**Spartacus**

**The Slaves Revolt**

Spartacus had been born in Thrace and received training in a Roman army, probably as an auxiliary, before becoming a slave. He was sold, in 73 B.C., into the service of Lentulus Batiates, a man who taught at a [*ludus*](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/games/g/Ludus.htm) for gladiators in Capua, 20 miles from Mt. Vesuvius, in [Campania](http://ancienthistory.about.com/b/a/195247.htm). That same year Spartacus and two Gallic gladiators led a riot at the school. Of about 200 gladiator slaves, less than 80 escaped, using kitchen tools as weapons.

In the streets they found wagons of gladiatorial weapons and confiscated them. When soldiers tried to stop the band of escaped slaves, the band used their accustomed gladiatorial weapons, easily defeating the soldiers. Then they took the better, military weapons of the beaten soldiers, and set out on their way south to [Mt. Vesuvius](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/pompeii/p/MtVesuvius.htm). Along their route, they picked up rural slaves.

**The Praetors Fail**

Little realizing how well Spartacus had organized his band of slaves, the [praetors](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/officials/g/Praetors.htm) made an inadequate attempt to end the revolt. [Clodius](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/romansc/p/032110ClodiusPulcher.htm), whose ancestor had built the [Appian Way](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/romanroads/g/011808AppianWay.htm) that would figure so prominently at the end of the story of Spartacus, besieged the Spartacans on a mountain, which had only one narrow path to the top. The rest of the mountain was steep and slippery.

As it turned out, the slippery surface didn't matter to Spartacus. Ample vines on the mountaintop provided suitable material for ropes, which they used to climb down and surprise the Romans. Instead of the Romans putting an end to the slave revolt, the slaves took the Roman camp.

Then the slaves headed towards the Alps, picking up a total of 70,000 slaves along the way. Spartacus intended for his men to disband and head to their pre-slave homes after a quick march to the Alps. He had shown remarkable skill in creating a force capable of defeating Roman legions, but he didn't have what he needed to be a great leader of his men. Many of his men preferred to pillage the countryside.

Unfortunately for the Spartacans, they had proven their significance to Rome. Now the Senate in Rome had to take the slave revolt seriously.

**Crassus**

[Crassus](http://ancienthistory.about.com/cs/people/a/crassus.htm) was elected [praetor](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/officials/g/Praetors.htm) and headed to Picenum to put an end to the Spartacan slave revolt with 10 legions, six new and four old. Crassus correctly assumed the slaves would head north to the Alps and so positioned most of his men to block this escape. Meanwhile, he sent his lieutenant Mummius and two new legions south to pressure the slaves to move north. Mummius had been explicitly instructed not to fight a pitched battle. He, however, had ideas of his own, and when he engaged the slaves in battle, suffered defeat.

Spartacus routed Mummius and his legions. They lost not only men and their arms, but later, when they returned to their commander, the survivors suffered the ultimate Roman military punishment -- decimation, by order of Crassus. All the men who had been involved in the disgraceful operation were divided into groups of 10 and then drew lots. The unlucky one in 10 was then killed.

Meanwhile, Spartacus turned around and headed towards Sicily, planning to escape on pirate ships, which he had hired, not knowing that the pirates had already sailed away. At the Isthmus of Bruttium, Crassus built a wall to block Spartacus' escape. When the slaves tried to break through, the Romans fought back, killing about 12,000 of the slaves, while losing only 7 of their own.

**Slaves vs. 3\* Roman Armies**

When Spartacus learned that Crassus' troops were to be reinforced by another Roman army brought back from Spain, he decided it was time to make a break for it. He and his slaves fled north, with Crassus at their heels. Spartacus' escape route was blocked at Brundisium by a third Roman force recalled from Macedonia. There was nothing left for Spartacus to do but to try to beat Crassus' army in battle. The Spartacans were quickly surrounded and butchered, although many men escaped into the mountains. Only a thousand Romans died.

Six thousand of the fleeing slaves were captured by [Pompey](http://ancienthistory.about.com/cs/rome/g/pompey.htm)'s troops and crucified along the [Appian Way](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/romanroads/ss/011808AppianWay.htm), from Capua to Rome. Spartacus' body was not found.

Because Pompey performed the mopping up operations, he, and not Crassus, got credit for suppressing the rebellion. For this reason they became bitter rivals.