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Pharsalus: Fall of the Roman Alexander

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Pharsalus: Fall of the Roman Alexander

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of Bard College

by

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Introduction

¹In Plutarch's history of Caesar, he makes note of a moment in which Caesar was reading of Alexander the Great. In this story, Caesar weeps at his supposed lack of accomplishments in comparison to Alexander. Plutarch quotes Caesar as saying, "Don't you agree that it is a matter for tears? When Alexander was my age, he was already master of so many nations- and I have not yet done anything distinguished at all."² Plutarch places this event happening around the time of Caesar's governorship of Spain. This would make Caesar about 39-40, making him a little under a decade older than Alexander at the time of his death. The exact origin of this story is unknown and could have been put about by either his supporters or his detractors.³ Narratively, the notion that Caesar desired to one day surpass Alexander's accomplishments fits well with how history would unfold.

In the year 40 B.C.E, a little more than a decade after Caesar supposedly wept over the lack of his accomplishments, he is able to watch as Pompey's forces are routed by Caesar's own men. He can see the numerically superior and better supplied Pompeian army flee from the battle hardened veterans of his Gallic campaign. It had been about a year since Caesar had crossed over the Rubicon, effectively declaring the beginning of the war that would change the course of Rome. Years of political positioning, speeches, and military campaigning had led to this very moment. Had he failed, Caesar most certainly would have either died on the battlefield or in the hands of his greatest political opponents, the optimates. With his death, his accomplishments would have been all for nought, as he would have instead been remembered as the man who failed to take Rome.

¹ I use the following translations for the ancient sources in this part: Plutarch's *Caesar*: Christopher Pelling,

² Plutarch, *Caesar* 11.6

³ Christopher Pelling, trans., *Plutarch Caesar* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 184.

On the other side of the battlefield, Pompey withdrew back to his camp. What had seemed like an unlosable battle had quickly turned into one of the greatest military upsets in history. Pompey had been likened (by himself and his supporters) to that of Alexander the Great, and now he found himself, against all odds, running from the battlefield. Pompey had defeated Mithridates, conquered the east in the name of Rome, subdued the pirates of the Mediterranean, and was expected by many to easily emerge victorious against the rebellious Caesar. Now, his forces lie scattered, his support crumbling, and himself fleeing with his life. Pompey would go on to flee to Egypt in an attempt to raise another army against Caesar. However, he would be betrayed by the young pharaoh of Egypt, beheaded, and presented to Caesar as a gift in hopes of receiving support in his squabble with his sister. As Caesar would agree, it was an unfitting end to a man thought of as the Roman Alexander.

After Pompey's death, Caesar would go on to win the Civil War. Though others tried to stand in Caesar's way, after the battle of Pharsalus Caesar simply could not be stopped. How is it that he was able to defeat Pompey? Caesar had been outnumbered and undersupplied, and Pompey had the legitimacy of the Senate mostly on his side. Herein lies the undoing of Pompey and by the extension the Republic's: the optimates. Whereas Caesar was able to make his own decisions, Pompey had the difficult task of placating the incessant complaints and opinions of the exiled optimates. The optimates were essentially the faction in the senate that would use any political measure to maintain the status quo, and therefore the continuation of what was essentially an oligarchy. After Caesar crossed the Rubicon and descended on Rome, many of the optimates found themselves in Pompey's camp, and followed him and his army. These men had been a thorn in the side of both Caesar and Pompey alike, and at one time both them had stood

together against the optimates during the time of the First Triumvirate. The optimates were a major hindrance to Pompey, as were politics in general. This would prove to be his undoing, as his inability to stand up to the optimates directly led to his decision to face Caesar at Pharsalus.

Both Caesar and Pompey are deserving of praise for their accomplishments as military leaders. Caesar was victorious in the west and Pompey in the east; their deeds are comparable in greatness. However, Pompey's accomplishments are overshadowed by his defeat at the hands of Caesar; Caesar is remembered as the conqueror of Rome, and Pompey his defeated rival. The two differed greatly in method, with Pompey preferring caution while Caesar chose brashness and trickery. It was this difference that made Pompey the perfect person to deal with Caesar, but it was his political ineptitude that led to his failure.

Part 1

Chapter 1: Early Life of the Roman Alexander

⁴To truly understand Pompey and his motivations, a look back at his early life is required. Like most people, Pompey's family and their position played an integral role in who Pompey was. As is the case with many of the major political figures in Rome, Pompey's family was one of the established ruling senate dynasties, or a Patrician family. However, his family joined the ranks of the elite rather late into the life of the Roman Republic, only truly coming to prominence in the year 141 BCE with Q. Pompeius stepping into the role of consul.⁵ Pompey's family had a place in the upper echelons of Roman society, but the family member who would truly have the greatest influence on Pompey and his future would be his father Pompeius Strabo.

Born in 106 BCE, Pompey quickly became familiar with internal conflicts that threatened Roman hegemony. In 91 BCE, Rome was launched into what would become known as the Social War. Many of Rome's Italian allies had become increasingly disgruntled by the fact that they had not received Roman citizenship. This eventually led to a full scale war, with Rome fighting their once close allies. Pompey's father played a large part in this conflict, and while there is no way of knowing if Pompey actually fought alongside his father, "... it would be out of character..." if he had not done so.⁶ The difficulty with the Social War was that the Italian allies knew all of the Romans' 'tactics and training', which led to a drawn out war that claimed many

⁴ I use the following translations for the ancient sources in this part: Plutarch's *Pompey*- Pamela Mensch, Plutarch's *Sertorius*- Bernadotte Perrin, Velleius Paterculus' *Roman History*- J.C. Yardley and Anthony A Barret, Cassius Dio's *Roman History*- Earnest Cary, Appian's *Roman History*- Horace White, Cicero's *Pro Lege Man*- Humphrey Grose Hodge, Cicero's *Letters to Atticus*- E. O. Winstedt, Cicero's *Letters to Friends*- D. R. Shackleton Bailey, Sallust's *Histories*- William W. Batstone

⁵ Robin Seager, *Pompey The Great: A Political Biography*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 20.

⁶ Peter Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman Alexander* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1981), 5.

Roman lives.⁷ The war ended in 87 BCE, meaning at the young age of 19, Pompey had already witnessed and potentially fought in a conflict that threatened to tear his country apart. This not only set Pompey on his way to a fruitful military career, but it also foreshadows the Roman internal conflicts that would shape Pompey's life.

The next major event in Pompey's life would be the conflict between Lucius Cornelius Sulla and Gaius Marius. Both great leaders in their own right, these two would end up at each other's' throats. Both wanted the glory of conquering the kingdom of Pontus, which had begun to attack eastern Roman settlements in the wake of the Social War.⁸ Sulla eventually won out and embarked for Asia, but while he was away, an army led by Marius and his ally Lucius Cornelius Cinna set their eyes on the city of Rome. Pompey's father was entreated by the Marians to join their cause, but Strabo hesitated on choosing a side. Cinna eventually sent an assassin to kill Strabo and recruit his men which ended up failing. However, after the failed assassination attempt, many of Strabo's men expressed their discontentment, and began to march off to join up with Marius and Cinna. Upon seeing this, Plutarch states that Pompey went, "...about among the soldiers, entreated them with tears, and... threw himself face-down... and lay in their way, weeping and bidding those who were marching off to trample him."⁹ Strabo's men, upon seeing this display, decided to stay with their general and defend Rome. While Pompey's actions may have worked, they stand in sharp contrast with how Caesar handled disloyal troops. Caesar demanded loyalty and bravery from his men, and shamed those who would not give it. Pompey, instead, pleaded for it.

⁷ Lee L. Brice, ed., *Warfare in the Roman Republic: From the Etruscan Wars to the Battle of Actium* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2014), 187.

⁸ Velleius Paterculus, *Roman History* 2.18.1

⁹ Plutarch, *Pompey* 3

Marius eventually took Rome after the death of Pompey's father (who had fallen ill to a plague).¹⁰ Upon taking Rome, Marius and Cinna set themselves up as consuls and began their rule, though Marius would die shortly after taking power from a heart attack. Sulla would not stay in Asia forever though and in 83 BCE he began to make his way back home, reigniting the tensions in Rome. After his father's death, Pompey became the head of the household and had to decide which side to take. Strangely enough, Pompey at first decided to lend aid to Cinna and his army. Whatever Pompey's reasoning for joining with his father's enemy, he soon regretted his decision. Upon arriving in Cinna's camp, he quickly realized his unpopularity amongst the Marians and was met with a plethora of accusations against him.¹¹ Pompey ended up changing his mind and instead went off to aid Sulla, but his original choice remains baffling. Pompey willingly put himself in a place of great danger amongst many who wished to see him dead. Even in his younger years, Pompey seemed to have a knack for choosing those who cared little for his well being.

The young Roman hastily made up for his blunder under the leadership of Sulla. Before even joining the returning general's forces, Pompey raised his own army and saw victory twice against two smaller Marian forces. The first came shortly after Pompey set off from Picenum (a region in Italy) to meet with Sulla. A clever cavalry charge led by Pompey brought the death of the leader of the enemies cavalry, which had the domino effect of plunging the entire army into chaos and an eventual rout.¹² The second victory occurred on the River Aesis, where Pompey was able to maneuver the enemies cavalry onto unfavorable terrain, thus rendering their horses

¹⁰ Seager, *Pompey The Great*, 9.

¹¹ Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 13.

¹² Plutarch, *Pompey* 7

useless.¹³ These victories made up for Pompey's earlier blunder of siding with the hostile Marians, especially in the eyes of Sulla who welcomed the young general with open arms. His skill as a general made up for his poor decision.

Eventually, Sulla and his men took back Rome and ousted the Marians. Once Sulla was in power, he began to purge many of his political opponents who had even the slightest relation to Marius and his cause. The new dictator also began to strengthen his ties to his allies, and insisted that Pompey divorce his wife and marry Sulla's stepdaughter Aemilia. Unlike Caesar, who was faced with a similar dilemma, Pompey accepted Sulla's proposal. Peter Greenhalgh does point out that Pompey was, "...dependent on continued favour for the promotion of a most unconventional career...", but this is still a telling moment of his character.¹⁴ While definitely a difficult situation, Pompey still bowed to those in power (directly contrasting a young Julius Caesar presented with the same demand). Plutarch comments that the marriage, "...was a product of tyranny, and suited the advantage of Sulla rather than the character and habits of Pompey..."¹⁵ The whole affair turned out to be fruitless in the end anyway, as shortly after joining Pompey's household she died of a miscarriage.

After the death of his new wife, Pompey was assigned to the island of Sicily and began to mop up any Marian supporters who had fled there.¹⁶ He then set off towards Africa (on the orders of Sulla), where an army of Marians had gathered led by Domitius Ahenobarbus. The two armies met, but when a powerful storm hit Domitius ordered his men to retreat so that they did not fight under hostile conditions. Pompey seized his chance, and attacked the enemy under the

¹³ Ibid., 7

¹⁴ Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 21.

¹⁵ Plutarch, *Pompey* 9

¹⁶ Ibid., 12

cover of the storm, surprising the Marian rebels.¹⁷ While it was a hard fought battle, Pompey's surprise attack gave his army the upper hand and brought about their victory. Following his defeat of Domitius, Pompey made an expedition into Numidia, reigniting their fears of Rome and further gaining fame for himself. Pompey was continuing to show his abilities as a general, even at the young age of 24. So great so were his deeds that he was given the surname 'Magnus' (the Great) and able to secure a triumph (after some deliberating with Sulla) even though he was not a consul or Praetor.¹⁸ A triumph was one, if not the, greatest rewards a Roman general could receive for his deeds, ensuring all knew of their achievements. In his early years, he showed talent as a smart and bold, potentially even careless, general that earned the respect of his superiors (though his tendency to throw away caution would wither away with experience).

Pompey was not completely under the heel of Sulla, which he showed in the waning days of the dictators political and natural life. When Sulla held the next election for the consuls, Pompey lent his support to Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, a popular and enemy of Sulla.¹⁹ Lepidus would end up winning the consulship, along with Quintus Lutatius Catulus who was a staunch supporter of Sulla and his regime. At the end of his term, Lepidus refused to give up his consulship and led a group of insurgents against the senate in hopes of achieving an immediate second term.²⁰ Pompey joined the nobility against Lepidus, and was able to subdue Lepidus' garrisons, forcing the rebellious consul to give up his siege of Rome and flee to Sardinia.²¹ With the threat defeated, Pompey did not disband his troops. With his army, Pompey was able to pressure the senate into allowing him to wage war against Quintus Sertorius, a popular who had

¹⁷ Ibid., 12

¹⁸ Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 28.

¹⁹ Ibid., 33

²⁰ Seager, *Pompey The Great*, 31.

²¹ Plutarch, *Pompey* 16

taken up arms against the senate in Spain. Even though he was still so young, Pompey had managed to secure a position usually reserved for a consul. His accomplishments as a general were propelling him up the ladder of Roman politics, and with an army at his back he easily got what he wanted.

After the failure of his fellow Marians and Populares, Sertorius had taken up refuge in Spain, where he had managed to wage an extremely successful guerilla war against Sullan regime. General after general had sought Sertorius out, only to find themselves woefully outmatched by the Marian rebel. Sertorius' rebellion posed multiple threats to Rome. Other than it being a mark of shame (since so many of Rome's generals had failed to end the uprising), it also posed threats abroad. News of the Roman rebel travelled fast, and there were those who saw this as a chance to bring Rome down a peg. Specifically, Mithridates of Pontus, who lent his support to Sertorius' cause in the form of money and ships.²² All of this must have made Pompey's desire to face Sertorius even greater. Though he was still young, his military achievements thus far had catapulted him up the Roman ranks, and defeating the last remnant of the Marian resistance would surely help him continue this trajectory. Sertorius must have seemed like just another step to glory.

With his unhindered success so far, it seems unlikely that Pompey was unaware of the tribulations that awaited him. Sertorius was an enemy unlike any that Pompey had yet faced. The Marian rebel had established his own little kingdom in Spain, and brought with him Roman

²² Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 52.

customs that helped transform the region into his own personal war machine. As historian Peter Greenhalgh explains:

For Sertorius was more than a great soldier that had mastered guerilla warfare. By introducing Roman drill and signals he had turned bands of robbers into highly disciplined yet flexible fighting forces that could both outfight and outmaneuver Roman legions under more conventional generals... He also knew the value of fine array, and by providing his troops with beautiful cloaks and setting their shields and helmets ablaze with gold and silver decorations he developed an *esprit de corps*... The fathers were proud to see their sons going to and from school in the purple-bordered togas worn by Roman schoolboys, and the lads themselves became devoted to Sertorius, whom they swore to protect with their lives.²³

Sertorius had created an army devoted to him and that was willing to lay down their lives for his cause. Additionally, they relied on more unconventional tactics, that left traditional generals (such as Pompey), generally bewildered on how to deal with them. In some ways, Sertorius and his army were similar to that of Caesar and his veteran legions. Sertorius would quickly prove to be the first real threat to Pompey, and would teach him lessons that would prove to be useful, especially against Caesar.

After he had been given the okay by the senate, Pompey left to go join his fellow Roman and governor of the Spanish province Metellus. Metellus himself had experienced multiple humiliations at the hands of Sertorius, and those who had tried to give him aid before Pompey had fallen to unfortunate fates. With the news of Pompey's arrival, many saw it as the end of Sertorius, with some cities in Spain even pondering changing their allegiances.²⁴ All of this changed after the two exchanged blows for the first time. The initial meeting of the two forces occurred at the city of Lauron, which Sertorius was besieging. Pompey had rushed to relieve the city, and upon arrival thought that the conflict would be over quickly. He had managed to trap Sertorius between his own forces and the city, and believed that Sertorius had nowhere to go.

²³ Ibid., 43

²⁴ Plutarch, *Pompey* 18

Though he was unwilling to attack up the hill that Sertorius had made camp on, Pompey believed he could siege out the besiegers.

Or so he thought, for Pompey had fallen right into Sertorius' trap. Sertorius had left a contingent of his forces behind in his older camp to wait out Pompey, and those forces had now revealed themselves.²⁵ In Pompey's arrogance and carelessness, he had taken Sertorius' bait and now found that he was the one surrounded. These new forces had taken a position on a hill behind Pompey's forces and trapped them, for if Pompey made the foolish decision to attack either of the hill encampments, the other would surely come down and attack Pompey from the rear. Faced with this precarious situation, Pompey began sending out his men to forage for food. After hearing of a coordinated raid on one group, he sent out a legion to relieve them. They too were quickly overwhelmed, and Pompey set out with his entire army to save them, only to find himself outmaneuvered once again by Sertorius' army which had taken the high ground.²⁶ He could only watch as his men, and later the city of Lauron, were destroyed by Sertorius' forces. His carelessness had led to his defeat.

Pompey retired from Spain and returned the next campaign season in hopes of reclaiming lost dignity. Initially, he found success as he was victorious over some of Sertorius' allies. However, if there were any in Pompey's camp who had hoped he had learned from previous mistakes, they were soon disappointed. After his early victories, Pompey rushed off to face Sertorius himself, without his ally Metellus. Plutarch states that this brash move was influenced by a desire to keep all the victory to himself and not share it with his fellow Roman.²⁷ This could not have been better news for Sertorius, as it kept his enemies divided. The battle that ensued

²⁵ Plutarch, *Sertorius* 18.4

²⁶ Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 48.

²⁷ Plutarch, *Pompey* 19

between Pompey and Sertorius was inconclusive, with neither side winning a clear victory. There were losers in the battle however, and they were mostly on Pompey's side. Pompey himself was wounded in the melee while commanding the right flank, and ended up having to flee from battle.²⁸ The left flank had found more success and even managed to push forward into the enemy camp, until they were set upon by the rest of Sertorius' army and took heavy losses.²⁹ The battle itself had few consequences for both sides, but it could have been much more catastrophic for Pompey. His eagerness to face his enemy alone nearly cost him his life, and perhaps if he had waited for his ally Metellus they may have seen a clear victory on that day.

After his encounter with Sertorius, Pompey met back up with Metellus in hopes that the two could bring an end to this rebellion. They found themselves constantly hounded by Sertorius' guerilla tactics (as a pitched battle against both Pompey and Metellus was out of the picture for the Marian general). The two Roman generals again tried to besiege Sertorius at the city of Clunia, but this too failed as a relief force came to Sertorius' aid.³⁰ Another campaigning season had come and gone, and Pompey once again had to face the reality that his war was not going well.

His acceptance of this fact is shown in a letter he wrote to the senate. The ancient historian Gaius Sallustius Crispus (more commonly known as Sallust) claims to know what was written in the letter. In it, Pompey admits to his own failings, "For my part, I acknowledge that I set out for this war with more enthusiasm than strategy..." but he also warned the senate what would happen if they did not give him aid: "You are what is left. If you do not help... my army

²⁸ Ibid., 19

²⁹ Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 49.

