

Octavian: Rise to Power

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"Caesar Augustus" wasn't always powerful! First, he was "Octavian."

Map of Sea Battle of Actium, 31 BC

In the early spring of 31 BC, Marcus Agrippa, Octavian's boyhood friend and brilliant military commander, sailed his fleet southeast from the port of Brundisium, Italy, to the port of Methone on the southwest coast of Greece.

Not long after he departed and the seas were calm, Octavian sailed his fleet to the west coast of Greece to a location just north of Actium where he landed his army. He marched south until he reached the northern peninsula of Actium.

Meanwhile, Agrippa defeated Antony's small fleet at Methone and took control of the port. Then he sailed north along the west coast of Greece, defeating Antony's naval forces one port at a time and taking control of each city along the way.

When Octavian and Agrippa met up at Actium, they put Antony and Cleopatra under siege. Octavian blocked the food and supplies from arriving from the north. Agrippa blocked the grain supply ships from the east from sailing up the west coast of Greece to Actium.

Antony's best strategy would have been to retreat by land to the east with his army and survive to fight another day. But Cleopatra argued against it. She had all her personal treasure and a large amount of Egypt's treasure loaded on her ships. If it were not a sea battle, she would have to abandon her ships and send her treasure to the bottom of the sea so that Octavian wouldn't get it.

Against the advice of his generals, Antony decided in her favor to fight a sea battle. His men were ravaged with illness and weak from lack of food because of the siege. Once the battle was joined, it didn't take long for Cleopatra to see that Antony was going to lose. As soon as there was an opening in the middle of the fight, she sailed her 60 ships through it and headed south for Egypt.

When Antony saw her sail away, he turned his ship south, deserting his army, and sailed after her.



Octavian set up a negotiation with Antony's men and merged them into his army. Agrippa sailed back to Rome with a large part of the army while Octavian began marching his large army around the eastern end of the Mediterranean, heading to Egypt in pursuit of Antony & Cleopatra.

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