

## The Roman Army : Military Units

**you are here:** [home](#) | [tablets](#) | [Tab. Vindol. II Introductory Chapters](#) | **The Roman Army : Military Units**

### Search database

View tablet number  
(118-573):

 go

[View all Tablets](#)

[Search Tablets](#)

[Browse Tablets](#)

### Search Tablets database

### Browse Tablets database

### Tab. Vindol. II Introductory chapters

[The Archaeological Context](#)

[The Roman Army](#)

[The format of the tablets](#)

[Palaeography](#)

[Appendix](#)

### Tab. Vindol. II Category introductions

### Tab. Vindol. II Abbreviations and Bibliography

### Digitising Vindolanda

### Tab. Vindol. II Addenda and Corrigenda

### Tab. Vindol. I Introductory Chapters

### The print publication and the online edition

### Print-friendly Tablet display

### Tablets guide

### General search

(Excluding Tablets database)

#### Text:

#### Images:

[Site map](#)

### Military Units

[Personnel](#)

[Soldiers and Civilians](#)

[Origins](#)

[Activities](#)

[List of Persons](#)

From Alan Bowman and David Thomas, *The Vindolanda Writing Tablets (Tabulae Vindolandenses II)*, London: British Museum Press, 1994. pp. 22-24

In interpreting the evidence of the tablets from the 1970s, we suggested that in the mid-90s Vindolanda was occupied by the quingenary Eighth Cohort of Batavians and that it was succeeded towards the end of the period c. AD 95-105 by the First Cohort of Tungrians, which may have remained in occupation for some years thereafter.<sup>2</sup> This interpretation can now be revised and amplified, beginning with the removal from the record of the Eighth Cohort of Batavians, since the evidence which has accumulated subsequently makes it clear that the numeral should have been read as *viii* rather than *viii*.<sup>3</sup>

The evidence of the tablets now indicates the certain or possible presence of three cohorts, or parts thereof, at Vindolanda, the First Cohort of Tungrians, the Third Cohort of Batavians and the Ninth Cohort of Batavians. The strength report of the First Cohort of Tungrians (154) shows that the unit was based at Vindolanda and the archaeological context of this tablet and of the correspondence of its prefect, Iulius Verecundus, indicates that it was there in the earlier part of the pre-Hadrianic period. The attribution of the strength report to Period 1 now seems less likely than was once thought and we prefer to regard this particular piece of evidence as attributable to Period 2 and hence to the last decade of the first century AD. If this is correct, the Tungrian cohort will have garrisoned Vindolanda after the enlargement of the fort.<sup>4</sup> The strength report shows that its nominal strength was 752, including 6 centurions, but of these only 296 were present at Vindolanda when the report was compiled. The absentees included a contribution of 46 *singulares legati*. It is probable that the unit was in the process of being enlarged from quingenary to milliary (it is attested as such in the diploma of 103<sup>5</sup>), but there can be no doubt that the enlarged fort will have contained other units or part of units as well; the evidence for the splitting of units and the combination of parts of different types of unit which is accumulating makes it clear that the notion that a fort was garrisoned by one particular unit is far from realistic.<sup>6</sup> It is likely that the Tungrian cohort was at Vindolanda also in the period after AD 100. A diploma found at Vindolanda and dating to AD 146, which belongs to a member of the unit who will have been recruited c. AD 122, shows that it is likely to have been at Vindolanda around this time.<sup>7</sup> It is certainly mentioned in a letter attributed to Period 4 which implies that it was at Vindolanda (295). The argument that it left Vindolanda and returned after a period of absence is hypothetical and cannot be supported by the one-fort-one-unit pattern. Part of it, at least, may have been there (perhaps coming and going) throughout much of the period c. AD 90-120. Some of the names which occur in texts attributed to the later part of the period would suit a Tungrian unit.<sup>8</sup>

There is evidence in the tablets for two cohorts of Batavians, the Ninth and the Third, which may well have been two of the units which fought with Agricola at Mons Graupius.<sup>9</sup> The Ninth Cohort is attested on several occasions, mainly on tablets which are attributed to Period 3, or which may safely be assigned to the later 90s or early 100s, and there can be no doubt that it formed the main part or a major part of the garrison at Vindolanda at this time.<sup>10</sup> There are far more attestations for this unit than for any other in the tablets. In discussing the earlier evidence for the unit (then identified as the Eighth Cohort), we suggested that it might have been a quingenary *cohors equitata*, basing this mainly on the number of 343 men attested as working in the *fabricae* (155) and on the repeated mention of barley in an account (190). This no longer seems such an attractive hypothesis, and in view of the fact that there is no other direct evidence for the strength or nature of the unit in this period we think the matter is best left open.<sup>11</sup> It is unclear when the unit left Vindolanda; tile stamps which name the unit have been found at Buridava in Moesia Inferior and these have been dated to the period between the first and second Dacian Wars (c. AD 102/6).<sup>12</sup>

There are two texts which refer to the Third Cohort of Batavians - one addressed to someone connected with the unit and the other probably referring to the fact that Cerialis, prefect of the Ninth Cohort, had received letters from a centurion of the Third. This suggests the presence of part or all of the unit, or individuals belonging to it, at Vindolanda at some point in the late 90s - early 100s, but this does not constitute strong evidence that the unit was actually based at Vindolanda.<sup>13</sup> A diploma shows the Third Cohort of Batavians at milliary strength in Raetia in AD 107.<sup>14</sup>

An account which is attributed to Period 4 (181) mentions a debt owed by *equites Vardulli* and this suggests the presence of a detachment of the Spanish *cohors I Fida Vardullorum equitata ciuium Romanorum*, attested in Britain in AD 98 and known to be milliary in AD 122.<sup>15</sup> Another account of the same period records a dispensation of wheat to *militibus legionaribus* [sic] (180.22-3); whether they were at Vindolanda or simply in the surrounding region, in which the supplier of wheat was operating, remains uncertain, but their presence in a period of important activity in the frontier region is hardly surprising.

Finally, it should be stated that we would not wish to claim evidence in the tablets for an *ala Vocontiorum*. The reference on which this claim is based (316) seems to us most likely to be an instance of the personal name Vocontius.<sup>16</sup> It should be noted, however, that two letters addressed to a decurion named Lucius (299, 300) and one military document mentioning a *turma* (159) offer firm evidence for the presence of cavalry at Vindolanda.

Units stationed elsewhere than Vindolanda, apart from the *singulares legati* and other detachments from the First Cohort of Tungrians (see 154), are represented only in a letter from a legionary *aquillifer*, almost certainly of *legio II Augusta*, to someone at Vindolanda (214, cf. 281.back 4 note). It must be emphasised, however, that despite the lack of named units there is a great deal of evidence for communication and contact between Vindolanda and units and personnel at other important military stations, such as Carlisle, Catterick, Ribchester, Corbridge and Binchester (Vol. II, Ch. 2).

[Previous page](#)

[Top of page](#)

[Next page](#)