³⁰ Ibid., 50.

will cross from here into Italy and with it will come the entire Spanish war.”³¹ The idea of an independent and hostile Spain (as well as the return of an angry Pompey) frightened the senate enough so that they quickly lent Pompey the aid he desired. This letter had come after Pompey’s previous letters to the senate had failed to drum up support.³² It had taken him a while, but finally Pompey had managed to get what he wanted, and, if Sallust’s account is to be believed, it only took him threatening mutual destruction to do it.

Now all Pompey had to do was find a way to use this newfound assistance in an effective way. Clearly, his approach to Sertorius up until this point was entirely ineffective. Sertorius had proven himself capable when it came to pitched battle, and when full scale conflict was not an option, his troops were extremely effective at switching to guerilla tactics to hound Pompey’s forces and cut off their supplies. Furthermore, Pompey’s brash nature had done him a disservice on more than one occasion, and his lack of caution had brought him closer to total defeat than he had ever been before. Pompey was not going to find a glorious victory after an intense battle, he needed to play it much slower. This leads to some complications however, as Greenhalgh points out: “It was not the most exciting kind of warfare and our sources give it scant attention...”³³ Pompey’s strategy was not very exciting; he essentially bided his time and set siege to multiple cities in the region in an effort to wear Sertorius and his men down.

While slow, this tactic worked as Sertorius’ men began to resent him, none more so than fellow Roman Perpenna. Perpenna sought Sertorius’ position, and hated being under his command. Many of the other Romans under Sertorius’ command shared Perpenna’s sentiments. Plutarch quotes Perpenna: “...we came to this land of destruction with the idea of living like

³¹ Sallust, *Histories* 2.98

³² Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 51.

³³ *Ibid.*, 53.

freemen, and are now voluntarily slaves in the body-guard of Sertorius the exile...”³⁴ Indeed, as the war dragged on, many in Sertorius’ camp must have begun to wonder what it was they were exactly fighting for. Marius and Cinna had been dead for years now; Sertorius was all that was left. They were now essentially fighting for Sertorius and his new Spanish kingdom. Internal conflict began to spread, especially between the Romans who had stayed loyal to Sertorius and the Spanish.³⁵ Eventually, Perpenna turned on his leader out of envy and ambition and had him killed. Pompey did not need to defeat Sertorius in open combat, simply waiting his enemy out showed the cracks in their system.

Without Sertorius, the rebellion did not stand a chance against the combined might of Metellus and Pompey. Perpenna was no Sertorius, as much as he may have wanted to be. Upon hearing that Sertorius was no longer in charge, Pompey quickly set out to finish the war. He sent out a contingent of men to act as bait, which Perpenna quickly took. After routing the smaller Pompeian force, Perpenna was inspired by this victory and chased after them with eagerness. This was when Pompey revealed himself and joined the battle, quickly defeating Perpenna.³⁶ Pompey essentially lured Perpenna into the same feeling of overconfidence that he had felt at the beginning of the campaign, and turned it on his new foe.

The war with Sertorius had been an important time in Pompey’s life. During the conflict he had managed to make connections all across Spain, that proved to still be loyal even into his conflict with Caesar during the Civil War.³⁷ From Sertorius, Pompey learned the importance of caution. He had only begun to see real success against Sertorius after he slowed down and began

³⁴ Plutarch, *Sertorius* 25.2

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.3

³⁶ Plutarch, *Pompey* 20

³⁷ Seager, *Pompey The Great*, 32.

taking his time. While this was not the most exciting of tactics, in the end it won him the day, and that is what really matters. Against an arguably better general and foe, Pompey found victory through the use of attrition tactics, simply waiting for his enemy to crumble.

Pompey was now able to return to Italy, with another military success under his belt. While he had been away, the Italian peninsula had not been without its own conflict. The heart of the Roman Republic had been dealing with a slave uprising, led by the escaped gladiator Spartacus. Marcus Crassus, Pompey's future fellow triumvirate member, had been fighting against the uprising for some time, and for the most part had brought the rebellion to an end save some smaller groups attempting to flee Italy. Upon his return, Pompey was able to catch some 5,000 fugitive slaves and defeat them in battle. According to Plutarch, Pompey told the senate, "... Crassus had overthrown the gladiators in a pitched battle, but... he had plucked up the whole war by the roots."³⁸ essentially taking credit, at least partially, for bringing an end to the war. Pompey was allowed to celebrate a triumph in Rome for his victory in Spain, but stealing the glory from Crassus would prove to have a negative impact on Pompey's political ambitions.

Back in Rome, Pompey ran for the position of Consul. Unfortunately for Pompey however, Crassus also made a bid for the consulship, the man whose glory he had just attempted to steal. Pompey, at first, was delighted to hear that Crassus was running. He desired a chance to work with him and even helped campaign for Crassus.³⁹ The two ended up winning consular positions, despite Pompey only being of equestrian rank.⁴⁰ However, despite Pompey being so excited to work with Crassus, problems quickly arose. Plutarch says that the two, "... disagreed

³⁸ Plutarch, *Pompey* 21

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 22

⁴⁰ Velleius Paterculus, *Roman History* 2.30.2

about everything and constantly opposed each other.” for, “In the Senate, Crassus carried more weight; but among the people the power of Pompey was great.”⁴¹ So great were their differences that their year as consuls was, “... politically barren and virtually without achievement’.”⁴² Pompey’s year as consul was a difficult one. As Greenhalgh explains, Pompey, “... was a military rather than political animal...” and this showed when faced with a political adversary.⁴³ This is in stark contrast to Caesar, who had a far less agreeable fellow consul but still managed to be wildly successful. Pompey’s military achievements had catapulted him to the head of Roman politics, but the battlefield of the forum proved to be much harder for him to navigate than the battlefield of war.

After his term as consul, Pompey began to retreat from political life. As Plutarch explains, “... life in a toga is apt to lower the reputation of men who have grown great by arms, and who are ill suited for civic equality.”⁴⁴ Indeed, in the years following his consulship, Pompey was unable to continue his ambitions, shown by his inability to put friendly faces in consulship positions: “The elections of these years reveal the weakness of Pompeius’ position in urban politics...”⁴⁵ Pompey needed another crisis to fight; something to get him away from Roman politics and back out fighting its enemies. Pompey’s new enemy came in the form of the Pirates that had been plaguing the Mediterranean. According to Plutarch, the pirates, “... had spread throughout our Mediterranean Sea, making it unnavigable and closed to all commerce.”⁴⁶ The Roman people were becoming more and more fearful, and trade was being hindered.

⁴¹ Plutarch, *Pompey* 22

⁴² Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 70.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁴ Plutarch, *Pompey* 23

⁴⁵ Seager, *Pompey The Great*, 41.

⁴⁶ Plutarch, *Pompey* 25

The senate needed to find a solution, so the tribune Aulus Gabinius proposed giving an ex-consul full power over the Mediterranean and a large force to deal with its piracy problem. According to Cassius Dio, “He did not directly utter Pompey’s name, but it was easy to see that if once the populace should hear of any such proposition, they would choose him.”⁴⁷ Some optimates in the senate opposed the bill at first as they thought Pompey already had too much power, but their objections were lost in the cries of the people and Pompey was appointed. Pompey’s military achievements had once again propelled him forward. Even though Pompey complained about this position being another burden for him to bear, this was exactly what he wanted.⁴⁸

The speed at which Pompey dispatched the pirates is truly impressive: “Within three months the war was over.”⁴⁹ While this may still seem like a larger chunk of time, the senate had planned to allow Pompey to keep his command for three years.⁵⁰ He swept from west to east, laying waste to pirate ships and freeing up the strangled Roman trade routes. Pompey’s swift defeat of the pirates did present a new problem however; he again had no enemy to fight. Pompey had an unbelievable amount of power at his fingertips, but nobody to direct it at.

Luckily for Pompey, another proposal was put before the senate. This time, a tribune by the name of Gaius Manilius proposed that Pompey be given the command of the Third Mithridatic War against Mithridates of Pontus.⁵¹ As with the pirate proposal, this new motion was also met with opposition. Many of the optimates feared giving Pompey even more power. This time, Pompey’s ambitions were supported by the increasingly successful Cicero, who gave

⁴⁷ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 36.23.5

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.24.5

⁴⁹ Seager, *Pompey The Great*, 47.

⁵⁰ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 36.37.1

⁵¹ Plutarch, *Pompey* 30

a speech on his behalf, praising Pompey's deeds.⁵² Dio makes mention of Cicero's speech and how it urged the senate to approve this law, but he also points to another rising star for his contributions to Pompey's success: Julius Caesar. Just how much Caesar helped Pompey is hard to tell, but Dio points to Caesar's courting of the public as a way to persuade the senators. Pompey's appointment to command in the Third Mithridatic War occurred in large part due to the efforts of others and their rhetoric surrounding Pompey's achievements, rather than Pompey's own political abilities.

⁵² Cicero, *Pro Lege Man*

Chapter 2: Pompey in the East

Pompey was put in charge of the Third Mithridatic War near the end of the conflict (similar to when he was granted command against Sertorius). Roman legions had been fighting on the Anatolian peninsula for some time under the command of Lucius Licinius Lucullus. While Lucullus had been generally successful, he was never able to catch King Mithridates of Pontus and his ally King Tigranes II of Armenia (who were the main obstacles of Roman expansion in the region). This caused discontent amongst his own men, eventually leading to Pompey's appointment as the new commander over the area. Pompey was therefore selected to bring a decisive end to this war that had ravaged Rome's eastern holdings for so long.

Though war had been raging in Anatolia for some time, Pompey was not arriving to entirely beneficial circumstances, despite what the glory robbed Lucullus said. Mithridates had taken control over the Roman province of Pontus, and Tigranes was actively invading the region of Cappadocia.⁵³ Dio describes Mithridates army as "inferior" to Pompey's, but it was still sizeable.⁵⁴ Appian and Plutarch agree that Mithridates had amassed a force of 30,000 foot soldiers, but Appian differs from Plutarch in the category of cavalry; Plutarch says Mithridates had 2,000 while Appian claims he had 3,000.⁵⁵ Pompey still had a fight on his hands

The real difficulty that faced Pompey was the region itself. After years of war, the land had become scarce of provisions, according to Appian, which acted as a double edged sword for Mithridates.⁵⁶ Yes, Mithridates' men may be struggling to find food and water, but that would mean Pompey's army, which again was supposedly greater than Mithridates', would also suffer

⁵³ Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 105.

⁵⁴ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 36.47.1

⁵⁵ Appian, *Roman History* 12.15.97 and Plutarch, *Pompey* 32

⁵⁶ Appian, *Roman history* 12.15.97

significantly. Mithridates played exactly into this and allowed Pompey to advance, while he retreated back into less ravaged lands. He hoped that the lack of provisions would in some way deter or hinder the Roman general. Pompey here shows another one of his strengths that would help him later in his war against Caesar: resource management. A supplied army is a functional army, and Pompey knew this well. Pompey had had his fleet take control over the Black Sea.⁵⁷ This allowed him to more easily ship in supplies and establish supply lines.⁵⁸ Of course, the farther inland he went the longer his supply lines got, but Pompey quickly adapted: "... he was able to employ to his advantage a tactic he had learnt... from Sertorius in Spain... Pompey decided to follow the scorched trail of Mithridates no longer but to blaze one of his own into the most fertile lands of Lesser Armenia."⁵⁹ This had the added effect of forcing Mithridates to cease his flight from Pompey, and instead return to Armenia to defend it (since it was so rich in supplies). Pompey had taken a fairly negative situation and used it to his advantage.

Mithridates now set himself up near Pompey's camp on top of a hill. Pompey had fortified a position in open country for foraging, but Mithridates used this to his advantage and began raiding the Romans with his numerous cavalry. Realizing his unfavorable position, Pompey moved his own camp near a wooded area, effectively neutralizing Mithridates' cavalry.⁶⁰ Thus, a stand still in the conflict began, with neither parties wanting to engage the other.

Pompey did not want to fight uphill, and Mithridates opposed fighting a pitched battle against Pompey's overall larger force. However, Mithridates found himself in an unfavorable position supply wise, and was beginning to scrape the bottom of the barrel. Realizing that he could not

⁵⁷ Plutarch, *Pompey* 32

⁵⁸ Appian, *Roman History* 12.15.99

⁵⁹ Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 109.

⁶⁰ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 36.47.3

maintain his position for long, Mithridates managed to slip away in the darkness of night, forcing the surprised Pompey to continue his pursuit of him.

It is difficult to say exactly what happened next, as Appian, Plutarch, and Dio all claim something different. It is known for sure that Pompey pursued Mithridates and engaged him, but how exactly is what is contested. All three accounts have the same outcome, but the tactics and the battle leading to that outcome are different depending on which ancient historian tells it, and which historian is to be believed has been debated by historians.⁶¹ I have chosen to disregard Appian's own telling of the events, seeing how this is a study of Pompey and Appian makes little mention of Pompey's actual involvement in the battle (and the fact that his version is the most different of the three). Plutarch gives an account that directly relates to the thesis of this paper, but is plagued by Plutarch's tendency to dramatize events. Dio gives the most detailed account, but it has some impracticalities (such as Pompey ordering his men charge even though they should have been exhausted from marching).⁶² Instead of picking one account over the other, I have decided to discuss how they are similar and how this relates to Pompey himself.

Both Dio and Plutarch claim that Pompey assaulted Mithridates at night (and this is what sets Appian apart as he claims the battle occurred during the day). The reason I am so hesitant to disregard Plutarch's account is because of how he claims Pompey came to the decision of a night assault. Plutarch says, "But when Pompey noticed their preparations, he hesitated to risk battle in the dark, and thought it necessary only to surround them... Pompey's oldest officers, however, by entreating and encouraging him, persuaded him to attack at once; for it was not completely dark, for the moon... still gave enough light to discern advantage. For the Romans were

⁶¹ Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 112.

⁶² *Ibid.*

attacking with the moon at their backs...”⁶³ Here we see a Pompey very different from the brash general who fought against Sertorius years before. He’s cautious, wants to take his time, and surround/strangle his enemy until an opportunity presents itself. Even more importantly, Pompey allows his own decision to be overruled by those around him. Plutarch does not mention whether Pompey disliked his officers’ plan, but the similarities to the events that unfurled during the Civil War cannot be ignored. Pompey gives in to those around him, despite his own gut feeling. He is showing the extreme caution that would characterize his approach to the Civil War years later.

While Plutarch does tend to employ narrative dramatization, Dio’s account also makes mention of Pompey’s decision to attack at night that indicates some level of unwillingness to do so. Dio says: “Then, knowing that they were about to escape, he was compelled to fight by night.”⁶⁴ Given Plutarch’s telling of the events, it is tempting to think that Pompey was compelled by his officers, but it is also equally likely that Dio means Pompey was urged on by the situation. Whatever the case, both Plutarch and Dio agree that Pompey’s forces attacked Mithridates’ at night with the moon on their backs, taking their enemy by surprise and winning a decisive victory, killing around 10,000 of Mithridates’ troops.⁶⁵ Mithridates was able to escape once again with 3,000-4,000 troops following him, meaning the chase was still on.⁶⁶

Mithridates continued his flight into Armenia, hoping to find refuge with his ally Tigranes II. Unfortunately for the king of Pontus, Tigranes turned him away, most likely because of the internal conflicts occurring in his kingdom. Tigranes’ son, Tigranes III, had rebelled against his father, and if Dio is to be believed, Tigranes suspected that Mithridates had been

⁶³ Plutarch, *Pompey* 32

⁶⁴ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 36.48.3

⁶⁵ Plutarch, *Pompey* 32

⁶⁶ Appian, *Roman History* 12.15.101

giving his rebellious son support.⁶⁷ Additionally, Tigranes may have believed that Mithridates' war against Pompey was a lost cause, especially considering his recent devastating defeat at the hands of the Roman general.⁶⁸ All of this led to Tigranes' refusal to help the king of Pontus, and things surely looked bleak for Mithridates. Luckily for him, he still had holdings in Crimea, and although Pompey controlled the sea, he could still make the lengthy journey north by land.⁶⁹ This is the course of action that he decided to take, and while Pompey pursued him initially, he eventually gave up to continue his conquest and stabilization of the region.

The tumultuous relationship between Tigranes and his son could not have been better for Pompey. King Phraates of Parthia, Pompey's ally, had been laying siege to the elder Tigranes alongside Tigranes III, but gave up after numerous failed attempts to take the King of Armenia's stronghold.⁷⁰ Without Phraates' help, the younger Tigranes was left alone and desperately seeking a new ally, in which he found Pompey. By allying himself with the rebellious Tigranes III, Pompey was able to frighten the elder Tigranes into peace talks. Tigranes feared the power of Pompey the Great, and did not wish to shed blood against a foe he was sure to lose to. Velleius relates to us, somewhat dramatically, that, "... Tigranes declared that there was no man other than Pompey... to whose authority he would have committed himself..."⁷¹ Tigranes II had once been one of, if not the strongest, king in the region, but now he had become Pompey's suppliant. Pompey's military strength and reputation truly carried him far.

Pompey gave his terms to king Tigranes as thus: "...the rest of his losses were attributable to Lucullus, who had dispossessed him of Syria, Phoenicia, Cilicia, Galatia, and Sophene; but all

⁶⁷ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 36.50.1

⁶⁸ Seager, *Pompey The Great*, 55.

⁶⁹ Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 114.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 116

⁷¹ Velleius Paterculus, *Roman History* 2.37.4

that he had preserved until that time he should keep...”⁷² Additionally, Tigranes had to pay a sum of money to the Romans as reparation and make his son king of Sophene (today eastern Turkey). King Tigranes accepted Pompey’s terms, and Rome’s borders were made official. Pompey had so far been extremely successful stabilizing the region and establishing Roman hegemony.

There was still plenty of work to do, however. Mithridates was still out there trying to rebuild his forces, and there were still those hostile to Rome either out of anxiety over Rome’s renewed presence in the region. One such person was Oroeses, king of the Albanians. Oroeses was (rightfully) fearful that the Romans were going to invade his country, and thought a preemptive strike was necessary.⁷³ In the winter months of the year 66 B.C.E., Pompey had split up his army into three groups, each in their own encampments waiting out the winter. Oroeses thought that this would be the perfect time to attack, as Pompey’s forces were split up and unprepared for an assault. Oroeses split up his own army (which Plutarch claims was 40,000 strong) and attacked all three camps simultaneously, hoping to prevent the Romans from coming to each other’s assistance.⁷⁴ Unfortunately for Oroeses, all three of his separate assaults failed. Pompey’s officers were able to skillfully repel the attacking Albanians, while Pompey, having learned of the attack, sauntered out of his own camp and surprised the regiment designated to attack him.⁷⁵ With his assault having failed, Oroeses capitulated to Pompey, and the two signed a

⁷² Plutarch, *Pompey* 33

⁷³ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 36.54.1

⁷⁴ Plutarch, *Pompey* 34

⁷⁵ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 36.54.4

peace treaty for the time being. Another hostile eastern kingdom had been defeated thanks to Pompey's skills as a general.

