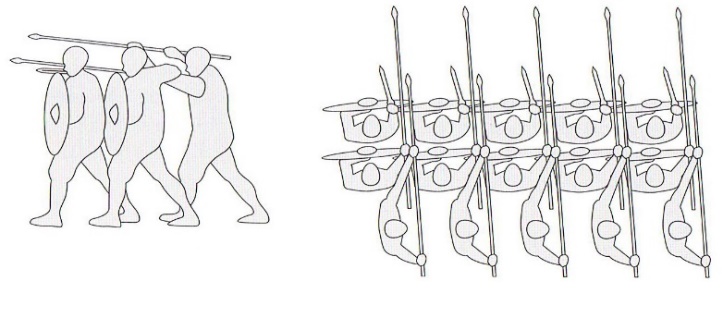
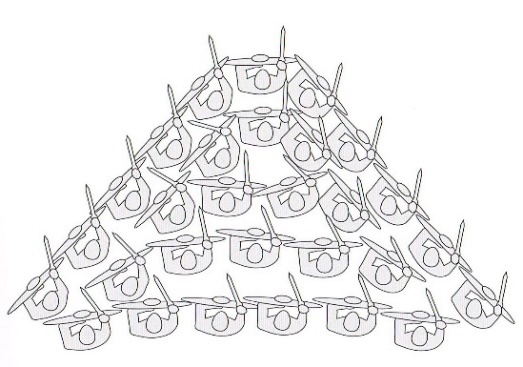
**Carham Battle Tactics**

Armies of the day were small, combatants usually numbered in hundreds rather than thousands. They travelled light, carried all there armaments and lived off the land by scavenging and plunder. Scouts would have noted the progress of threats or invasion, but response times might have been slow due to distances that had to be covered, first to get to muster points and then to march as a cohesive force to counter the enemy incursion.

The weapons of war were very basic, hand held or thrown, and therefore causing close quarter fighting. The first weapons used in a battle were missiles; spear, javelin and arrows, but as battle proper was joined, heavy sword, axe and seax, a long dagger, were used in close quarter, face to face and hand to hand fighting. Defensive personal armour was heavy, but surprisingly similar to the weight carried by the modern infantryman. It consisted of a large metal rimmed wooden shield, steel helmet and mail tunic, leather and linen padding. Using these weapons while carrying the weight of the armour required prodigious personal strength and stamina but ensured that battles were relatively short in duration as exhaustion would inevitably overcome ambition. Battles were short, sharp, bloody and brutal.

The normal battle tactic was to form a **shield wall**, three or more ranks packed closely together, protected by shield, spear and sword. This formation allows for a gap in the front rank caused by a fallen warrior to be quickly filled from the second rank - and so on. This is a nominally a defensive formation, but when one shield wall is set in opposition to a second shield wall there are two potentially immovable objects and somethings gotta give! Much, if not all, depends on holding the line of the shield wall, so initially neither side would want to make the first move.

Battle would likely have started with the hurling of javelins and exchange of arrow storms, and then the two shield walls would approach each other with the great noise of, banging of sword on shield, shouting and screaming of insults and each side looking for a weak point in the opposition wall which might be exploited. The larger force of Malcolm and Owen might have attempted to overcome the Northumbrians by sheer force of numbers and use their superiority to crush the line or outflank the defenders and attack into their rear. Another tactic was to use the **Boar’s Head formation** to break through the Northumbrian defensive line by sheer force of numbers using the Boar's Head formation. This concentrates the attack at a point and drives a wedge through the defenders’ line which can then be exploited to great advantage.

The Shield wall tactic was used at the Battle of Stamford Bridge (1066) by both the experienced Saxon army and the poorly armoured Viking army of King Harald Sigurdsson of Norway; most Vikings had left their mail behind on their ships and were wearing only their helmets. Both sides at the Battle of Hastings used the shield wall, with the Norman Cavalry eventually breaking the Saxon shield wall.

