

The Life of Ancient Egyptian Soldiers

Ancient Egyptian soldiers were the main ingredient of what made ancient Egypt a great civilization. The military might of ancient Egypt was what translated the Pharaoh's ideas and tactics into a reality. It is also what kept ancient Egypt continuous for over 3,000 years.

It's strange then to know that ancient Egypt did not have a standing army, ready for battle, before the New Kingdom! In fact, whenever soldiers were needed, the Pharaoh had to call on the many nomarchs to conscript able young men from each of their nomes (provinces).

This temporary army only lasted for as long as the campaign was alive, and then dispersed once it was done. The young men would go back to their old jobs and villages.

Once it was seen how much of an advantage having a permanent army would be, it was set up in the New Kingdom and the career of a soldier was created.

So there were now 2 ways to be part of the army:

National Service - You could just join as an adult recruit to train/serve for a year or two, with the possibility of being called back to serve any time after that.

Military Career - You were signed up as a child to serve in the army your whole life.

Some military men rose to such great power as to become kings themselves...

...the pride and glory of a military life then became a most-coveted aspect of such a career choice.

So once this career was chosen, the child was signed up and began training. Some children signed up as young as 5 years of age!

The actual service however didn't start until the age of 20 - older than some armies today.

Ancient Egyptian Military Training

After becoming a new recruit, the ancient Egyptian soldier got a haircut and an induction... the inductions included beatings to show who's boss. Soldiers needed to learn the important lesson of obeying orders before they were given any.

Now that the soldier is ready, the training began. Training for strength, fighting skills and stamina were the main tasks of the day. They included:

Wrestling

Sand-bag lifting

Archery

Spearing

Free fighting

Knife throwing

Charioteering

Target practice

Stick fighting

And according to the soldier's superior skills, he was then assigned to the corresponding regiment.

Ready For Battle!

Now that a soldier has had a hard induction and even harder training, he is now almost ready for his first campaign!

But of course, he needs to be armed...

Some of the more popular weapons of choice in ancient Egypt include:

Bow and Arrow

Knives and Swords

Axes

Spears

Maces

Sticks

Other than weapons soldiers had to wear helmets, scales, gloves, and shields for protection...

...they also had another form of protection - magical and religious icons on jewelry for example were popular too.

And on top of all that, they had to carry food and water. They would sometimes hunt or fish.

The men were divided into infantry divisions that grouped similarly skilled soldiers together. Charioteers, spearmen, archers, foot soldiers, etc...

And now the army is ready to march! And along with them followers followed: musicians, scribes to record the events, military standard carriers, etc...

But what if there was no campaign? Other than the usual training, ancient Egyptian soldiers were called on to help out with non-military tasks.

Helping with the harvest was one of the most important tasks, as this was what fed the entire country.

Guard duty such as making sure the trade routes were secure.

And also - hard manual labor such as construction.

The Hard-Earned Rewards

Ancient Egyptian soldiers sought the prestige that comes with being a national warrior and hero. They were more widely respected than others of the working class, and they gained recognition from the elite and even the royal family.

There were also formal awards for heroism and duty.

Soldiers were also paid wages, which in ancient Egypt was not monetary. They were given in rations of food which could be bartered for other items. However, they were also given the opportunity to plunder - a plus that comes with war.

And finally, ancient Egyptian soldiers were those of the lucky few that got state pensions.