Pompey's next enemy was the Iberians in modern day central Georgia, west of where Pompey had fought the Albanians. Like Oroeses, King Atroces of the Iberians feared Pompey, and believed that he was next on Pompey's list of conquests.⁷⁶ Thus, he began to prepare his own forces to preemptively strike Pompey before he could reorganize after resting in his winter quarters, and sent envoys to the Roman general under the pretense of peace to delay him further. Pompey recognized this trick, and in turn invaded the Iberians, making Atroces the one that was unprepared. Hearing of Pompey's advance, Atroces quickly began to flee with his army, as Pompey fought his way through Iberian territory after him. Eventually, Pompey caught up to the Iberian king at the Pelorus river (showing the speed at which he was able to move his army), and was able to bring a swift defeat to Atroces' troops by rushing the king's bowmen before he could make use of them.⁷⁷ Atroces' capitulation came soon after this defeat, and another of Rome's enemies had been defeated by the Roman Alexander.

Pompey now marched west and invaded Colchis, intending to follow the path of Mithridates, who Pompey still needed to capture/kill to complete his task set for him by the senate.⁷⁸ However, looking over his options, Pompey decided against marching up towards Crimea. There were quite a few reasons that explain Pompey's decision. The terrain itself was rather mountainous and was inhabited by numerous hostile tribes. Travelling by sea also posed its own risks, as there were few harbors in the region.⁷⁹ Making the trek there would put his men

⁷⁶ Ibid., 37.1.2

⁷⁷ Ibid., 37.6.3

⁷⁸ Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 124.

⁷⁹ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 37.3.2

at risk for a problem that had a much easier solution. Pompey still had control over the sea, and the Crimean peninsula could be easily blockaded, trapping Mithridates where he was. This was choice that Pompey inevitably made, saving both time and effort. Pompey no longer charged blindly ahead like he did against Sertorius in their first encounters. He now approached the risks presented to him with caution, and weighed whether or not the risk was worth the reward.

To further encourage Pompey to turn back and give up his pursuit of Mithridates, the Albanians had broken the truce they had just recently signed and were now in open revolt.⁸⁰ Pompey now had to return to the Albanians' territory to once more secure Rome's hegemony in the region. He decided to go south into Lesser Armenia and loop back around into Albania. Plutarch claims that when Pompey reached the Cyrnus river, he encountered palisades placed along the riverbank, though Dio makes no mention of this and instead says Pompey met no resistance.⁸¹ Pompey continued his march into Armenia and crossed the Abas river, where he learned that the Oroeses was approaching. Pompey needed to find a way to bait Oroeses for, as had been the case so far, upon seeing the size of Pompey's army Oroeses would be sure to flee. Thus, he came up with the following, rather clever, solution: "Accordingly, he marshalled his cavalry in front... and he kept the rest behind them in a kneeling position and covered with their shields... so that Oroeses should not ascertain their presence until he came to close quarters."⁸² The plan worked perfectly, and Albania once again had to sign a truce with Pompey.

Pompey's success in the region did not go unnoticed; it was clear to see that the Roman was a general beyond approach and whose ire should be avoided at all costs. Thus, the king of Parthia, Phraates, sent envoys to Pompey, hoping to renew their alliance and secure his

⁸⁰ Plutarch, *Pompey* 35

⁸¹ Plutarch, *Pompey* 35 and Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 37.3.5

⁸² Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 37.4.2

kingdoms safety. Instead, Pompey demanded the return the of the Gordyene territory (which lies north-east of Syria), and sent one of his officers to take it through force. On this, Dio gives an interesting look at Pompey's character: "This was the treatment which Pompey in the fullness of his power accorded to Phraates, thereby indicating very clearly to those desiring to indulge their greed that everything depends on armed force, and that he who is victorious by its aid will inevitably the right to lay down whatever laws he pleases."⁸³ This quote can be used to describe how Pompey approached diplomatic and political situations. He relied on his reputation and success as a general, and when that did not work, the presence of his army or his other supporters/allies usually helped him get the job done. Phraates was no different, as Pompey commanded respect from someone that he believed he no longer needed (seeing as how his enemies had mostly been subdued). Pompey was effective at this type of power politics, it was just when he did not have the power of his army backing him that he floundered.

Pompey's next campaign was the conquest of Syria. While Mithridates was still technically on the loose, Pompey established a type of courier system to quickly send information if Mithridates showed any sign of leaving his position in Crimea. Pompey's reasoning for conquering Syria is contested, but it is fair to say that it was a mixture of "desire and zeal" and to reestablish stability in the area (for Syria had recently gotten rid of its kings and were experiencing a form of power vacuum).⁸⁴ From Syria, he also went to Judea to settle the war occurring there and establish a Roman presence in the region. The real reason that Pompey's conquest of Syria and Judea is so important is because of what Mithridates was doing at this time. With Pompey so far off, Mithridates began to make plans to leave Crimea and make a

⁸³ Ibid., 37.6.1

⁸⁴ Ibid., 37.7a.1

move against the Romans.⁸⁵ Unfortunately for him, in his time away from Pontus he had neglected his relationships with those closest to him, most notably his son Pharnaces. Pharnaces rebelled against his father, and while what actually happened is up for debate, we do know that Mithridates died, either by his son's hand or his own.⁸⁶

With the death of Mithridates came the end of Pompey's conquests. Pompey had added a significant portion of land to Rome's eastern frontier, installed friendly leaders in neighboring kingdoms, and deterred anyone else through force from disrupting the peace he had created in the region. With no further need of military conquest, Pompey set about governing the region and making sure that his feats would not be undone so quickly. As Greenhalgh explains:

“...Pompey's organization of the East was no mere tying-up of loose ends from a patchwork of military adventures designed for self-glorification at the expense of the achievements of other generals whom he superseded. It was the culmination of a carefully planned and coherent exercise in empire-building which not only acquired the three new provinces of Pontus, Cilicia and Syria but also stabilized Rome's interests through the far greater area which had fallen under the sway of Kings Mithridates and Tigranes at the height of their powers.”⁸⁷

Pompey was ensuring that the glory that he had earned would not be forgotten. If the region broke down shortly after Pompey's departure, the East would no longer be the monument to Pompey's achievements like he wanted it to be. For Pompey thrived on his military successes to fuel his life in Rome, for it had been his success as a general that had gotten him to where he was.

Pompey now returned home in the year 62 B.C.E. to receive his third triumph. By the end of his time in the East, Pompey's accomplishments were staggering. He had helped Sulla to defeat the Marians in Italy and Africa. He had been to both the western and eastern edges of

⁸⁵ Ibid., 37.11.1

⁸⁶ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 37.13.1 and Plutarch, *Pompey* 41

⁸⁷ Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 150.

Rome, pushing its borders even farther and subduing its enemies. He had even cleansed the Mediterranean of its pirate problem, allowing for greater access to trade for the Romans and making it safe once again to be near the sea. Pompey's name was known throughout Rome, and was both respected and feared by his colleagues. Indeed, anyone with that kind of track record and public support would be a danger to the carefully constructed oligarchy that the optimates had created. Unfortunately for Pompey, he no longer had the luxury of living the high life as his weaknesses as a politician truly began to come to light. Plutarch says it best, "And how well it would have been for him had he ended his life at that point, while he still enjoyed the good fortune of Alexander! For the years that followed brought him only successes that excited envy, or failures too great to be remedied."⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Plutarch, *Pompey* 46

Chapter 3: The (not so) Triumphant Retirement

Pompey came back to a very anxious Rome. While Pompey's achievements were truly worth celebrating, his return to Italy was marred by the precedent set by recent previous Roman generals, namely Sulla. Many feared that Pompey would return with his army and seize control of Rome, and the fear was not completely unfounded. The powers that had been granted to him to fight the pirates and later Mithridates were enormous, and whether Pompey would willingly give those up was unknown. Pompey surprised all however when he disbanded his army immediately after landing in Italy. Dio gives Pompey's decision high praise, calling it "...a deed forever worthy of admiration".⁸⁹ While his decision was certainly admirable, it is also important to note that Pompey was throwing away one of, if not his greatest asset. Pompey was most successful getting people to do what he wanted when he had an army at his back. Now it was just Pompey, and he needed to rely on his own merits, or that of his allies, to get what he desired.

Once back in Rome, Pompey set about achieving three things: "... a triumph, a grant of land for his veteran troops, and the ratification of his arrangements in the East."⁹⁰ Before he could achieve this, he found a senate embroiled in somewhat petty controversy and unwilling to give Pompey's requests the attention he believed they deserved. If Cicero is to be believed, Pompey's first public speech after his return to Rome was a complete failure. Cicero claims that Pompey failed to please anybody in his speech. He also reports that Pompey seemed agitated

⁸⁹ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 37.20.3

⁹⁰ Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 188.

when Crassus stole his moment during a senate meeting.⁹¹ Both of these events, if not embellished, show a Pompey already off to a rough start and struggling to adapt to a world in which he is not in complete control.

Pompey quickly realized that, to get what he wanted, he needed to get men loyal to him elected consuls. He chose Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer and Lucius Afranius, who both ended up winning the election after Pompey threw all his weight behind them (especially Afranius).⁹² Pompey was able to celebrate his triumph, and now set about accomplishing his other two requests. However, he met fierce opposition from the optimates, who stopped him at every turn, and Pompey quickly learned he had backed the wrong people for consul. Metellus ended up betraying Pompey (which Pompey should have seen coming as Pompey had divorced his sister), and joined with the optimates to oppose him.⁹³ Afranius, while a loyal soldier, turned out to be an awful politician and unable to help Pompey.⁹⁴ While Pompey did not have complete control over the decisions and abilities of his picks for consul, he should have at least thought about the potential ramifications of his divorce or the limitations of Afranius.

The optimates in the senate postponed the vote to ratify Pompey's arrangements in the East, deciding that they needed further investigation before being voted on.⁹⁵ Furthermore, they shot down Pompey's land proposal, arguing fiercely against it. With so much hostility against him, Pompey needed someone in his court. This came in the form of a tribune by the name of Lucius Flavius, but he too would prove to be a poor choice. During a heated exchange over one

⁹¹ Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 1.14

⁹² Seager, *Pompey The Great*, 79.

⁹³ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 37.50.5 and Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 194.

⁹⁴ Seager, *Pompey The Great*, 81.

⁹⁵ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 37.49.5

of Pompey's proposals, Flavius had Metellus arrested.⁹⁶ This could not have been worse for Pompey. He had disbanded his army so as to dispel fears that he would take Rome by force, and now his own supporter had imprisoned one of his opponents. Pompey called Flavius off, and tried to convince everyone that he had done so at Metellus' request, but this too failed miserably and nobody believed him.

Pompey had been faced with failure after failure since returning to Rome. It does not seem unlikely that by this point, Pompey must have been feeling some type of nostalgia for his time as a general. Then, his greatest tool was his army, an always reliable way of getting people to do what he wanted, especially when he was leading it. Now, Pompey seemed to be continuously floundering. From failed speeches to horrible choices in political allies, all of Pompey's plans were falling through. Thus, it is no surprise that Dio reports that Pompey, in exclamation towards his enemies, "...declared that they were jealous of him and that he would make this clear to the plebs. Fearing, however, that he might fail of their support also... he abandoned his demands."⁹⁷ His return home, upon closer inspection, was less than a triumphant one.

Pompey was eventually able to return to his demands and get them approved, but this came after his joining of the First Triumvirate with Caesar and Crassus. There is some disagreement amongst more modern historians about who actually put the alliance into motion. I decide to follow the sequence of events as presented by historians like Philip Freeman, that believe Caesar was the one who orchestrated it. Upon reviewing Pompey's political floundering, it is hard to believe that he would be able to create an alliance of such magnitude. It supposes

⁹⁶ Ibid., 37.50.2

⁹⁷ Ibid., 37.50.5

that Pompey and Crassus were both able to put their rivalry aside without Caesar's intervention. Furthermore, we then must believe that Pompey and Crassus had kept their alliance a secret for some time, until officially announcing it with Caesar, and that the accounts by ancient historians like Plutarch and Dio are wrong.⁹⁸ While there is some plausibility to the claim that Pompey formed the alliance himself, it seems unlikely. It seems much more probable that Caesar put everything together (especially considering his own skills as an orator), and that his proposal truly saved Pompey's political aspirations. Pompey was able to accomplish what he wanted, but only after Caesar stepped into the picture to help.

Pompey did not just fail on the senate floor, he also failed when trying to court the public. In a letter from Cicero, we learn of a gladiatorial event hosted by Pompey (most likely in attempt to win favor with the people). He describes the event as being rather mundane, with nothing new or exciting of mention. That is until the final day of the event, in which Pompey brought out elephants to fight. If Pompey hoped to impress the crowd with the exotic animals, he was sorely mistaken as it had the complete opposite effect. Cicero reports that there was no enjoyment in the crowd, and many felt some level of compassion towards the creatures as they watched the games unfurl.⁹⁹ It echoes the first speech he gave after returning to Rome, as he once again failed to create a buzz around him.

Pompey's return to Rome and Roman politics was plagued with failure. He consistently showed his inability to read a crowd and drum up support for his causes. Pompey was not completely inept at giving speeches though. He gave quite a popular speech at a popular assembly in support of a land bill proposed by Caesar. However, it would seem as though

⁹⁸ Greenhalgh, *Pompey The Roman*, 199.

⁹⁹ Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 7.1

Pompey was being used as a tool for advancement by Caesar, and the excitement in the crowd can easily be attributed to Caesar's own speech beforehand.¹⁰⁰ While a great military leader, Pompey found himself struggling to survive in Rome without his army. His military achievements carried him far, but they meant nothing to the optimates that now stood against him.

Pompey continued to support Caesar for years to come, until things began to break down as the Civil War approached. There are a myriad reasons why: Pompey's wife/Caesar's daughter died, the death of Crassus, and Pompey's jealousy over Caesar's success in Gaul. With this stake driven between the two, the optimates stepped in to sink their claws into the Roman Alexander, now using him as their own instrument like Caesar had done for years. Pompey proved himself to be an extremely capable general, on par with Caesar. But the difference between the two in terms of political ability becomes apparent when we look at Caesar's life as a whole.

¹⁰⁰ Philip Freeman, *Julius Caesar* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 97.

Part 2

Chapter 4: The Formation of an Upstart

¹⁰¹The biographies written by Suetonius and Plutarch on Caesar are both damaged in the beginning, leaving us with his birthdate and around 16 years missing. Therefore, whatever may have happened during those 16 years must be extrapolated based on the information we have on Caesar and Roman life. Since Caesar was born into a patrician family (like Pompey), he most likely became familiar early on with political life. Caesar's father experienced moderate success as a politician, and as Roman tradition would dictate, Caesar would most likely have started accompanying his father, also named Julius, at a very early age to become acquainted with the politics of Rome.¹⁰² However, while his family may have technically been a part of the aristocracy and participated in politics, Caesar's class origins did not reflect this. Caesar's family lived in the Subura neighborhood of Rome, which, "...was a lower-class neighborhood in a small valley known for tradesmen, prostitutes, and foreign residents."¹⁰³ Growing up, Caesar would have had a lot of contact with the plebeian population of Rome, which may have played a very large factor later on in his political leanings.

¹⁰¹ I use the following translations for the ancient sources in this part: Suetonius' *The Lives of the Caesars*- J. C. Rolfe, Plutarch's *Caesar*- Christopher Pelling, Tacitus' *A Dialogue on Oratory*- Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb, Cassius Dio's *Roman History*- Earnest Cary, Polybius' *The Histories*- W.R. Paton, Caesar's *Gallic War*- Kurt A. Raaflaub

¹⁰² Adrian Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life of a Colossus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 38.

¹⁰³ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 18.

It can be assumed that Caesar grew up with a sense of self importance and high ambitions. Being born into a patrician family already put him above the majority of Roman citizens (even if he did live among them), and accompanying his father would have given him some level of pride as he would have been among the nation's elite. Furthermore, Caesar's position in his family would have contributed to his feelings of enhanced self worth as well. Amongst his siblings, Caesar was the only son, thus he would be expected to take over as the *paterfamilias* (the head of the household) after his father passed.¹⁰⁴ From a very early age, Caesar would have been aware of the fact that he was to become a leader in not only his household but also his country.

While Caesar would have spent more time with his father as he matured, the role of his mother cannot be overlooked in shaping the young Caesar into an ambitious upstart. While the Julian family had fallen on hard times, members of the family had been able to marry powerful figures, and such was the case with Caesar's father. The senior Caesar married a woman by the name of Aurelia who came from the Cotta family (a noble plebeian line).¹⁰⁵ "Aurelia was cultured, highly intelligent, and absolutely devoted to the welfare and career of her son."¹⁰⁶ Aurelia would clearly play an important role in Caesar's upbringing, and is even mentioned by Tacitus as being a prime example of motherhood.¹⁰⁷ Caesar very clearly was set up from the start as an upstart. His lineage allowed him to enter into the upper echelons of Roman politics, while his mother's background as well as the location of his childhood home made sure that he was in constant contact with the plebeian majority.

¹⁰⁴ Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life*, 38.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 33

¹⁰⁶ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 14.

¹⁰⁷ Tacitus, *A Dialogue on Oratory* 28

The first major event in Caesar's life was the defeat of the populares movement led by Cinna and Marius by Sulla. The Julii had been able to secure some powerful marriages to try and help elevate themselves from their impoverished situation. Of these two marriages (the other being Caesar's father and mother), the marriage of Caesar's aunt Julia to Marius was the more important for the family as a whole. Marius was a powerful and influential general and marrying him would bring notoriety to Caesar's family. Of course, Marius' success did not help him in the end as Sulla and the optimates defeated his populares movement.

