoke Viriathus into war, but Viriathus resisted. Instead, some hot-headed tribesmen did get provoked, and in 140 BC the war resumed. Viriathus was reluctant to resume war, so he sent 3 trusted advisors to Caepio, Caepio lavished the 3 advisors with luxuries, and told them if they killed, murdered Viriathus they would obtain a huge reward. They went back to camp and stabbed Viriathus in the throat, fleeing to Caepio. Caepio then betrayed the deal, saying he had not meant for them to kill their leader. They were escorted from the city without a penny, though some other students of this era say that the three were killed by Caepio.

To end the hostilities, Caepio did as Galba has promised in the beginning, he resettled the Lusitanians to fertile lands. It worked and peace reigned.