Taken, with permission, from [http://www.carham1018.org.uk](http://www.carham1018.org.uk/)

**Roman Battle Tactics**

A close up of a stone wall

Description automatically generatedOne innovation on the Greek phalanx that the Romans introduced was a **triple line formation** of three distinct ranks.

Military seniority was the key to where a legionary stood in the battle order.

Surprisingly, the least-seasoned men, hastati, made up the front rank. Behind them were the principes and, finally, the triarii, veterans of combat. In front of the whole lot stood the unfortunate velites, the newest (and usually poorest) recruits, who would launch javelins at approaching enemies before melting back behind the triarii. The final rank, which could be some distance back, was the line beyond which the Roman legionary would not retreat. “Falling on the Triarii” passed into common usage, meaning facing a last ditch struggle.

The three lines would often line up – a Legion’s battle formation could be upwards of a mile – with alternating gaps, presenting a wider but still apparently unbroken fighting front. These gaps gave the already flexible legion even more room for manoeuvre and allowed the rear ranks to step up into a threatened line.

Roman legionaries in Triple line formation. Shown on a Stele found at Glanum.

[Gallo-Roman Museum of Lyon-Fourvière]

The Roman army was the ancient world’s master of formation movement, with a menu of pre-drilled movements at the general’s fingertips. On the cry, “cuneum formate”, the legionaries would form a **wedge** and charge at the opposition.

Re-enactors demonstrating a wedge formation

It’s a matter of simple physics. A sharp point drives deep into the body of enemy soldiers, while a thickening mass behind expands to further divide their forces. Just as a wooden wedge can split a log, a human one can smash an opposition force.

The “point” of the wedge would be made of deep lines of the best troops, allowing for concentration of killing power against a weaker enemy. This mismatch of blades or missiles allows the wedge in to force a gap that can be widened by the rest of the formation against an enemy that is being compressed into a smaller space.

The wedge was used often. At the Battle of Pydna in 168 AD, wedge attacks helped to end the empire Alexander the Great of Macedon had founded. In the Battle of Watling Street, after halting a British charge with spear volleys, a vastly outnumbered Roman force advanced in wedge formations to a stop Boudicca’s great revolt in 60 or 61 AD.

Taken, with permission, from <https://www.historyhit.com/roman-military-tactics/>

As most armies at the time consisted of inexperienced **Fyrdmen**, the shield wall had many advantages: it did not require a lot of skill or training to organise, it needed little input from the battlefield commander, the close formation gave confidence to inexperienced men; they could support each other easily and it required no risky battlefield manoeuvres once formed. The widely available spear and **seax** (a stabbing knife) were the ideal weapons in close, hand-to-hand fighting. To strengthen the shield wall the front ranks of the foremost wall would usually be made up of experienced and well-armed warriors, such as **Huscarls** and **Thegns.**

The disadvantages of the shield wall were that, once broken it could not be reformed quickly, especially whilst in combat. The inexperienced Fyrdmen gained morale whilst in the wall, but would lose confidence even more quickly without the mutual support; often panic, with little chance of rallying the men, would be the outcome. The weakest point of the shield wall was usually the ends, as these men had less support as well as facing the danger of being attacked from behind.

**Battle Tactics Questions**

* Describe a shield wall and a Boar’s Head formation
* List the similarities and differences between the Roman tactics and the tactics at Carham
* To what extent are the shield wall and the triple line formation similar?
* To what extent are the Boar’s Head formation and the wedge formation similar?
* Explain why the shield wall and the triple line formation are so similar
* Explain why the Boar’s Head formation and the wedge formation are so similar
* Explain the advantages and disadvantages of a shield wall and a sedge formation
* Explain why shield wall and a Boar’s Head formation would be widely used across Europe at the time.
* Explain why the use of Cavalry would see the end of the shield wall
* Explain why the wedge formation is a tactic that is still used today in combat