When Sulla controlled Rome, he set upon eliminating any who had supported or had connection with Marius and the movement. Due to Caesar's familial relationship with Marius, this now made him a potential target for the new dictator of Rome. Oddly enough however, Sulla's first action against Caesar was not to have him killed. He first attempted to "entice or intimidate" Caesar into divorcing his wife Cornelia (the daughter of Marius' co-conspirator Cinna).¹⁰⁸ Even stranger was Caesar's decision to reject Sulla's demands. Caesar had not been the first that Sulla had ordered to cut marriage relations; as mentioned earlier Pompey too, had been asked to divorce his wife (to which he had quickly complied). Caesar's decision to stay with Cornelia is characteristic of him as it shows his unwillingness to back down, especially to an optimate such as Sulla. After this, Sulla wanted Caesar dead, to which many in Sulla's own party found puzzling, and argued against such an action.¹⁰⁹

Both Plutarch and Suetonius cite Sulla in a fairly prophetic way, though Suetonius' writings are much more foreshadowing than Plutarch's: "Have your way and take him; only bear

¹⁰⁸ Plutarch, *Caesar* 1.1

¹⁰⁹ Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars* 1.1.3

in mind that the man you are so eager to save will one day deal the death blow to the cause of the aristocracy, which you have joined with me in upholding; for in this Caesar there is more than one Marius,”¹¹⁰ While this may have simply been a myth, it is possible that Sulla did indeed see the potential that was within the young patrician.¹¹¹ Caesar would go into hiding until Sulla was convinced to let Caesar live, after which Caesar decided to join the military at the age of 19 and served his first campaign in Asia.¹¹² Caesar’s enlistment was probably an attempt to put as much distance between himself and Sulla as possible, meaning that Sulla was responsible for the beginning of Caesar’s military career. Even early on his life, Caesar was showing his stubbornness and unwillingness to bend to his enemies.

After these events, Caesar began his climb up the Path of Honors (essentially the ladder of Roman politics), at the top of which lied the coveted position of consul. During this time, Caesar would prove himself as an orator such as when he prosecuted the ex-consul Cornelius Dolabella.¹¹³ It is unknown what exactly Caesar did on the first step of the Path of Honors (the position of military tribune). It is theorised however (by historians such as Philip Freeman) that he served under Marcus Crassus against the slave revolt led by Spartacus, which would explain why Caesar became such a staunch supporter of his future co-member of the Triumvirate.¹¹⁴ During his time as Quaestor (the second step on the Path of Honors), Caesar was sent to Farther Spain. On his way back from Spain, Caesar established friendships with many Romans in the north of Italy. “This move would again pay enormous dividends in the following decade,” says Philip Freeman, “when he recruited thousands of soldiers from this region for his war in Gaul

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life*, 59.

¹¹² Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars* 1.2.1

¹¹³ Plutarch, *Caesar* 4.1

¹¹⁴ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 49.

and his subsequent revolution.”¹¹⁵ Continuing with his populist approach, as Aedile Caesar decorated a plethora of buildings and held gladiatorial events and plays. The result being that Caesar won the admiration of the masses in Rome.¹¹⁶ On the final step before consul, Caesar spent his time by attacking the optimates in the senate and firmly stomping out any who tried to connect himself to Catiline’s conspiracy (scaring away any who might try and oppose him in the process).¹¹⁷ Caesar’s time spent advancing along the Path of Honors may not have afforded him much military experience, but it was still essential foundation for his later years. He proved himself to be a firm *populare* and a politician capable of achieving what he set out to do.

After Caesar’s term as praetor, he returned to Spain, this time as the governor of the province. Cassius Dio tells of a Caesar aspiring for glory and reaching for a place among the great generals of Rome.¹¹⁸ Upon arriving, Caesar raised another legion to add to the two he already had waiting for him.¹¹⁹ First, he set upon the Lusitani by ordering them to vacate their homes, and, knowing they would refuse, allowed him the opportunity to subjugate them. He marched to war against the Lusitani and met them on the battlefield. The Lusitani sent their herds before their troops, expecting Caesar’s men to give chase to the animals and give them the opportunity to attack the occupied Romans.¹²⁰ However, Caesar was not like the Roman generals the Lusitani had encountered and defeated before. Caesar paid little attention to the animals and pressed his men onwards, dispatching of the Lusitani army and forcing them into a retreat.¹²¹ Caesar shows

¹¹⁵ Ibid.,55

¹¹⁶ Suetonius,*The Lives of the Caesars* 1.11.1

¹¹⁷ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 83

¹¹⁸ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 37.52.1

¹¹⁹ Plutarch, *Caesar* 12.1 and Pelling, *Plutarch Caesar*, 184.

¹²⁰ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 37.52.5

¹²¹ Ibid., 37.55.1

great control in this engagement, exemplifying his ability to lead and coordinate his men, as they easily could have broke rank and given chase to the Lusitani's herd. Caesar chased the Lusitani to an island off the Atlantic Coast of Iberia. After one failed attempt to take the island, Caesar had a fleet prepared and took the island from the malnourished Lusitani.¹²² Caesar then took this newly formed navy and conquered the Callaici (who lived in the northwest corner of Spain). By accomplishing this, Caesar had conquered a fairly large swath of territory for Rome. He had come to Spain in hopes of finding glory and he had achieved that, surprising his enemies with unexpected tactics. Caesar next set his eyes towards Rome and taking the final step on the Path of Honors.

Caesar quickly returned to Rome, ready to receive a triumph and run for his first consulship. However, Caesar quickly faced a difficult choice brought upon by the fickleness of Roman law and a clever opponent in the senate. To run for consul, Caesar would have to enter Rome as a private citizen, and he could not do this if he received his triumph (as he would be entering as a general).¹²³ While he petitioned the senate to allow him to run even though he was absent from the city, Cato (an optimate and critic of Caesar) was able to filibuster the vote on Caesar's proposition.¹²⁴ While this was surely frustrating for Caesar, it would not have been the end of the world. Consuls only served one year, after which Caesar would be able to run for the office. This seemed like the clear choice, as a triumph would have surely brought Caesar plenty of personal glory and prestige. However, as was common with Caesar, he did not make the obvious choice. He instead decided to forego his triumph and run for the consulship. While Dio does say that Caesar forfeited the triumph expecting more to come his way in the future, his

¹²² Ibid., 37.53.4

¹²³ Plutarch, *Caesar* 13.1

¹²⁴ Ibid., 13.2

decision to run for consul shows his conviction and unwillingness to give into his political opponents as well as his tendency to take the least expected course of action.

Caesar was able to secure the consulship by patching up relations and forming an alliance with two of Rome's most powerful men: Marcus Crassus and Pompey. The three had agreed, according to Suetonius, that, "...no step should be taken in public affairs which did not suit any one of the three."¹²⁵ Thus the First Triumvirate was born, and it ensured that, as long as the three agreed, they could do just about anything they set their minds to. The gravity of this alliance was not lost on everyone in the senate. Cato was very critical of the Triumvirate, with Plutarch writing, "Cato often gave dark prophecies of what would come, and at the time all he won was a reputation as an ungenerous troublemaker; it was only later that people applauded him for his sagacious and ill-starred advice."¹²⁶ While the optimates did attempt to block Caesar's power grab by backing the senator Marcus Bibulus (a fierce opponent of Caesar) in his bid for consulship, this plan soon backfired in epic proportions.

Caesar's first action as consul was to propose a new agrarian law, which Bibulus shouted objection to. On the day of the vote, the forum was filled with Caesar's supporters. While Bibulus tried to push his way through and stand against Caesar, he was thrown to the ground, had his fasces broken, and his followers attacked.¹²⁷ Bibulus managed to escape, but his pride had taken a powerful hit. During the rest of Caesar's consulship, Bibulus would remain in his home and do little to stop his fellow consul. So little was Bibulus seen, that many documents during this time were sealed saying, "Done in the consulship of Julius and Caesar," rather than,

¹²⁵ Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars* 1.19.2

¹²⁶ Plutarch, *Caesar* 13.6

¹²⁷ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 38.6.3

“Bibulus and Caesar” as it should have been.¹²⁸ Caesar knew how to win over a crowd and to get what he wanted done. His treatment of Bibulus shows that Caesar was not afraid to step on anyone’s toes.

Over the course of his consulship, Caesar would pass many laws that angered the optimates. Thus, as the end of his consulship neared, he began to worry about potential prosecution brought on by his rivals in the senate. With the help of his powerful allies, Caesar was able to secure a proconsular governorship over the provinces of Cisalpine and Transalpine Gaul.¹²⁹ This could not have been a better opportunity for Caesar, as Gaul had largely been untouched by any Roman generals in recent times (with most of the more recent wars being focused in the east). As Pompey had conquered the east, Caesar was to conquer the west.

Caesar’s sights were now set towards Gaul. Plutarch remarks that this was “a new start” and “a new path of achievement” for Caesar.¹³⁰ He finally had the chance to truly achieve something great. Before him lied the Gauls, ancient enemies of Rome. In his early career, he proved himself to be a more than capable politician, and even a competent general. Now, he could really show what he was capable of. His achievements in Gaul would impress (and sometimes anger) many back in Rome, including his ally and friend, Pompey.

¹²⁸ Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars* 1.20.2

¹²⁹ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 109.

¹³⁰ Plutarch, *Caesar* 15.2

Chapter 5: Caesar in the West

Before beginning with Caesar's campaign in Gaul, it is important to acknowledge where our information is coming from. Caesar was, like all Roman generals, expected to send reports back to the senate on his travels and conquests. However, after Caesar had concluded his wars in Gaul, he published these reports as a single book (what we know as the Gallic Wars), allowing the average Roman citizen to read of Caesar's escapades.¹³¹ Caesar's intentions now seem clear: this was a propaganda piece that was meant to capture the minds of the public. The work itself does not meet the standards of what constitutes history (whether it be now or even in his own time); Caesar wanted to write something that could be understood by all, not something meant for academia.¹³² This does not mean that the source is fictional in its entirety; much of what he said has been verified through physical evidence.¹³³ However, it is important to note that when Caesar is writing, he is making himself out to be the hero, as this was meant as a way to excite and win over the Roman people. His writing is still an excellent source and gives a look into the mind of Rome's future conqueror, but the fact stands that Caesar was writing to entice the Roman people to his side.

Caesar's conquest into Gaul was fueled by the Romans' fear that the German peoples would expand into the Gallic region and gain strength. The instability of Gaul and its many tribes gave Caesar the perfect excuse to invade in the name of protecting Roman interests from a

¹³¹ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 232.

¹³² "Web Essay DD: Caesar the Historian," in *The Landmark Julius Caesar: Web Essays*, by Christopher B. Krebs, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub and Robert B. Strassler (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2017), 210, excerpt from *The Landmark Julius Caesar: Web Essays*, PDF.

¹³³ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 193

potential German invasion. In his own writings, Caesar shows a type of reverence for the strength and the threat the Germans posed. When describing the Helvetii (one of the Gallic peoples), Caesar says that they are one of the bravest of the Gauls due to their proximity to the Germans and having to deal with “daily battles”.¹³⁴ Not only was Gaul the perfect avenue to prove his military worth and gain power, but Caesar would be able to do so under the guise of protecting Rome from a larger threat. The senate of course would not want Caesar to gain power in any form, so by using this excuse he was able to keep his political opponents’ hands tied back at home.

Caesar’s praise of the Helvetii’s bravery can be interpreted as more than just a testament to the ferocity of the Germans. By describing the Helvetii as such a brave and strong people, he is making his victory over them all the more impressive, as the first military engagement between Caesar and the Gauls was against the Helvetii themselves. While their near constant contact with the Germans may have made them formidable enemies to Caesar, they desired a better place in which to live. As Caesar describes, the Helvetii at this time were hampered by natural barriers (the Jura Mountains and the Rhone River) and the Germans across the Rhine which gave them little breathing room.¹³⁵ At this time, people among the Helvetii began to discuss the possibility of migrating west, further into Gaul. One such person was Orgetorix, a Helvetii nobleman who managed to convince the Helvetii to prepare for their trip west by using his influence and prestige.¹³⁶ While he may have not lived to see the migration he so desperately wanted, the idea did not die with him. Orgetorix had fueled the creation of Caesar first enemy.

¹³⁴ Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.1.4

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.2.3

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.2.1

In order for the Helvetii to go west, they had two options at their disposal. They could take the route that went between the Rhone River and the Jura mountains (a part of the Alps), or they could travel through the Roman province of Ulterior Gaul.¹³⁷ The former, as Caesar explains, was less ideal for the Helvetii to take: “... an extremely high mountain range looms above it, so that a tiny force could easily prevent their advance.”¹³⁸ Faced with this, the Helvetii decided to take the route through Roman territory, thus leading to the first engagement between Caesar and the Helvetii.

Caesar would not allow for an entire foreign tribe to wander through Roman territory. The problem however was this: there was only one legion in the province of Ulterior Gaul. In order to level the numbers between him and his enemy, Caesar imposed a levy on the province.¹³⁹ A Roman legion from this period contained around 4,000 to 5,000 troops.¹⁴⁰ Caesar does not include the amount of men that he was able to gather from the levy, but whatever that number may have been seems to pale in comparison to what the Helvetii had. Caesar is quoted as saying there were 368,000 migrants, and Plutarch places the number of active combatants at 190,000.¹⁴¹ Of course, this seems to be an unreasonable amount, and it was often the case that Roman generals would exaggerate the number of enemies killed in battle.¹⁴² However, it is safe to assume that Caesar was most likely outnumbered as this was still an entire tribe migration, especially in instances like river crossings where individual groups would be forced into tighter quarters.¹⁴³ Thus, Caesar decided to go on the defensive: “...he employed the legion he had with

¹³⁷ Ibid., 1.6.1

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 1.7.2

¹⁴⁰ Polybius, *The Histories*, 6.20.8

¹⁴¹ Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.29.3, Plutarch, Caesar 18.1

¹⁴² Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life*, 209.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 210

him....to build a wall nineteen miles long and sixteen feet high, along with a trench, all the way from Lake Lemannus, which flows into the Rhone River, to the Jura mountain range.”¹⁴⁴ It is generally agreed upon that Caesar did not build a wall that encompassed the entire length of the river but instead fortified only certain areas.¹⁴⁵ This still would have created a natural bottleneck at the more shallow points in the river, as this is where the Helvetii would have the best chances of crossing. While the Helvetii did attempt to ford the river, it ended in failure as they were repelled by the Roman forces stationed along the wall.¹⁴⁶ Caesar was able to use the terrain around him using large manmade works (which would become somewhat characteristic of him) to turn a larger force into a much more manageable threat.

Faced with this new and seemingly unsurpassable obstruction, the Helvetii decided to turn around and instead go through their neighbor’s land in the Jura Mountains. The Helvetii had managed to broker a deal with the Sequani, exchanging hostages for safe passage through the mountain pass.¹⁴⁷ Caesar was now in an even tighter situation than he was before. His enemy still had a huge number advantage, and he no longer had the advantage of his river fortifications. Caesar enlisted two legions and raised three more out of their winter quarters, ready to chase down the Helvetii.¹⁴⁸ While he made it seem as though this was an impromptu action, there is reason to doubt Caesar. It is much more likely that he had had these legions prepared before he knew of the Helvetii migration. Caesar also did not have the ability to raise new legions; that power was reserved by the senate. Therefore, these new legions were coming out of the general’s

¹⁴⁴ Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.8.1

¹⁴⁵ Kurt A. Raaflaub, trans., *Julius Caesar: The Complete Works*, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub and Robert B. Strassler, The Landmark (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2017), 9n1.8a.

¹⁴⁶ Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.8.4

¹⁴⁷ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 123.

¹⁴⁸ Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.10.3

own pocket; he was essentially creating his own personal army.¹⁴⁹ This of course meant that these men were loyal to Caesar and not the senate, as he is the one who supplied their paychecks. This shows not only his independence, but also his willingness to subvert authority.

To catch up to his enemy, Caesar did something unexpected that would show his, to become, famed speed. He led his men through the Alps, on paths, “...no other Roman general would have even considered.”¹⁵⁰ In the short time that Caesar had lead his army, he had already showed them that not only did he not falter against unfavorable conditions, but he flourished. Caesar was already demonstrating his unpredictable nature as a general and his ability to rally his troops onward against disadvantageous odds.

Due to Caesar’s unorthodox decision to pass through the Alps, he was able to catch up to the Helvetii as they were crossing the Saône River. It had taken the Helvetii 20 days to finish a makeshift bridge, and as such only three-quarters of the Helvetii had made it across the river by the time Caesar arrived. Caesar ordered a surprise attack against the Helvetii that had not yet crossed, and was easily victorious as he had struck them when they were least prepared.¹⁵¹ Caesar had caught his more numerous foe while they were at their weakest, and used this moment of division to strike and even the odds. Caesar then built his own bridge and managed to cross his entire army over the river in a single day.¹⁵² Caesar’s speed and his ruthlessness frightened the Helvetii so much, that even though they had a numerical advantage they attempted to parley with him. Even against a larger force, Caesar was able to find ways to break down his enemy both physically and mentally.

¹⁴⁹ Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life*, 212.

¹⁵⁰ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 123.

¹⁵¹ Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.12.3

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 1.13.1

The Helvetii sent their emissary Divico (who Caesar notes to have been one of the leaders of the Helvetii in a previous war with the Romans) to discuss terms of peace with Caesar. The negotiation did not go particularly well however, as the Helvetii not only threatened the Romans but also chastised Caesar for his use of trickery when attacking while they were crossing the Saône River, and claiming that “They had learned from their fathers and forefathers to fight with bravery rather than cunning, and not to rely on tricks.”¹⁵³ What makes this passage so interesting is that Caesar shows no misgivings towards the Helvetii’s insult. This is coming from Caesar’s own writings, so surely if he felt the need to defend his actions he could have. Caesar shows no remorse for his actions, signifying his willingness to use trickery to his advantage.

With negotiations breaking down between the two, Caesar’s pursuit of the Helvetii continued. Due to a disloyal Aeduan ally, Caesar experienced some difficulties while following the Helvetii. While giving chase, the Gallic allied cavalry, a large portion of which were Aedui led by a man named Dumnorix, became too ambitious and engaged the Helvetii, who beat the larger cavalry and caused a rout which started with Dumnorix and his men.¹⁵⁴ Additionally, Dumnorix was implicated by his own brother Diviciacus to be inciting rebellions and blocking grain shipments.¹⁵⁵ As Freeman points out, “Any other Roman general would then have promptly separated Dumnorix’s head from his body.” Caesar would have been well within his right to do so.¹⁵⁶ However, not one to be conventional, Caesar instead let Dumnorix live and put him under guard. Caesar knew that by killing Dumnorix, he would be creating more animosity between himself and the already disgruntled Aedui. Knowing that he needed their cavalry and

¹⁵³ Ibid., 1.13.6

¹⁵⁴ Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life*, 215.

¹⁵⁵ Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.20.2

¹⁵⁶ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 127.

grain payments, Caesar instead made an ally out of Diviciacus by not killing his brother. Caesar could be cruel at times, but he also knew when to be forgiving. Compare this to Pompey, who divorced his ally's relative and expected him to still be loyal. Caesar was able to take a negative situation and, through some clever diplomatic positioning, ease tension amongst the Aedui, and even get a high ranking Aeduan indebted to him.

