

**1<sup>st</sup> ACE Contest - Academic Year 2001 /02**  
**Andrew B. age 14 – 1<sup>st</sup> prize – Intermediate**  
**School ref 22 in Canada**

## Victory

No matter what we did, they never quit; they kept coming. And no matter what they did, we never quit. The battle seemed never-ending, eternal, yet, for some reason or another, I knew what was going to happen.

You may now be thinking that I have special powers. You may now be thinking that I am a general because of my special insight. But truly, I tell you, I am an ordinary foot soldier in the ordinary ranks of an ordinary Roman army. The biggest problem is that I could say the same thing if I was fighting for the other side.

I am a part of the army of Maxentius. The month is October; the year is 312 AD. I've been in the army for a year, long enough to realize that Maxentius has a huge army, though it is loosely organized, if organized at all. When one signs up for Maxentius' army, he's there for a lifetime. That is because lifetimes are short in this army. Some commit suicide. Others die in battle. About 1% may live. I am amongst the suicidal. I decided that instead of committing suicide, I might as well join the army to make a little money for my wife and children.

Our rival Constantine, however, is different. His army is one quarter of the size, and his troops are as tightly packed and organized as the brain cells of Constantine himself.

You may consider me a fool now for joining Maxentius' army, but I didn't want to prolong my death too long. Deep down inside, at the heart, in the heart, I often ask myself this. Do I really want to die?

I'm 20 years old, smart, but depressed. If I live to be 40 years old, it will be then that I will retire from the army. And it is then that I will get a land grant.

"Constantine has one quarter of our powers. We will all come out of here alive," Maxentius told us. "Constantine is inexperienced. That we are not. If Constantine beats us, I will kill the remainder of you." And those were the motivational words that Maxentius left us to ponder.

And, no matter what happened, the battle moved on, leaving percentages of the men, troops and friends behind. Those percentages were much higher for us. But we were soldiers. We kept moving.

Actually, we tried not to move from the safety of the wall that we found. We catapulted boulders over the wall. So did they.

I woke with a start. I'd dreamed of a cross over a sun bearing the words "*Be Victorious in This*," as the voice of God told me to leave this army and join to Constantine's army. As I looked down from the sun, I saw Constantine and his troops. They were painting crosses on their shields. Maybe they'd seen the same sign as me. Maybe "victorious" to God doesn't mean what "victorious" means to me. Maybe victorious is to have no war at all, to have peace. Maybe I'm a peace messenger for Maxentius. And maybe I'm meant to be a traitor. *Be Victorious in This*. I could hear a voice playing over and over in my head, sounding like a broken record, but one that was more meaningful and less aggravating. Mysterious.

Now I have a dilemma. I received a message that could have multiple meanings; it's the middle of the night under the surveillance of guards; I'm supposed to be asleep, but I can't sleep. I can't think straight, either. What to do. And there was pressure to *Be Victorious in This*.

I finally decided to sleep on it.

When I woke in the morning, I didn't know. That is, I didn't know how I knew. I just knew. I knew what to do. Quite like the dream. It happened. Without warning.

*Be Victorious in This*. Victorious in peace and love. Oddly enough, I now knew this, too. For the same reason that I know what to do. I'd joined the army for suicidal purposes. The earlier I die, the longer I am with God. I had to carry on. Carry on with the war. I put my trust solely in God.

I then painted a small red cross on my shield.

My daggers and spears were snapping, as if they were cut through most of the way. They weren't cut. My bows were curving as if they were caught in hurricane force wind. Yet there was not a breath of a breeze. But my shield held strong. It's as if God was on my side, yet against me at the same time. He was helping me be victorious in this. And that brought up the question. Do I still want to die?

I took a wild, yet controlled swing at a man from Constantine's army. If it were me swinging my sword, the man would have been a headless man. But that wasn't the case. Truly, I tell you, the innocence of the man struck me with more force than my sword would have struck him. If I could have stopped my sword before contact, I would have. But I couldn't. Nor did I have to. Similar to my other weapons, it shattered on impact. Everything I possessed was cursed. Everything. Except my shield. And my faith. And my soul. But I don't think that my soul is mine. God owns my soul. God owns me. And He could throw me away as soon as He wants. I simply hope, pray, that the small cross on my

shield will save me from an awful fate that may befall me. A fate that I now watch being played royally, as if in a theatre, by our army leader, who is falling off, or being pushed off the Milvian Bridge in defeat. He was, however, not my leader. My leader here on earth is the hope of joining my ultimate leader in heaven.

by: Andrew B., age; 14, grade 8