

# THE PECHENECS - Military

## OVERVIEW

The lifestyle of the Pechenegs was determined by the nature of their economy. Since the Pechenegs' economy was dominated by pastoralism, they were not economically self-sufficient, and in order to fulfill their demand for goods that they could not produce themselves they needed to obtain these goods through raids or plundering.



In order to carry out these aggressive actions, they needed to have a strong military formation that organized raids for plunder with relatively regularity to feed their population.

Military strength and taking plunder gave them prestige and the opportunity to assert their political power. The Pechenegs' military success not only allowed them to politically dominate their neighbors, but also gave them added leverage in trade relations.

### *Battle of Liubech (1016)*

The Pecheneg nomads frequently threatened the southern borders of the Kievan state during their raids on Russian caravans and merchant ships to obtain trade goods. However, because they were skilled and brave warriors, some groups of Pechenegs were hired to serve in the Byzantine, Rus' and Hungarian armies.

## MILITARY

**B- PECHENECS:** The Pecheneg warriors' bravery and strength was mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenitus. He portrayed the Pechenegs as being a serious threat to the Byzantines, Magyars, Rus', and Bulgars and noted that all these nations struggled to avoid being harmed by them and made alliances with them to enjoy the advantage of their assistance.

In military actions, every Pecheneg knew how to use arms, and they were able to organize rapidly to confront the enemy. They even prepared their women to fight if necessary.

The Pechenegs used only cavalry in the army. They had two types of cavalry: light and heavy. Light cavalry was generally ineffective, they shot at enemy soldiers who were not yet engaged in the fighting with their bows. For direct confrontations they used their heavy cavalry. A feigned escape tactic was used to ambush and attack the enemy when the enemy troops became increasingly spread out during the course of pursuit; as well as to shock the enemy with their rapid attack and immediate retreat before the enemy could gather their forces to retaliate. They would never make a direct attack on fortified sites, but would rather besiege such places to starve them into surrender.

Each tribe had their own cavalry units known as *arrows* (oq) and they were commanded by their tribal leaders. The military units included 20,000 horsemen.

During military expeditions, the Pechenegs had spare horses to ride in order to let the other horse rest. They would never chose to fight in close combat, however, if it was unavoidable they wore leather body armor,

and used a mace, a small axe and a saber. In more open conflict they used the bone-reinforced, double-curved bow, arrows and spears.

They were skilled warriors in guerrilla warfare. Due to their military skills and bravery, some groups of the Pechenegs were employed in the service of the Byzantine, Rus' and Hungarian rulers.

The organization of the Pecheneg army into units of five or ten was a characteristic found in the later Turkic and Mongolian armies. The Pecheneg practice of creating a division from five smaller units was very similar to the Golden Horde's organization on the basis of *ulus*.

### **Discussion/Questions**

1. What tactics did the Pechenegs use in their military expeditions?
2. Why did the Pechenegs almost always prefer to besiege a fortified location rather than take it by force?

### **Readings**

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