With his internal struggles solved, Caesar could turn back to his much more pressing issues. The Helvetii still greatly outnumbered him, making any direct engagement with the larger force an almost assured defeat. Therefore, if Caesar wanted to finally defeat the Helvetii, he would have to find favorable positioning to give himself and his army the upper hand.

Opportunity presented itself when Caesar's scouts reported to him that the Helvetii had set up camp at the foot of a hill fairly close to Caesar's own encampment.¹⁵⁷ After gathering more intel on the hill, Caesar sent the legate Labienus (who would serve with Caesar throughout his Gallic campaigns but eventually betray him and join Pompey during the Civil War) with two legions to establish a foothold on the hill, giving the Romans the high ground which is always an advantage in battle. Caesar's plan from there was "to launch a full-scale attack" on the Helvetii in a surprise offensive, with Labienus' men to engage after seeing Caesar begin the assault.¹⁵⁸ Caesar had no intention of engaging the Helvetii in what they would describe as an "honorable" fashion. He knew that if he was to win, he needed to fight dirty and use every opportunity to his advantage.

Sadly for Caesar, his string of bad luck continued. Labienus and his men were able to take the hill with no difficulties, and Caesar's own men were in position and ready to attack. However, a man by the name of Publius Considius, who had been sent to scout ahead and see if

¹⁵⁷ Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.21.1

¹⁵⁸ Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life*, 217.

Labienus was in position, falsely reported back to Caesar the Helvetii had taken the hill, and not Labienus.¹⁵⁹ Due to this faulty information Caesar backed off from the enemy and awaited what he thought was their inevitable attack. By the time he learned what happened, Caesar had missed his chance and the Helvetii moved on. His plan had been perfect and very likely would have seen a swift victory for the Romans. While Caesar himself makes no mention of whether or not Considius was punished for his failure, he does name him directly in his commentaries. This ensured that not only was Considius' shame known by many, but also that Caesar was not to blame for the misstep.¹⁶⁰ A smart move political move sure to prevent any doubt of his abilities.

With this setback, Caesar's supplies were beginning to run low, so he gave up pursuing the Helvetii for a while to replenish at the Aeduan town of Bibracte. The Helvetii saw this, and gave chase to Caesar as they saw their chance to end the Roman harassment. Knowing he had little time to prepare, Caesar sent forth his cavalry to stall the advancing enemy while he set up his men on higher ground.¹⁶¹ A large portion of the cavalry was made up of allied Aedui, as was customary for Roman cavalry to primarily be comprised of allies at this time. Their stalling of the Helvetii proved instrumental in giving Caesar time to take the high ground, so his choice to spare Dumnorix and ease tension with the Aedui proved to be crucial.

With his army set up on the hill, Caesar had his horse sent away so he could fight on foot with his men, saying that, "...he wished to make the danger equal for all and take away any hope of flight." and urged them on to victory.¹⁶² Plutarch quotes Caesar saying, "'I shall use that later,' he said, 'for the pursuit, when I have won. For the moment, let us attack the enemy.'"¹⁶³ The

¹⁵⁹ Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.22.2

¹⁶⁰ Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life*, 219.

¹⁶¹ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 38.33.3

¹⁶² Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.25.1

¹⁶³ Plutarch, *Caesar* 18.3

battle began as the Helvetii, confident in their own abilities, charged uphill towards the romans in phalanx formation. Throwing their javelins, the Roman soldiers quickly broke the enemy phalanx, and charged forward, swords in hand. The heavy javelins insured that many of the Helvetii fought with no shield, as they were weighed down with the Roman pila.¹⁶⁴ With their formation shattered, the Helvetii began to retreat and the Romans gave chase. However, Helvetii reinforcements attacked Caesar on his exposed flank from behind, forcing the Romans to fight in two directions. While the fighting was, “long and bitterly contested,” and continued on into the night, the Roman force was able to defeat the Helvetii and seize their baggage train.¹⁶⁵ While the battle of Bibracte may not have been the most complex in terms of strategy, it does show Caesar’s ability to control his army and his soldiers’ discipline. Fighting on two fronts is never optimal, but Caesar and his men were able to turn a potentially disastrous situation into a victory.

After their defeat, seeing no other option, the Helvetii once again sent emissaries to discuss surrender. Caesar’s terms were simple: the Helvetii were to return home and essentially serve a buffer between the Germans and Rome and stop any German incursions into Gaul.¹⁶⁶ The Helvetii were essentially being forced back into the very role that they had been trying so desperately to flee from. Caesar had won his first major war in Gaul. By defeating the Helvetii, he not only shored up defences against the Germans, but he had also proven himself to be an effective commander in large engagements (as his only experience prior had been smaller battles in Spain).

¹⁶⁴ Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.25.3

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.26.4

¹⁶⁶ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 131.

Caesar's next opponent in Gaul would not be another Gallic tribe. Instead, Caesar would find his legions facing off against the very people that he had so desperately been trying to keep at distance with the Helvetii: the Germans. Longtime allies of Rome, the Aedui had found themselves victorious against their rival faction, the Arverni. Seeking help, the Arverni invited German troops to help them with their conflict, and led them to victory over the Aedui. However, once victorious, the German king Ariovistus decided to settle in the lands of the Sequani (one of the tribes of the Arverni faction) with his German troops, and according to Caesar, "...he was ruling cruelly and arrogantly."¹⁶⁷ Caesar writes that he promised the Gauls that he would help resolve this matter, and after a failed attempt at diplomacy, Caesar turned to military action and his next Gallic campaign.¹⁶⁸ This could not have been a better scenario for Caesar. One of the main reasons that he had waged war against the Helvetii was because they served as a buffer between Rome and the feared German tribes. Now, he had the chance to not only prove himself against a German tribe, but also gain favor with his Gallic allies and increase the Roman presence in Gaul.

Caesar's first move was to occupy the town of Vesontio, north of the Jura mountains along the Dubis River. Quickly forcing his troops into a march, he was able to take the town before Ariovistus could, demonstrating his ability to traverse long stretches of land rapidly.¹⁶⁹ Caesar goes into detail about the strategic positioning of the settlement, such as how it was mostly surrounded by the Dubis River, making it easily defensible.¹⁷⁰ Anyone attempting to lay siege to the town would have to cross the river (such as when the Helvetii attempted to cross the

¹⁶⁷ Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.31.12

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.36.7

¹⁶⁹ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 136.

¹⁷⁰ Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.38.4

Rhône), or cross over the small strip of land into the town, which was naturally fortified by a hill. Caesar now had what was essentially a natural fortress with plenty of supplies.

The next step was invigorating his troops to fight the Germans. Many soldiers were beginning to have second thoughts when it came to fighting against the men from across the Rhine. This fear quickly spread throughout the army, with some soldiers even threatening mutiny against Caesar if he ordered them to advance.¹⁷¹ Any army would have difficulty engaging their enemy with such low morale, as it could easily lead to a devastating early route. Caesar knew he needed to win back his army, so he gathered his lieutenants together, and after giving a lengthy speech, told the men:

“Do you, then, look at matters in this light yourselves, and also instruct the rest. For that matter, even if some of you do feel differently, I, for my part, will fight just the same and will never abandon the post to which I have been assigned by my country. The tenth legion will be enough for me; I am sure that... they would readily go through fire naked. The rest of you be off, the quicker the better, and let me not see you wearing yourselves out here to no purpose... appropriating the plunder gathered by others.”¹⁷²

Surrounded by men telling him to not engage, Caesar stood defiantly against them. His actions contrast heavily with Pompey, who had faced a similar scenario under his father’s command. His words roused the Roman soldiers, quickly snapping them out of their fear. Caesar showed his abilities as an orator and was able to persuade those around him.

With his army’s loyalty firmly secured, they set off towards Ariovistus. The fast approach of the Romans alarmed the German king, and he quickly called for further peace talks.

¹⁷³ However, just as before, the chance at a diplomatic solution quickly fell apart as German

¹⁷¹ Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.39.7

¹⁷² Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 38.46.3

¹⁷³ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 38.47.3

horsemen began harassing Romans soldiers.¹⁷⁴ The two opposing armies returned to their camps, and proceeded to carry out a long stalemate. Caesar would move his troops out, but the Germans seemed intent on not engaging in a decisive battle, preferring smaller skirmishes. Caesar gives the following reason for the Germans reluctance: "...it was customary among the Germans for the mothers of families to cast sacred lots and practice divination before declaring whether or not it was advantageous to join battle. On this occasion they had said that it was not the will of fate for the Germans to win if they fought a battle before the new moon."¹⁷⁵ The Romans now had the upper hand, as the German troops were hesitant to fight in a battle they thought they were fated to lose. With this information, Caesar knew now was the time to press the attack. The tides had turned: it was now the Germans who were afraid to fight the Romans.

Caesar deployed his men into a triple battle line and marched close to the German encampment. This provoked the Germans, and they marched out to meet the Roman legions on the battlefield. It is odd that Ariovistus decided to engage the them, especially due to the ill omens he had received, though Plutarch sums it up as simple rage.¹⁷⁶ Marching out in front of the enemy camp did not come without its downsides, however, as the proximity to the enemy made it impossible for the Roman soldiers to launch their javelins at the Germans before engaging.¹⁷⁷ While not an optimal situation (and perhaps even an oversight on Caesar's part), the battle still went in the favor of the Romans, as the German phalanxes were overcome by the fierce Roman soldiers. The whole of the German army was routed off, and sent back over the Rhine into Germany. Caesar had managed to once again overcome staggering odds. He kept control of his

¹⁷⁴ Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.46.1

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.50.4

¹⁷⁶ Plutarch, *Caesar* 19.10

¹⁷⁷ Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.52.3

army in face of a terrifying foe, while also recognizing and attacking the German when they were at their lowest. Caesar knew the importance psychology played in warfare. He had made sure that his own troops were eager and ready to fight, and attacked the enemy when they already believed they would lose.

Caesar had now defeated two rather large threats in Gaul. Additionally, he had done it in a very short period of time, with both the defeat of the Helvetii and the Germans occurring in just one summer.¹⁷⁸ If there were any who had doubted Caesar's abilities before, they were surely rethinking their stance now. The northern Roman borders were now secure and the German threat subdued. However, the next threat would not come from Germany, as Caesar once again found himself facing off against Gallic tribes.

Over the winter, Caesar allowed his legions to rest in Gaul after their successful campaigns against the Helvetii and the Germans. During this time, he began to receive reports that the Belgae (who resided in the north of modern day France) were conspiring against Rome. Caesar lists the reasons for their discontent as follows: "...first of all, the Belgae were afraid that after the pacification of all Gaul, they would be the next target of our army. Second, they were being approached by a number of Gauls, some of whom, though they did not want any more German involvement in Gaul, were no less annoyed that an army of the Roman people should stay through the winter and become established there. There were also those whose sheer fickleness and lack of constancy induced them to aim at a shift of power."¹⁷⁹ If Caesar thought

¹⁷⁸ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 232.

¹⁷⁹ Caesar, *Gallic War* 2.1.2

his stay in the Gallic region had gone unnoticed he was sorely mistaken. The Gallic tribes were beginning to view his actions in Gaul with apprehension.

The rebellious Roman general, in response to these reports, enlisted another two legions without the senate's consent and set off towards the Belgae.¹⁸⁰ According to Caesar, he travelled from Cisalpine Gaul to the borders of the Belgae in around 15 days, once again frightening his enemy with his speed.¹⁸¹ His quick arrival was a great advantage, as the Belgic tribes had not yet consolidated their forces. The largest of these tribes was the Bellovaci, who had pledged 60,000 troops to fight against Rome, making them the greatest threat. In order to divert the Bellovaci from joining the rest of the Belgic tribes, Diviciacus was sent with the rest of the Aedui to destroy the Bellovaci farmland.¹⁸² Dividing the enemy would make future engagements more manageable, and destroying the farmland of one of the largest Belgic tribes was sure to damage the enemy's supplies.

While their initial strategy was sound and saw early success, the Belgae began to fall apart once they began to face the Roman soldiers. Caesar made camp on a hill near the Aisne river, "...looking down on a swampy stream to his north, through which the Belgae would have to approach if they wanted to attack."¹⁸³ The Belgic tribes knew that attacking the Romans on their own terms would be foolish, so they instead attempted to bait them out. The Belgae laid siege upon the nearby Roman allied town of Bibrax, and saw much success, with the town's commander quickly asking for help from the Roman army. The enemy still had a much larger force, so fighting without the advantage of the fortified camp would prove difficult. However,

¹⁸⁰ Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life*, 233.

¹⁸¹ Raaflaub, *Julius Caesar*, 52n2.2a and Caesar, *Gallic War* 2.3.1

¹⁸² Caesar, *Gallic War* 2.5.3

¹⁸³ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 148.

Caesar did not intend to simply hand the town over to his enemy. He sent forth his light troops, comprised of Numidians, Cretans, and Balearics and armed with bows and slings, to help fend off the attack.¹⁸⁴ The psychological effect that these slingers and archers had on the Belgic troops should not be underestimated. These Roman allies were utilising a type of warfare not yet seen by Belgae, and the fear that they induced led to a quick rout. Caesar cleverly used the foreign fighting style to his advantage to attack the psyche of the enemy. The Belgic tribes next attempted to attack the Romans directly, but their attempts were easily pushed back.

These early engagements had proven unsuccessful for the Belgae. Their next move, however, seemed to play directly into Caesar's earlier strategy of dividing and conquering. The Belgic tribes decided it would be best to split up and to have each tribe return home. The plan was that, once the Romans attacked, they would rally to whosoever was invaded.¹⁸⁵ The idea was that this would give the Belgae, not the Romans, the luxury of fighting on their own terms. The Belgic tribes quickly departed and set off towards their homelands. Realizing that his enemy was in flight, Caesar set off after them, and began harassing the rear guard of the enemy. Due to the disorganization of the Belgae, who were without a clear leader, the Roman soldiers were left unopposed and laid waste to many of the enemies troops.¹⁸⁶ Caesar could not have found himself in a better position; his enemy was divided and in flight. Caesar had used every opportunity available to him and the much larger Belgic force had been beaten back at every turn.

Following their rout, Caesar set upon the individual Belgic tribes and found them to be easy pickings. First were the Suessiones, who surrendered in the town of Noviodunum (near modern day Soissons) after becoming, "...hugely alarmed at the large scale of the siege works,

¹⁸⁴ Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life*, 240.

¹⁸⁵ Caesar, *Gallic War* 2.10.4

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.11.6

the likes of which they had never seen or heard of before...”¹⁸⁷ Next, Caesar set upon the Bellovaci. The largest of the Belgic tribes, they had retreated to the town of Bratuspantium. Upon the Romans arrival, the Bellovaci surrendered and handed themselves over to Caesar.¹⁸⁸ With two of their allies having already surrendered, the Ambiani were quick to follow.¹⁸⁹ Things could not have been going better for Caesar. He had seemingly broken the enemies morale and was making quick work of the separated tribes.

Not all of the Belgae were so willing to surrender to Rome. The Nervii still stood in Caesar’s way of ending the Belgic conspiracy. While not as large as the Bellovaci in terms of manpower and land, the Nervii were still formidable in their own right as they devoted themselves to warfare: “...the Nervii were the toughest warriors in all of Gaul. Like the Spartans in ancient Greece, the Nervii prided themselves on their austerity at home and discipline in war.”¹⁹⁰ Unlike the others, the Nervii did not stand alone; they had managed to solidify alliances with the Atrebate, Viromandui, and Atuatuaci tribes. The Belgae may have split up, but the Nervii had managed to muster up a fairly large force, again putting Caesar at a numerical disadvantage.¹⁹¹

The decision to retreat back to their own homeland also gave the Nervii the advantage of fighting on familiar ground and on their own terms. Perhaps taking inspiration from Caesar himself, the Nervii used the environment around them and set themselves up in the wooded forest across from the Sabis River. As Caesar and six of his legions were building their encampment, the Nervii emerged from the forest and ambushed the Romans. The only advantage that the Romans had was that the Nervii were charging uphill and were already tired upon

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 2.12.5

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 2.13.2

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 2.15.2

¹⁹⁰ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 154.

¹⁹¹ Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life*, 244.

engaging the surprised Roman soldiers. There was no time to come up with a strategy, as the enemy was already upon them. Caesar, in his own words, began, "...to do everything at once..." and readied his men for battle.¹⁹² Even with their general shouting orders and attempting to organize them, the legions were still far apart from one another and far from a cohesive unit. This battle was to be decided more on brute strength and sheer will rather than strategy, and would test the mettle of Caesar's soldiers. While some of Caesar's men experienced success (such as the 9th and 10th Legions on the left wing), others were in great duress, with the entirety of the fourth cohort having been cut down and their standard lost.¹⁹³ Seeing the dire straits they were in, Caesar launched himself into battle and fought side by side with his men, inspiring those around him.¹⁹⁴ Reinforcements soon arrived afterwards, and the tide turned in favor of the Romans, leading them to victory. While the battle had been costly, Caesar had proven himself as a leader. With no time to prepare, Caesar and his men had been able to edge out a victory against a more numerous foe, speaking to the skill of his men and Caesar's ability to control them.

The final tribe that still defied him were the Atuatuci. Similar to the Suessiones, when besieged by Caesar they quickly surrendered: "They believed that the Romans did not wage war without divine help, since they could move forward such towering machines with so much speed."¹⁹⁵ Thus, the Belgae had been defeated and Gaul subdued. The senate, recognizing Caesar's accomplishments, decreed a period of thanksgiving for fifteen days, five days more than Pompey had received for his defeat of Mithridates.¹⁹⁶ His achievements had been recognized, and were clearly beginning to rival those of his triumvirate ally Pompey.

¹⁹² Caesar, *Gallic War* 2.20.1

¹⁹³ Caesar, *Gallic War* 2.25.1

¹⁹⁴ Plutarch, *Caesar* 20.8

¹⁹⁵ Caesar, *Gallic War* 2.31.2

¹⁹⁶ Raaflaub, *Julius Caesar*, 78n2.35e.

Following the defeat of the Belgae, in the year 56 BCE, Caesar found himself at war with the maritime tribes along the Atlantic coast, most notably the Veneti. The Veneti had become tired of their Roman conquerors, and desired the return of their freedom. Thus, they captured the Roman officers Silius and Velanius, and refused to free them unless Rome returned to the Veneti their hostages.¹⁹⁷ The Veneti were to be a difficult foe for they were unlike Caesar's previous enemies; they were able to flee from village to village by boat, transporting their people along to coast.¹⁹⁸ The Veneti knew the seas and Caesar was out of his element. While the Roman general did call for a fleet to be assembled, his fleet's style of ship was unable to compete with those of the Veneti, as their ships were built to deal with the extreme tides along the French coast.¹⁹⁹

While Caesar was able to capture a number of the enemies towns, they would always flee on their ships, stopping the Romans from achieving a decisive victory. If there was to be any chance at putting an end to this war, the enemies fleet would have to be either captured or destroyed. While it was true that Caesar's ships were inferior, the Roman fleet did have one trick up their sleeve. As Caesar recalled, "...one thing prepared by our men was of great use: sharp-edged hooks inserted and fasted onto long poles...They used these to grab hold of the lines by which the yardarms were tied to the masts and pulled them along as the Roman ship was driven forward by its oars, until the lines were severed. When these ropes were cut, the yardarms, of course, dropped, and... the ships... were at once rendered completely useless."²⁰⁰ With this clever tactic, the Roman fleet was able to engage and defeat the Veneti. Caesar himself was not

¹⁹⁷ Caesar, *Gallic War* 3.8.2

¹⁹⁸ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 164-165.

¹⁹⁹ Raaflaub, *Julius Caesar*, 90n3.12b.

²⁰⁰ Caesar, *Gallic War* 3.14.5

onboard any of the ships during the battle. He and the rest of the army were watching from the coast, and he takes some credit for the bravery with which the Roman troops fought, saying that his mere presence made them fight harder.²⁰¹ While Caesar may not have been overly involved in fighting the Veneti, the lessons he learned from his conflict with them would prove extremely helpful in the coming years. The subjugation of the Gauls along the Atlantic coast set Caesar up for the series of expeditions he was about to set out on.

He made three expeditions during this time, his first being across the Rhine and into Germany. His decision to invade Germany was not entirely unwarranted, as two Germanic tribes, the Uipetes and Tencteri, had crossed into Gaul and attacked the Belgic tribe of the Menapii.²⁰² Caesar quickly responded to the reports of the German invasion and marched his army towards the Rhine River and his enemy. Initial attempts at finding a diplomatic resolution broke down as the Germans betrayed the Romans, and Caesar launched an attack on the enemies camp. Once again, the speed at which Caesar moved surprised his enemy. As they were unprepared, the Germans were quickly defeated, and many attempted to run and cross the Rhine, though they were either cut down by Roman troops or overcome by the current.²⁰³ Caesar's speed had once again led him to victory.

It was here, after he had defeated the invading German force, that Caesar decided it was time for the Romans to go on the offensive and cross into Germany. This was unheard of, as no Roman general prior to Caesar had ever led an army into German lands.²⁰⁴ Of course, Caesar's

²⁰¹ Ibid., 3.14.8

²⁰² Ibid., 4.4.1

²⁰³ Ibid., 4.14.2-4.15.2

²⁰⁴ Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars* 1.25.2

reasoning for entering Germany was to ensure the safety of Rome by showing the Germans the strength of Republic and its armies. However, while this may be true, it was also a tremendous opportunity for Caesar to further solidify his name in the minds of the Roman people. For years the Romans had lived in fear of the Germans, so an expedition into their homeland would most certainly have been big news. Once he was in Germany, Caesar mainly spent his time laying waste to the villages and farmlands of hostile German tribes. While the Suebi tribe had prepared to fight, Caesar never actually engaged them, choosing instead to simply return to Gaul.²⁰⁵

Caesar's goal was not to conquer the Germans but to show them the power of the Republic, and that they were no longer afraid to enter their lands (as well as increasing his own fame). He knew that any military engagements would simply be a waste of resources and manpower, and instead decided to return to Gaul where he could set his sights towards his next destination.

Caesar's next two expeditions were both to the land of the Britons. In the same way that Caesar was the first Roman to lead an expedition into Germany, he was also the first to sail across the British Isles and set foot on the island of Britain. Unlike the Germans, the Britons themselves were a complete mystery to the Romans. Caesar knew so little of them, that he began asking Gallic merchants for information, though they were little help. He had no idea how large the island was, how many people inhabited it or how these people engaged in warfare.²⁰⁶

Caesar's reasoning for invading Britain was that the Britons had supplied troops to the Gauls during Caesar's various conflicts with them.²⁰⁷ Of course, as with Germany, he must have realized the significance of travelling to Britain. Again Caesar was attempting to enrapture the minds of the Roman people.

²⁰⁵ Caesar, *Gallic War* 4.19.4

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.20.4

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.20.1

Caesar's first expedition to the land of the Britons was to be a short one, as winter was soon to be upon him. However, if Caesar was expecting for things to go as smoothly as they did in Germany, he was sorely mistaken:

There were problems from the beginning. The cavalry had not yet embarked, and by the time that they had hastened to another port and gone aboard the eighteen transports allocated to them the weather had changed... Caesar consistently underestimated the power and unpredictability of the sea, and especially the English Channel. The cavalry transports were unable to follow.²⁰⁸

Even though Caesar's journey was already off to a rocky start, he was still intent on making landfall. Caesar's ships once again showed their inferiority. As he was using the same fleet that he used against the Veneti, they were not built to anchor in shallow waters, so the Roman soldiers had to disembark farther off the coast. This was difficult, as they were weighed down by their arms and armor. To make matters worse, they were quickly set upon by the Britons' cavalry and chariots.²⁰⁹ Caesar's men were unfamiliar with the Britons' style of warfare, but they were able to finally push the enemy back and make landfall. The hardships did not end for the Romans, however. During their time on Britain they saw much conflict with the Britons and their feared chariots and intense storms. Caesar was able to make peace with the Britons (requiring that they hand over hostages to the Romans), but this still came at great cost to Caesar's army. Still, upon his return home, Caesar's supporters in the senate were able to secure him another thanksgiving, much to the dismay and objection of the optimates, this time lasting an unprecedented 20 days.²¹⁰ While his first expedition to Britain may not have gone exactly as he wanted, he was still able to achieve what he was most likely after in the first place: recognition for his achievements.

²⁰⁸ Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life*, 280.

²⁰⁹ Caesar, *Gallic War* 4.24.1

²¹⁰ Raaflaub, *Julius Caesar*, 130n4.38f.

Caesar's second trip to Britain went much better than the first. He was able to learn much more about the island itself and the people that lived there, saw victory against hostile forces, and was able to get more hostages from the different southern tribes.²¹¹ Caesar's second expedition to Britain may have been to make up for his failures the first time. His trips to Germany and Britain solidified his name in the minds of the Roman people. He would forever be remembered as the first Roman general to travel to these lands, which must have been irritating on some level for the glory seeking Pompey.

Caesar's conquests had taken him far. He had subjugated Gaul, crossed the Rhine, and been to far off Britain. However, the Gallic people still yearned for freedom, and before Caesar's governorship came to an end he was to face the final attempts of the Gauls to expel the Roman general from their lands. A precursor to a larger uprising, a small Belgic tribe called the Eburones rose up against Caesar. Their leader, Ambiorix, tricked two of Caesar's lieutenants, and slaughtered them and their men.²¹² Caesar was deeply affected by the betrayal, and launched a "campaign of terror" against the Eburones and all who joined them, which ended with a Roman victory and harsh punishment of the rebellious tribe.²¹³ If Caesar had thought his cruelty would keep the Gauls in line, he was sorely mistaken.

As Plutarch describes it, the war to come was, "...the greatest and most hazardous of all the Gallic Wars."²¹⁴ Inspired by his fellow Gauls, Vercingetorix of the Arverni began to create alliances amongst many of the Gallic tribes and his growing rebellion soon reached the ears of

²¹¹ Caesar, *Gallic War* 5.12-5.22

²¹² Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars* 1.25.2

²¹³ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 209.

²¹⁴ Plutarch, *Caesar* 25.3

Caesar (who had returned to Italy after his defeat of the Eburones). To delay Caesar's arrival, Vercingetorix created a diversion by convincing the Gallic tribes near the Roman border to join his cause, creating chaos in the region and forcing Caesar to stay and restore peace.²¹⁵ Already Vercingetorix was proving to be a greater opponent than Caesar had ever faced.

Once things had been settled along the border, Caesar needed to reach the bulk of his army to the north. In a characteristic move, he made the bold decision to break through the Cévennes mountains and set upon the territory of the Arverni.²¹⁶ Caesar then set off from there and met up with two of his veteran legions, and used them to capture three Gallic towns in quick succession (Vellaunodunum, Cenabum, and Noviodunum), using brutal force when necessary.²¹⁷ While Caesar's early success was surely worrying for Vercingetorix, he did not give up so easily. He shifted strategies, and convinced many Gauls to burn down their towns and food storages in an effort to starve out the Romans.²¹⁸ Vercingetorix had seen what happened to the previous Gauls who had dared to directly face Caesar, so he instead decided to attack Caesar indirectly. The Gallic king was willing to sacrifice everything for freedom.

Caesar's next move was to besiege the town of Avaricum. Here, the rebellious Gauls were able to witness first hand Caesar's tricky tactics. During a rainstorm, Caesar noticed that the guards posted along Avaricum's walls were placed somewhat carelessly. Always knowing to take advantage of an opportunity when he saw it, Caesar explains his plan: "He ordered his own troops to go about their work more sluggishly... Unseen under the protective siege roofs, the legions got ready for an attack. Caesar... offered rewards to those who climbed the wall first, and

²¹⁵ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 215.

²¹⁶ Caesar, *Gallic War* 7.8.3

²¹⁷ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 217.

²¹⁸ Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life*, 323.

then gave the soldiers the signal. They made a sudden swoop from all directions and quickly took control of the wall.”²¹⁹ Not expecting this sudden attack, the town of Avaricum fell to Caesar and his men.

The next big engagement would occur at the town of Gergovia near the Elaver River. After being outmaneuvered by Caesar, Vercingetorix moved his army into the fortifications of the town as he did not want to fight on unfavorable terms.²²⁰ Caesar of course laid siege to the town, but things did not go as smoothly as they had at Avaricum. They met heavy resistance, and were quickly overcome by Gallic troops. The Romans were pushed back from the wall, and suffered heavy losses. Vercingetorix meanwhile made the clever decision not to pursue the Romans once they had been pushed back, and returned to his fortifications where he had the advantage.²²¹ So great was the defeat at Gergovia, that Suetonius makes note of it being one of the three times that Caesar failed during his Gallic campaigns (the other two being the loss of his fleet to a storm in Britain and the slaughter of his lieutenants at the hands of the Eburones).²²² Caesar decided to leave Gergovia behind and return to the allied lands of the Aedui. By avoiding direct confrontation with Caesar and approaching conflict with the Romans with caution, Vercingetorix managed to land a major blow to Caesar. While things looked grim for the Roman general, Caesar would prove that he should never be underestimated, especially when his back was against the wall.

After his retreat, Caesar was able to meet up with the rest of his army, and made his way back towards the province of Transalpine Gaul as it was being targeted by Gallic forces.²²³

²¹⁹ Caesar, *Gallic War* 7.271

²²⁰ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 221.

²²¹ Caesar, *Gallic War* 7.51.4

²²² Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars* 1.25.2

²²³ Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life*, 335.

Vercingetorix, perhaps too ambitiously, ordered his cavalry to attack the Romans' baggage train, but this attack was repelled by Caesar cavalry.²²⁴ The Gauls retreated back to the town of Alesia, where they were once again besieged by Caesar's forces. Caesar had the Gauls trapped, as the citadel of Alesia was surrounded by natural barriers.²²⁵ The Romans set about trapping the Gauls in their fort: "He had a trench dug that was twenty feet wide... He placed the rest of the fortifications four hundred feet back from that ditch...Behind this open space he had two trenches dug all around, both fifteen feet wide and of equal depth...Behind these ditches he built a wall of earth and rubble crowned by a palisade, twelve feet high in total..."²²⁶ Caesar's fortifications would help keep the Gauls in, but they would also help repel any forces hoping to relieve those at Alesia. This proved useful, as a massive relief force arrived to try and break the siege. The Gauls attempted to overtake the Romans on three separate occasions, but because of Caesar's fortifications and effective leadership, he was able to defeat them every time.²²⁷ Vercingetorix realized he had been defeated and surrendered. Caesar had once again subjugated Gaul.

In the same way that Sertorius challenged Pompey, Vercingetorix challenged Caesar. Just like in Pompey's case in Spain, Caesar experienced major setbacks against his Gallic foe. However, this is where another big distinction between Pompey and Caesar can be made. Where Pompey shifted towards caution and slowly wearing down his formidable enemy, Caesar went in the complete opposite direction. He played into his strengths, using bold and tricky tactics to get the better of his enemy. This contrast between the two is shown heavily over the course of the Civil War.

²²⁴ Caesar, *Gallic War* 7.67.2

²²⁵ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 224.

²²⁶ Caesar, *Gallic War* 7.72.1

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.85.3

This was the last major war Caesar fought in Gaul. His conquests had taken him far from his initial province that he had been granted governorship over. He had led his army across Gaul, into Germany, and even to the far off land of the Britons. The amount of land that Caesar had conquered for Rome was staggering, and his name was truly known all throughout the Republic. Caesar had set out at the beginning of the Gallic campaigns to make a name for himself as a military leader, and he had done just that. His quick thinking and often times unorthodox methods launched him to the forefront of great Roman generals. Even when things had looked bleak, Caesar had pressed onwards, sometimes against the protest of those around him. His stubbornness, trickery, and superb leadership helped Caesar bring Gaul to its knees.

Chapter 6: The (not so) Celebrated Return

After the end of the Gallic Wars, Caesar was not afforded much time for respite before he famously crossed the Rubicon and entered into his conflict with Pompey. However, in the short time that follow the end of his Gallic campaign, Caesar was constantly maneuvering himself politically, wary of what was to come upon his return home. The reason for this was, once he was no longer governor of Gaul, he would no longer be afforded the privileges of the position. The most important of these privileges was that he was free from any and all prosecution. Through his connections in Rome, he had been able to extend his time away in Gaul (of course always saying that his presence was needed), but with his governorship nearing its end, Caesar faced potentially devastating lawsuits over his first consulship and his actions in Gaul. Cato had long swore that Caesar would face criminal prosecution, so the question was not if but when.²²⁸

Of course, Caesar did not intend to simply go down without a fight. Originally, his plan was to run for (and presumably win) another consulship, once again making him immune to prosecution. However, the optimates had not been idle while Caesar was away in Gaul, and had been working hard to dismantle the Triumvirate. With the death of Crassus after his failed conquest of Parthia, all that remained was the friendship between Pompey and Caesar. With the death of Caesar's daughter, the marriage that had so long secured the alliance between the two generals ended. Additionally, Caesar's exploits in Gaul must have bothered the famed Roman Alexander, as Caesar's achievements were beginning to overshadow Pompey's own. The optimates capitalized on this, and during Pompey's time as consul while Caesar was in Gaul, they got him to approve of a piece of legislation that would require candidates for office to

²²⁸ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 230.

actually be present in Rome to be eligible for election.²²⁹ Even before the eruption of the Civil War, the optimates had begun to dig their claws into Pompey.

Caesar was not just going to sit back and let his opponents win. He set out on a campaign to win the hearts of the common people. It was during this time that Caesar published his books on the Gallic War. While most citizens would have definitely heard of Caesar's exploits at this time, they only knew the end result and not the specifics of his adventures. The publication of his campaigns showed Caesar's brilliance and his abilities. He also spent much of the money he had made in Gaul lavishly on public works, and was able to veto an optimate backed proposal to revoke citizenship from the people of Comum, which Caesar had helped establish just a few years prior.²³⁰ All of this was meant to help build up Caesar's popular base, especially among the tribunes.²³¹ Pompey's efforts against Caesar went about as well as expected: "Pompey, accordingly, as he could affect nothing in any other way, proceeded without any further disguise to harsh measures and openly said and did everything against Caesar; yet he failed to accomplish anything,"²³² Pompey was ineffective in stopping Caesar's political maneuvering.

Things continued to deteriorate however, as Caesar simply refused to disband his army, knowing the firestorm that would follow if he did. Meanwhile, Pompey too had begun to prepare for what seemed inevitable. Things did look up for a short while however, as the senate passed a proposal that both Caesar and Pompey dismiss their armies simultaneously. This would surely have eased tensions amongst the two parties, but the optimates were not so willing to go along with the senate's plan. They wished to see Caesar crushed, and illegally gave Pompey command

²²⁹ Ibid., 212.

²³⁰ Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars* 1.29.1

²³¹ Ibid., 1.26.1

²³² Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 40.63.1

of two more legions, which Pompey happily accepted.²³³ If he was not already, Pompey was officially in the pockets of the optimates.

The optimates actions essentially ended any chance at a peaceful resolution. While Caesar did propose to the senate that he be allowed to keep his army until becoming consul, but the senate declined.²³⁴ The stage had been set for civil war, as Pompey and Caesar were unwilling to disband their armies. Caesar had everything to lose and nothing to gain from backing down to the optimates, especially with Pompey on their side. Caesar's political maneuvering had done much to win the hearts of the common people, but the optimates were unwilling to back down. Pompey was firmly in the hands of Caesar's enemies, and it had become clear that a diplomatic resolution was no longer possible. The optimates planned to use Pompey to destroy his former ally, and bring down what they saw as the most dangerous popularis since Marius.

²³³ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 240.

²³⁴ Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars* 1.30.1

Part 3

Chapter 7: Clash of Two Egos

²³⁵When Caesar realised that all attempts to work with the senate and find a diplomatic resolution had failed, he turned to military action. By crossing the Rubicon River, Caesar was leaving his province of Cisalpine Gaul and leading an army against the state. Many in Rome were unprepared for Caesar's sudden advance. Much of his army was still stationed in Gaul, so many believed that he would at the very least wait for them to join him before making a move on Rome.²³⁶ With Rome in disarray, Caesar was able to take the city of Arminium and begin his consolidation of Italy.²³⁷ The senate should have learned by now however, that Caesar was not a man of convention. Caesar's surprise advance was completely in character; he had caught the optimates unprepared.

Things were not looking particularly good for Pompey. While he technically had the numerical advantage, Caesar's quick advance seemed to be facing little resistance.²³⁸ Even if he was able to hold off or even defeat Caesar's veteran troops in Italy, he would still have to worry about those loyal to Caesar in Gaul, as they would surely arrive in Italy before reinforcements from Spain could. Therefore he made the smart, and characteristically cautious, decision to withdraw from Rome and set about raising new troops to fight his new enemy. He took with him many senators, declaring that any who stayed behind were supporters of Caesar.²³⁹ While

²³⁵ I use the following translations for the ancient sources in this part: Appian's *The Civil Wars*- John Carter, Plutarch's *Pompey*- Pamela Mensch, Cicero *Letters to Atticus*- E. O. Winstedt, Cicero's *Letters to his Friends*- D. R. Shackleton Bailey, Cassius Dio's *Roman History*- Earnest Cary, Caesar's *Civil War*- Kurt A. Raaflaub

²³⁶ Appian, *The Civil Wars* 2.34

²³⁷ Caesar, *Civil War* 1.8.1

²³⁸ "Web Essay Y: Civil War Strategies," in *The Landmark Julius Caesar: Web Essays*, by Arthur M. Eckstein, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub and Robert B. Strassler (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2017), 110, excerpt from *The Landmark Julius Caesar: Web Essays*, PDF.

²³⁹ Plutarch, *Pompey* 61

Pompey was essentially leaving the city of Rome to Caesar, he was leaving it empty but for a few senators who stayed behind as even the reigning consuls abandoned the city. He may have been leaving the city behind, but he was taking any possible chance Caesar had at claiming legitimacy with him. Without any senatorial or consular support, Caesar would be little more than illegitimate upstart.

Without anyone defending the city, Caesar was able to walk into Rome unopposed. He was able to take many cities of Italy in this manner, for Pompey had taken his legions and his senate supporters with him and set off to the coastal city of Brundisium. It was here that Pompey planned to embark from Italy and flee to Greece where he could continue to raise new forces.²⁴⁰ When Caesar learned of Pompey's plans, he quickly set off towards Brundisium, hoping to cut his enemy off. However, for the first time Caesar's legendary speed failed him, and he was beaten to the city.²⁴¹ By the time Caesar had arrived, Pompey had already sent away half his army to Greece and was awaiting the return of his ships.²⁴² Caesar besieged the city, hoping to keep Pompey and his forces in Italy, however this would quickly prove difficult. The harbor remained open, as Caesar had no navy to blockade it, so once Pompey's ships returned he would be able to leave unopposed. Caesar's main advantage at this point was that his enemy was divided, so it was integral that he keep it that way. To make up for his lack of boats, he set about creating a floating causeway at the narrowest part of the port.²⁴³ While certainly not an ordinary way of blockading a port city, Caesar rarely was.

²⁴⁰ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 41.10.3

²⁴¹ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 250.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 251.

²⁴³ Caesar, *Civil War* 1.25.5

Pompey's ships returned before Caesar was able to fully complete his causeway, but Caesar's uncompleted machination would still prove a formidable obstacle for Pompey if he attempted to flee. Additionally, if Pompey ordered his men to embark, it would leave the city undefended and Caesar's men would be right on their heels. While this was truly a distressing situation, Pompey was able to put his skills as a general to work. He had been harassing Caesar's men daily, using merchant ships that he had commandeered and armed with catapults.²⁴⁴ He also set about placing obstacles throughout the city (trenches, spikes, etc.) so as to impede any advances made by Caesar's men. While Caesar's army was made aware of these obstructions by the people of Brundisium, Pompey's efforts were still enough to get him and the rest of his army out of Brundisium (minus two ships that had gotten stuck on Caesar's barrier).²⁴⁵ Caesar had been beaten and left behind. While Cassius Dio harshly criticized Pompey's decision to sail to Greece, "... Pompey... deserted his country and the rest of Italy.... Hence he gained the opposite fortune and reputation." the disadvantage this put Caesar at should be noted.²⁴⁶ With no way to pursue his foe and more enemies ready to pounce in Spain, Caesar was stuck in Italy while Pompey was free to build up his forces. His legendary speed had failed him and Pompey had broken through Caesar's flimsy attempts and blockading him in. Pompey had, in a way, won the first confrontation of the war.

The siege of Brundisium also marked a big change in how Caesar approached the war. In his own telling of the events, Caesar makes repeated mention of his efforts to find a diplomatic resolution, even after crossing the Rubicon. This continued into the siege of Brundisium, but these efforts, like all the others, had failed. It is here that Caesar notes that he gave up on any

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 1.26.1

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 1.28.4

²⁴⁶ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 41.13.1

hope of a peaceful resolution to the war, and instead decided, "...to focus entirely on the war."²⁴⁷ His efforts at diplomacy should be taken with a grain of salt however, especially seeing as how his commentary on the war can be viewed as a piece of propaganda (though it was never published).²⁴⁸ The war was still going on, and Caesar was making no attempt at slowing down his military activities across the Italian peninsula. Cicero, in a letter to his friend Atticus, vented his frustration over Caesar's continued military aggression.²⁴⁹ However hollow Caesar's diplomatic attempts may have been, Brundisium marked the moment in which the war had truly begun.

Caesar's chance at bringing a decisive end to the war had slipped through his fingers. Pompey's navy would have been formidable even if Caesar did have a navy, so pursuing him to Greece was out of the question.²⁵⁰ Even if Caesar had been able to pursue his rival, he still would have had to worry about Pompey's forces stationed in Spain. If Caesar left Italy, nothing would stop them from moving in and reclaiming the peninsula, undoing all of Caesar's work and destroying more of the little legitimacy he had. This is why he instead decided to head to Spain so as to subdue this threat. Meanwhile, he ordered new ships to be requisitioned and delivered to Brundisium so that once he returned from Spain he could continue his pursuit of Pompey.²⁵¹ While Caesar was distracted in Spain, Pompey was free to continue to raise troops in Greece. He knew that his greatest strength against Caesar's veteran army would be sheer numbers, and with

²⁴⁷ Caesar, *Civil War* 1.26.6

²⁴⁸ "Web Essay JJ: The Civil War as a Work of Propaganda," in *The Landmark Julius Caesar: Web Essays*, by Kurt A. Raaflaub, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub and Robert B. Strassler (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2017), 246, excerpt from *The Landmark Julius Caesar: Web Essays*, PDF.

²⁴⁹ Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 7.17.2, 7.18.2

²⁵⁰ Plutarch, *Pompey* 64

²⁵¹ Caesar, *Civil War* 1.29.1

the support of both consuls and the senate he was able to begin raising an army that would dwarf Caesar's. Pompey had successfully outmaneuvered Caesar.

Over the next year, Caesar campaigned against Pompey's forces in Africa and, despite a few hiccups, was mostly successful. Additionally, he was able to earn the title of dictator (and later consul) thanks to one of his supporters in Rome, since the consuls were not present in the city.²⁵² Caesar now had a legitimate title and was no longer breaking the law by being present in Rome. With his hastily crafted navy now assembled in Brundisium, he finally had the means to cross the Adriatic Sea and confront Pompey.

Of course, Pompey did not spend his year in Greece simply waiting for Caesar to arrive. Caesar writes that Pompey had collected a large sum of money and grain from nearby provinces in Asia. He had been able to raise nine legions of Roman citizens as well as assembling a large force of foreign allies: "Such an assembly of soldiers from the nations of the Mediterranean and beyond had not been seen since the days of Alexander the Great."²⁵³ If Caesar had thought that he would be able to cross the Adriatic uncontested, he was very mistaken. Pompey had continued to add to his navy, and was actively patrolling the entire west coast of Greece. While Caesar had been so preoccupied in Spain, Pompey was creating a full fledged war machine. He was truly ready for the arrival of his once protege.²⁵⁴

Leading Pompey's fleet was none other than Caesar's previous fellow consul and political enemy Bibulus. Caesar had disgraced him, and now he was the only thing standing between Caesar and Greece. A full on naval battle would prove disastrous for Caesar, so instead

²⁵² Ibid., 2.21.5

²⁵³ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 267.

²⁵⁴ Caesar, *Civil War* 3.3- 3.5

Caesar needed to find a way to circumvent the enemy fleet and surprised everyone with his next move. Since it was still winter, everyone in Pompey's camp assumed that Caesar would wait until spring to embark, when sailing conditions would be better. However, when the winter was half done, Caesar and his army crossed the Adriatic with considerable speed and were able to avoid Bibulus, thus safely landing in Greece. When Bibulus caught wind of this, he immediately went out to prevent any further enemy movements by sea, and was actually able to catch the fleet on its return voyage to Brundisium. The damage had been done, however, and Caesar had once again defeated Bibulus by forging through unfavorable conditions.²⁵⁵

After making landfall in Greece, Caesar quickly set about capturing towns along the coast and made his way north towards the town of Dyrrachium. This was a great concern to Pompey, as Dyrrachium served as both his military depot and his supply center for the region.²⁵⁶ What followed was very similar to what happened in Brundisium, as both armies quickly raced towards the town. Once again, Pompey was able to defeat Caesar's legendary speed and was able to arrive in Dyrrachium and establish camp.²⁵⁷ When Caesar arrived, he saw Pompey's larger force and decided against fully engaging his enemy.

A standoff ensued. Caesar thought it best to wait for reinforcements and supplies from Italy before making a move against his enemy, and instead spent his time attempting to win the favor of nearby communities in hopes of earning supplies.²⁵⁸ Pompey was cautious to meet his foe in battle. While Caesar had been able to secure some territory along the coast, Pompey still had his impressive naval blockade roaming the Adriatic. Anyone attempting to cross the Adriatic

²⁵⁵ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 41.44

²⁵⁶ Raaflaub, *Julius Caesar*, 413n11.13a.

²⁵⁷ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 269.

²⁵⁸ Caesar, *Civil War* 3.13.5 and 3.16.1

would have to find some way through Pompey's navy, which was extremely vigilant after Caesar had slipped past them.²⁵⁹ Caesar was behind enemy lines and quickly consuming supplies, so Pompey's strategy was very similar to when he fought against Sertorius: he was going to wear his enemy down. Instead of advancing, Pompey waited to see what Caesar's next move would be.

Luckily for Caesar, Marcus Antonius was able to encourage and lead reinforcements on one final expedition across the Adriatic and avoid Pompey's navy, landing north of Dyrrachium. Caesar's loyal follower quickly joined his commander, and together they were able to cut off Pompey's supply lines.²⁶⁰ Quickly realizing that he had been outmaneuvered, Pompey fortified himself on a plateau just a few miles southeast of Dyrrachium that had easy access to the sea, and called for his navy to begin shipping him supplies. Pompey was still wary to engage his rival, and while Caesar had received reinforcements from Italy, it was unlikely that anyone else was coming to relieve him (as most of his more vehement supporters were with him), and so Pompey continued to pursue his tactic of wearing down his foe.

Seeing his foe's advantageous position on the plateau, Caesar set out to fortify the surrounding hills with forts and a wall, effectively besieging Pompey. While it may seem odd for a smaller force like Caesar's to lay siege against such a large army, this was exactly why Caesar did it. Once word spread that Pompey had found himself under siege by Caesar, people would quickly begin to question their loyalties, and perhaps begin supporting Caesar instead. Additionally, since Pompey had been so reluctant to fully engage Caesar in battle, to many it would look as though he was hiding from Caesar in fear.²⁶¹ A letter to Cicero confirms Caesar's

²⁵⁹ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 270.

²⁶⁰ Caesar, *Civil War* 3.29 and 11.41.1

²⁶¹ Raaflaub, *Julius Caesar*, 433n11.43a.

supporters desired to humiliate Pompey and use it as propaganda.²⁶² While Pompey was not in a particularly dire situation (as he still had plenty of incoming supplies), it would not have been hard to paint it as such. His tactic of waiting out Caesar may have been effective in wearing down his enemy, but it did him no favors in terms appearances. Caesar's plan was dangerous and reckless (as it forced him to spread his army thin), but was completely in his nature. His erratic strategies usually had a way of working out.

Once again the two parties found themselves at a bit of a standoff. Caesar's tactics and fortifications were not so different from the ones he had used at Alesia against Vercingetorix, although here he was using them on a much larger scale.²⁶³ In a way, Pompey and Caesar found themselves fighting an early style of trench warfare. Their armies found themselves frequently skirmishing as they attempted to take one another's fortifications, never really making progress. While this was definitely a sustainable type of warfare for Pompey, Caesar found himself in dire straits. Although in his own commentary, Caesar says Pompey was the one suffering (as he had cut off Pompey's water sources), other accounts suggest otherwise. Appian claims that Caesar's army was starving, and was scavenging for any kind of food it could find.²⁶⁴ Though Caesar does make some mention of this, he focuses more on Pompey's hardships than his own. Pompey's tactics were working; his enemy was starving and struggling to keep up with his larger force. Caesar, in his arrogance, had spread his army thin by sieging Pompey, and this overaggressiveness had led to serious logistical problems.²⁶⁵ It was only a matter of time before an opportunity presented itself for Pompey.

²⁶² Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 9.9

²⁶³ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 273.

²⁶⁴ Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.61

²⁶⁵ "Web Essay," in *The Landmark*, 112.

Pompey finally got the opportunity he wanted in the form of two Alloborgan brothers that defected from Caesar's camp. With them, they brought money, horses, and, most importantly, information. Caesar writes, "... the brothers... reported everything of note to Pompey: any part of the fortifications that remained unfinished, any shortcomings... , schedule of routine events, distances between locations, and the variations in attentiveness among guard posts..."²⁶⁶ With this information, Pompey could finally break the siege, and show everyone that his caution did yield results. With the defectors information and his own knowledge of the battlefield, Pompey was able to more effectively attack Caesar fortifications, bringing the end of the siege ever closer. It finally came when Pompey assaulted the southern part of Caesar's wall that had been left unfinished. Pompey's men poured into the breach and established a new camp. Caesar launched a counterattack, but failed as his men got lost in the maze of trenches and other fortifications, leading to a full on rout.²⁶⁷ Pompey had outmaneuvered Caesar, and Caesar was now faced one of the greatest losses of his military career. Appian claims that Pompey was able to capture, "...a large number of their standards, and only just failed to take the eagle..."²⁶⁸ Classicist Gregory S. Bucher says it best: "The simple fact remains that Caesar had gambled and lost, and that he himself bore a good share of the responsibility for this loss. All he could do was cut his losses and move on."²⁶⁹ Caesar was on the run.

Even though Caesar had been defeated and was in flight from Dyrrachium, Pompey did not push his advantage. Even Caesar recognized that his army had faced total annihilation,

²⁶⁶ Caesar, *Civil War* 3.61.3

²⁶⁷ "Web Essay TT: From Defeat at Dyrrachium to Victory at Pharsalus," in *The Landmark Julius Caesar: Web Essays*, by Arthur M. Eckstein, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub and Robert B. Strassler (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2017), 299, excerpt from *The Landmark Julius Caesar: Web Essays*, PDF.

²⁶⁸ Appian, *The Civil Wars* 2.61

²⁶⁹ "Web Essay," in *The Landmark*, 299.

saying that the only reasons they were able to continue was because, “Pompey feared an ambush... he was completely surprised by what was happening...”²⁷⁰ Additionally, Pompey’s greatest strength (his cavalry) had difficulty navigating the extensive fortifications, depriving him of one of his greatest assets and therefore more vulnerable to a surprise attack. It seems as fruitful as his caution had been so far, here it did him no favors. If Pompey had simply pressed the attack, he would have seen the end of the war so many in his camp wanted. Appian provides a useful opinion on the matter, proposing that Pompey was hesitant, “...perhaps because he suspected the absence of defenders on the fortification was a trap...”²⁷¹ This would make sense, as Pompey was surely aware (thanks to the publication of the Gallic Wars) of Caesar’s tendency to lay traps for his enemies. Therefore it would be wrong to say that a certain amount of caution was unwarranted. However, Pompey’s cautious nature did him no favors on this day, and Caesar was free to flee. Appian quotes Caesar, “Today my enemies would have finished the war if they had a commander who knew how to win a victory.”²⁷²

The siege of Dyrrachium shows the fundamental difference between Pompey and Caesar; Caesar tends to throw caution to the wind while Pompey embraces it. Had the roles been reversed, Caesar surely would have pressed the attack and put an end to the Civil War. This does not mean that Caesar’s approach to warfare was necessarily superior to Pompey’s as both styles saw results. Pompey’s approach took longer, but by being wary of conflict he could avoid unnecessary casualties. Caesar’s unpredictability and brash nature helped him win many battles, but sometimes costed of many of his soldiers their lives (as it did here). Just because Caesar

²⁷⁰ Caesar, *Civil War* 3.70.1

²⁷¹ Appian, *The Civil Wars* 2.62

²⁷² Ibid.

would have pressed the advantage does not mean that his approach to warfare is superior to Pompey's.

Pompey had achieved a great victory nonetheless. When all had doubted his abilities, his meticulous evaluation of his situation won him the day, and his already starving enemy was now in flight. Caesar had been right in thinking that laying siege to Pompey would make many question Pompey's ability to win the war. Now the tides had turned, and Caesar was running away outmanned and undersupplied. It would be much harder now for Caesar to convince anyone that victory was within his grasp. Pompey had complete control of the area, all he had to do now was wait for his enemy to crumble.

Chapter 8: The Battle of Pharsalus

With Caesar fleeing east and essentially trapped in Greece by Pompey's navy, Pompey easily could have crossed back into Italy, reclaimed the peninsula, and taken Rome. However, this would only have symbolic meaning and have no real military advantages. If left to his own devices, Caesar could regroup and gather reinforcements. Victory would only come once Caesar had been defeated.²⁷³ Even though Pompey could not invade Italy, chasing his enemy down also came with its fair share of problems. While Caesar had been defeated at the siege of Dyrrachium, he managed to find a silver lining. By moving east, he could lure Pompey away from the resources he had amassed at Dyrrachium and, "... force him to seek a decision in a battle fought under equal conditions."²⁷⁴ Caesar had truly underestimated Pompey at Dyrrachium. He had attempted to use brute force and sheer will to trap Pompey, but his enemy had remained clear headed and the siege failed. If Caesar was going to be victorious, he was going to have to be more careful. Getting Pompey away from the safety of Dyrrachium was imperative.

Caesar was not the only one who could play the political game. While a worse politician than Caesar, Pompey still knew the power of public opinion. He was able to take Caesar's strategy -to use the siege of Dyrrachium as propaganda- and turn it on his enemy, by sending dispatches all throughout Greece telling of Caesar's defeat.²⁷⁵ As Caesar was already struggling resource wise even at Dyrrachium, this made it more difficult for him. His desperation can be seen when his army approached the Greek town of Gomphi. While the townspeople had once supported the rebellious Roman, they now turned their backs on what they saw as a lost cause. Truly in need of a win, Caesar set upon the town, quickly took it, and gave it to his troops as

²⁷³ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 276.

²⁷⁴ Caesar, *Civil War* 3.78.3

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.79.4

plunder.²⁷⁶ As Philip Freeman points out, this was out of character for Caesar, especially considering how he had approached the Civil War thus far: “Caesar rarely allowed such license to his men as it was bad for discipline and contrary to his stated goal of mercy for all...”²⁷⁷ While this was a Greek town and not necessarily a Roman one, its sacking still portrays an image that Caesar was trying to avoid. He wanted to distance himself from the slaughters that occurred during the time of Marius and Sulla, and plundering a town goes against this. News of the sack of Gomphi, and the Greek community was wary to shut their doors to Caesar again. However, they were not welcoming him because they believed in him, but because they feared him. Caesar was compromising his mission just to stay afloat.

Meanwhile, things had begun to fall apart in Pompey’s camp. He had already faced mounting criticism at Dyrrachium for allowing himself to be besieged by a smaller force with little supplies. Now that Caesar was on the run, many saw the war as essentially over. A couple of optimates in Pompey’s camp had actually begun fighting over who would succeed Caesar as pontifex maximus (essentially the head priest of Rome), focusing more on politics and their future ambitions than the conflict ahead.²⁷⁸ With a bright future apparently just ahead of them, frustration with Pompey and his strategy of attrition was only continuing to grow among the optimates.

First and foremost, Pompey had to worry about Cato (arguably the most well known optimate in Pompey’s camp). Even though Pompey and Cato were on the same side, tension between the two still existed from Pompey’s days in the First Triumvirate. Pompey feared that once Caesar was defeated, Cato would force him to lay down his command (and his authority

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 3.80.7

²⁷⁷ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 277.

²⁷⁸ Plutarch, *Pompey* 67.

along with it), so Pompey had been keeping him at a distance.²⁷⁹ This was another reason for his desire to prolong the war. Though he had managed to keep Cato at an arm's length, Pompey still had to deal with the optimates that had stayed with him in his own camp. Plutarch cites Domitius Ahenobarbus, an optimate and defender of the aristocracy, as referring to Pompey as “Agamemnon” (a mythical Greek leader that is known for being “vainglorious and overambitious”).²⁸⁰ Additionally, he cites Favonius, another optimate, as saying, “Men, will we have to go another year without gathering figs in Tusculum?”²⁸¹ All of this chatter was occurring as Pompey’s army chased Caesar to Pharsalus. Pompey’s war of attrition had had an unforeseen effect. It was no longer just about who could keep their army supplied longer, but also who could convince their men to stay loyal longer as well. Pompey was being set in on from all sides by his optimate allies. They all desired an end to the war, and saw their leader’s apprehension toward a final confrontation as selfish and as an obstacle to their ambitions. Despite his better judgement, and perhaps out of desperation to keep his camp and the optimates loyal and happy, Pompey conceded to the critics in his camp and decided to try and face Caesar in battle.

Though Caesar had been able to secure some supplies for his soldiers through his act of terror at Gomphi, he was surely still less well off than Pompey (who had yet to face the food shortages that Caesar had). Appian points out the disagreement amongst historians about just how many troops each side had exactly, but it is safe to say that Pompey had around double that of Caesar.²⁸² Pompey’s greatest advantage was still his cavalry, which greatly outnumbered Caesar’s. Caesar arrived first at Pharsalus and quickly acquired an advantageous position. He set

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Appian, *The Civil Wars* 70.1

up camp just north of a bridge that crossed the Enipeus river, which effectively blocked the way south and also secured him plenty of grain in the surround area.²⁸³ The cold of winter and spring had finally let up and summer had set in, allowing for grain fields to once again be plentiful.²⁸⁴ Pompey arrived and, after realizing that the way south had been blocked by enemy forces, set up camp upon a hill looking down at the river.

Caesar was ready for things to play out in the same way as they had so many times before, with both sides unwilling to make the first move. Pompey would deploy his troops, but keep them at the base of hill, which would force the Caesarian army to fight uphill and at a disadvantage.²⁸⁵ Caesar had no intention to advance then, since it would have led to a quick defeat for his much smaller force. Therefore, he planned to continue playing Pompey's game and remain on the run. His reasoning was like this: "...he would acquire readier access to grain supplies... while on the march he might find some opportunity to fight a battle... with those daily marches, he could wear out Pompey's army, which was unaccustomed to such exertion."²⁸⁶ At this point it is unlikely that Caesar was aware of the situation in his enemy's camp. He had no way of knowing that Pompey's own men had, in a way, turned on him and rejected his strategy. When Pompey had begun advancing from his advantageous position on the hill, Caesar had already given the order to begin packing up camp. Realizing that this might be his only chance, Caesar quickly readied his men for battle: "We need to put off our march for now and turn our thoughts to battle... Let's take courage and be prepared to fight. It will not be easy to find another chance later."²⁸⁷

²⁸³ "Web Essay," in *The Landmark*, 300.

²⁸⁴ Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life*, 422.

²⁸⁵ Caesar, *Civil War* 3.85.1

²⁸⁶ Caesar 3.85.2

²⁸⁷ Caesar 3.85.3

Though outright battle had not been Pompey's preferred plan, he still knew how to come up with an effective strategy that utilised his strengths. He approached Caesar with the river on his right flank, thereby making any attack from that direction infeasible. He had lined his troops up to face the enemy, but had done something slightly out of the ordinary that exploited his strength in numbers. His battle line was made up of cohorts, "... ten ranks deep, a much thicker formation than was usual."²⁸⁸ Caesar would have difficulty breaking through this line if he stuck to a frontal assault. Pompey's reinforced rear also insured that inexperienced troops would continue fighting, as there would be nowhere for them to go except forward and attack the enemy.

Goldsworthy does point out that Pompey's strategy came with its disadvantages, namely that troops in the back were under utilised and would not even be able to properly throw their pila at the enemy.²⁸⁹ However, Pompey was not relying on his infantry to win him the day; that burden went to his cavalry. It would be left up to his horsemen to overwhelm Caesar's own outnumbered cavalry and flank the enemy infantry on the right flank. Caesar's left flank was protected by the river, but his right flank was completely open. Since Roman soldiers held their shields with their left arm (as Pompey was clearly aware), their right flank was particularly vulnerable, especially to a cavalry charge.²⁹⁰ Even though his advance had lost him the advantage of an elevated position, Pompey was still able to use the geography around him in his favor.

²⁸⁸ Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life*, 425.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ Raaflaub, *Julius Caesar*, 464n11.86c.

Philip Freeman describes Pompey's plan as "...brilliant, innovative, and sure to succeed..."²⁹¹ Pompey was playing to his strengths, and covering his weaknesses. Caesar's infantry may have been more experienced, but fighting through a wall of infantry would be difficult for them, especially with cavalry harassing their exposed flank. Pompey's plan did have the unfortunate weakness of being heavily reliant on the success of the cavalry. If Caesar could find a way to beat them, he would have a chance at coming out victorious. He had to find a way to do so with his own, smaller force of cavalry.

As the two armies advanced toward each other, Caesar gave the order to charge. As they rushed forward, however, they noticed that Pompey's forces were not charging, and were instead waiting for Caesar's men to meet them. By not charging, Pompey was keeping his inexperienced troops in formation. He hoped that by the time the two armies clashed Caesar's troops would be tired from running.²⁹² Caesar chastises this move in his own commentary, saying that by forcing his men to remain stationary, Pompey was dampening the "...spirited energy and enthusiasm..." that is "...innate by nature in all men..."²⁹³ Even in this final confrontation, Pompey was showing his characteristic constraint and caution.

Upon recognizing Pompey's strategy (i.e. waiting for Caesar's troops to come to his)- Caesar says that his men collectively stopped on their own.²⁹⁴ This gave them time to rest before they continued their charge, hurling their spears at their enemy as they went. The two forces collided and switched to fighting with their swords. There was no turning back now, the future of the Roman Republic was to be decided here on the plains of Pharsalus. Though inexperienced,

²⁹¹ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 280.

²⁹² Caesar, *Civil War* 3.92.2

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3.92.4

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.93.1

Pompey's men were able to hold together while they waited for the cavalry to take the left flank. Plutarch states that Pompey was hesitant at first to bring up his right wing as he waited to see what his cavalry was doing.²⁹⁵ Luckily for him, his cavalry was seeing early success. Though inexperienced like the rest of his army, his cavalry was able to overwhelm Caesar's, who quickly began to give ground. As Pompey's cavalry advanced, his archers and other light infantry pressed forward behind them, intent on backing up the horsemen. Pompey was right to be cautious, as his entire plan relied on his cavalry being successful. Thankfully, they seemed to have been victorious, and victory within their grasp.

Pompey's cavalry chased down the retreating horsemen, and began to round Caesar's right flank. With Caesar's cavalry broken and his right flank completely open, it seemed (to Pompey's cavalry) that Caesar's demise was imminent. Suddenly, Caesar gave the signal, and a line of troops that had been lying in wait behind Caesar's main line (thus blocking them from the view) set upon the cavalry. Caesar had set his trap and Pompey's men had fallen right in. Caesar had ordered his men to hold on to their javelins and, instead of throwing them, use them as spears to stab up at the enemy cavalry.²⁹⁶ The tactic was extremely effective, and the tide of battle quickly began to turn in Caesar's favor. Before, Pompey's cavalry could rely on their superior numbers to make up for lack of experience, but now they were at a disadvantage. Caesar's men repeatedly stabbed upward, toward the faces of their enemies.²⁹⁷ The Roman javelin was not usually effective in hand to hand combat, as it was designed to break off after being thrown.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ Plutarch, *Pompey* 71

²⁹⁶ Appian, *Civil War* 2.78

²⁹⁷ Plutarch, *Pompey* 71

²⁹⁸ John Carter, trans., *Appian The Civil Wars* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 374n126.

In his commentary, Caesar does not mention ordering his troops to use them, but both Plutarch and Appian say that this was the case. If they were used in this manner, it was more likely that they were used for their psychological effect, as horses are generally afraid of spearmen.²⁹⁹ Pompey's cavalry quickly broke, and Caesar's infantry were able to set upon and break Pompey's now undefended light infantry as well. Pompey's caution and fear of engaging Caesar had not been misplaced. Caesar had taken his inferior numbers and turned the battle on his foe. By giving into the optimates, he had effectively spelled the beginning of the end.

The tables had been turned, and Pompey's forces now found themselves being outflanked. With the cavalry in flight and the light infantry broken, nothing could stop Caesar's forces from circling around Pompey's line and attacking them from the left. What was going through Pompey's head at this exact moment is uncertain, but he made no move to shift his strategy, either out of stubbornness or shock. Appian suggests that Pompey ordered his men to keep formation, wait for Caesar's troops to come to them, and repel the enemy with their own spears, but there are some problems with this.³⁰⁰ As was mentioned earlier, the Roman javelins were generally ineffective in hand to hand combat. Additionally, Appian contradicts himself, as he had earlier claimed that the two armies had been marching towards one another, bringing the authenticity of Appian's account into question.³⁰¹ Whatever the case, it seems that Pompey made no move to shift tactics as his left flank was taken and his men started to become overwhelmed. In Pompey's defense, there is little he could have done at this point except hope that his infantry could repel the enemy, as both his cavalry and light infantry had been routed and were fleeing the battlefield. He could only watch and hope for a miracle.

²⁹⁹ Raaflaub, *Julius Caesar*, 469n11.93i.

³⁰⁰ Appian, *The Civil Wars* 2.79

³⁰¹ Carter, *Appian The Civil*, 373n126.

That miracle never came, though. Caesar had ordered his third line (which had hung back and stayed out of the fighting until now) to enter the fray and put more pressure on the Pompeian forces. These fresh troops descended upon the exhausted enemy front line infantry which quickly began to fall apart. The fact that they had been flanked and could see that their cavalry was in full flight did little to help the quickly withering morale of Pompey's forces. Even though he had stacked his forces deep, Pompey's troops could not withstand Caesar's attack and their lines began to fall apart. Caesar states that once Pompey saw that his cavalry had fallen he had lost confidence in his ability to win, left the battlefield, and returned to his camp.³⁰² His initial strategy of waiting Caesar out had been completely sound. Even after giving into the optimates demands, Pompey's strategy for the Battle of Pharsalus was fairly commendable (the only mistake being that Pompey had made was he was overconfident in his cavalry's ability to carry out their orders effectively, and made no back up plan in the event that they failed). Watching his defeat unfold in front of him must have been extremely frustrating and heartbreaking.

Without their general, Pompey's forces were routed and began fleeing, many going back to the camp. With victory all but assured, Caesar ordered his forces to march up the hill and take the enemy camp. Some of Pompey's forces had stayed behind to guard the ramparts of the camp, but they too eventually succumbed to Caesar's attack and abandoned the camp's fortifications.³⁰³ Pompey had no intention of being captured by his former ally, and quickly fled with a number of horsemen to the sea.³⁰⁴ Once Caesar took the camp, many of the senators that had been staying with Pompey now joined Caesar (though they had little choice in the matter).³⁰⁵ Pompey wanted

³⁰² Caesar, *Civil War* 3.94.5

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 3.95.4

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.96.4

³⁰⁵ Freeman, *Julius Caesar*, 282.

to avoid a confrontation with Caesar, and now all the optimates in his camp who had doubted him were witnessing why. Pompey's instincts had been correct: a pitched battle with Caesar should have been avoided.

Throughout the Civil War, Pompey had shown himself to be an admirable match for Caesar. Time and time again his tactics were brought into question by his contemporaries, but looking back they make logical sense. Fleeing from Italy had been looked down upon, but Pompey knew that if he wanted to beat Caesar he needed to do so using numbers, and with the rest of Caesar's army sitting in Gaul it makes sense that Pompey would rather leave and return to Italy later. Caesar's victory in Spain cannot be seen as a failure on Pompey's part, as he had not been there to lead. In Greece, Pompey remained level headed, even when he was besieged at Dyrrachium. Though many looked at Pompey negatively for letting himself be sieged by a smaller force in the first place, it is easy to see that the siege was really a thinly veiled political move on Caesar's part. Pompey had all the supplies he needed, while it was Caesar who was running the risk of starvation. When it came time to fight, Pompey had arranged things favorably on the battlefield. But his greatest weakness, the inexperience of his troops, was exploited by the clever Caesar, which led to his downfall.

That is what it really comes down to, Pompey was a worse politician than Caesar. The two generals had very different approaches: Pompey was cautious and tended to hold back, while Caesar took risks and at times seemed to throw caution to the wind. Caesar's tactics (when they worked) garnered more positive press, but both approaches to warfare are valid as long as they see results. As for Pompey, his strategy had been working, but his weak skills as a politician and

his inability to ward off the optimates and their demands led to him abandoning his plans and eventually his defeat. While we will never know if Pompey's strategy would have led to Caesar's defeat, it is clear to see that Pompey was leading a successful, but unpopular campaign against Caesar, one that he was unable to defend against the optimate senators and war leaders.

Conclusion

The Battle of Pharsalus did not mark the end of the Civil War, but it was essentially the end of Pompey. While he had managed to avoid capture at Pharsalus, his time soon ran out. Pompey fled to Egypt, where perhaps he had planned to raise a new army against Caesar.³⁰⁶ He never got the chance however, as when he reached the shores of Egypt, he was betrayed. He had prepared to meet with Egypt's young ruler Ptolemy, but was killed in an attempt to win favor with Caesar. Ptolemy's men beheaded the former consul of Rome, and unceremoniously threw his body out to sea.³⁰⁷ It was truly a tragic end for one who had once been called the Roman Alexander.

Caesar arrived in Egypt shortly after looking for Pompey, and was presented with his head. Ptolemy and his advisors quickly regretted their decision, as Caesar looked at them with fury and pain in his eyes. Dio states that, "...Caesar at the sight of Pompey's head wept and lamented bitterly, calling him countryman and son-in-law, and enumerating all the kindnesses they had shown for each other. As for the murderers... he actually heaped reproaches upon them..."³⁰⁸ This was not the end that Caesar wanted for his ally turned rival. It is ironic, and horribly cruel, that Pompey's death was used in a failed political move.

It truly was an unfitting end to someone who had achieved so much. When compared to Caesar, Pompey's journey to the forefront of the Roman consciousness is truly astonishing. Starting at such a young age, Pompey saw military success everywhere he went. When it comes down to it, Pompey was the perfect choice to face Caesar. Pompey had travelled all across Rome, and fought on both its eastern and western borders. In terms of experience, there was no

³⁰⁶ Plutarch, *Pompey* 77

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 79

³⁰⁸ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 42.8.1

other Roman general at that time with more experience than Pompey. Over the course of his career as a military commander, Pompey learned the importance of caution, especially when dealing with a tricky foe. His approach to Caesar was therefore very similar to his approach to Sertorius; it was a slow war of attrition, which did not bring much glory, but it was an effective tactic nonetheless. Indeed, over the course of the Civil War Pompey showed himself to be more than adept at dealing with the troublesome Caesar. Whenever Pompey was in direct control, he defeated Caesar handily, whether it be the siege of Brundisium or Dyrrachium. He showed himself capable against Caesar's famed speed, even beating him on multiple occasions. He even had Caesar on the run nearing the end of his days, with Caesar having to abandon his ideals, raiding villages and scrounging for food. If there was anyone who could have defeated Caesar, Pompey sat at the top of the list.

Unfortunately, Pompey's military success and experience did not help him when it came to being a politician. Without his army at his back, Pompey quickly learned how difficult it was to get the senate to do what he wanted, especially when there was a coalition of hostile optimates against him. He repeatedly showed his political ineptitude through failed speeches, publicity stunts, and horrible choices in allies. When Pompey tried to blaze his own way through Roman politics, he failed miserably, and it was not until Caesar approached him with an alliance that he began to see success. Caesar used him as a tool, for the weight of Pompey's achievements were great to have as support. As the relationship between Caesar and Pompey broke down, the optimates dove in to dig their claws into the Roman Alexander, and use him as their tool instead.

Perhaps if the optimates had actually allowed Pompey to carry out the war they gave to him, he may not have come to such a despicable fate. Pompey's failure to persuade and stand up

to the optimates in his camp at the end of the Civil War highlights his failings as a politician. By giving in to the optimates' demands of a swift end to the war, Pompey had essentially signed his own death warrant. For while his battle strategy at Pharsalus had been commendable, Caesar had a trick up his sleeve, just as Pompey had most likely feared, and stole the victory from him. The cautious Pompey that we had seen up until Pharsalus had been replaced with the reckless one we saw against Sertorius, and just like in Spain Pompey's disregard for caution proved to be disastrous.

The question of whether or not Pharsalus was Caesar's victory or Pompey's failure comes down to political ability as much as it does military strategy. Pompey's failure to stand up to the optimates was simply Pompey's final blunder as a politician. Up until Pharsalus, it seemed like Pompey had Caesar on the ropes. Caesar's military victory could not have come without Pompey's political failure. Pompey's title is fitting, for his fall was truly great. While he may have been defeated in the end, the successes of Pompey the Great should not be forgotten, for his military achievements are on par with that of Caesar's. What Caesar had over Pompey, and why we remember his deeds greater than Pompey's, were his skills as a politician and unwillingness to give in to his opponents.

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