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Pharsalus 48 BC

Caesar and Pompey – Clash of the Titans



Si Sheppard • Illustrated by Adam Hook



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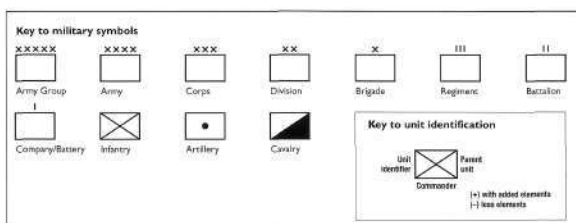
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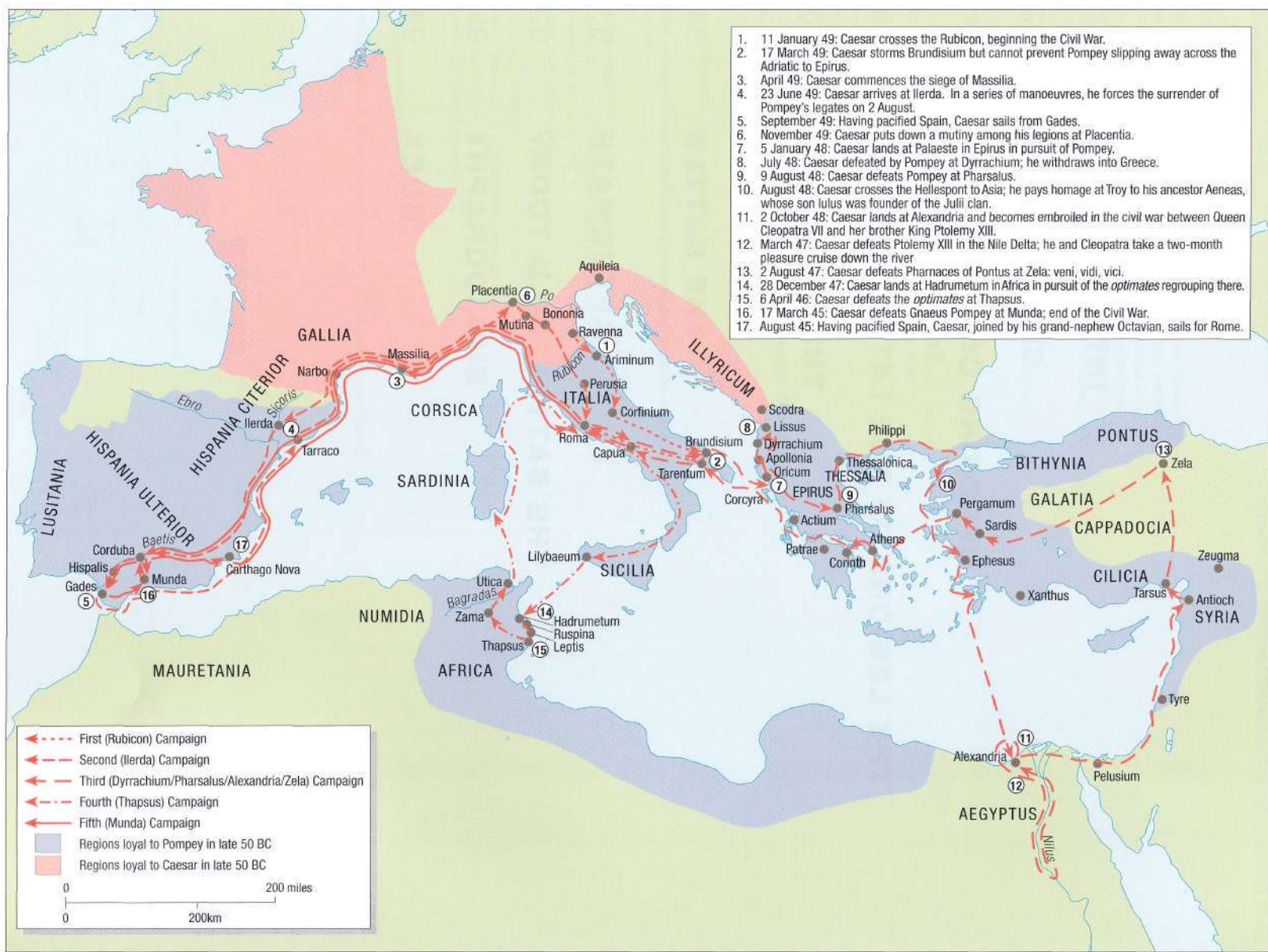


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CAESAR'S FIVE CAMPAIGNS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

- 11 January 49: Caesar crosses the Rubicon, beginning the Civil War.
- 17 March 49: Caesar storms Brundisium but cannot prevent Pompey slipping away across the Adriatic to Epirus.
- April 49: Caesar commences the siege of Massilia.
- 23 June 49: Caesar arrives at Ilerda. In a series of manoeuvres, he forces the surrender of Pompey's legates on 2 August.
- September 49: Having pacified Spain, Caesar sails from Gades.
- November 49: Caesar puts down a mutiny among his legions at Placentia.
- 5 January 48: Caesar lands at Palaeste in Epirus in pursuit of Pompey.
- July 48: Caesar defeated by Pompey at Dyrrachium; he withdraws into Greece.
- 9 August 48: Caesar defeats Pompey at Pharsalus.
- August 48: Caesar crosses the Hellespont to Asia; he pays homage at Troy to his ancestor Aeneas, whose son Iulus was founder of the Julii clan.
- 2 October 48: Caesar lands at Alexandria and becomes embroiled in the civil war between Queen Cleopatra VII and her brother King Ptolemy XIII.
- March 47: Caesar defeats Ptolemy XIII in the Nile Delta; he and Cleopatra take a two-month pleasure cruise down the river.
- 2 August 47: Caesar defeats Pharnaces of Pontus at Zela: *veni, vidi, vici*.
- 28 December 47: Caesar lands at Hadrumetum in Africa in pursuit of the *optimates* regrouping there.
- 6 April 46: Caesar defeats the *optimates* at Thapsus.
- 17 March 45: Caesar defeats Gnaeus Pompey at Munda; end of the Civil War.
- August 45: Having pacified Spain, Caesar, joined by his grand-nephew Octavian, sails for Rome.



← First (Rubicon) Campaign
- - - Second (Ilerda) Campaign
← Third (Dyrrachium/Pharsalus/Alexandria/Zeta) Campaign
← Fourth (Thapsus) Campaign
← Fifth (Munda) Campaign
 Regions loyal to Pompey in late 50 BC
 Regions loyal to Caesar in late 50 BC

0 200 miles
 0 200 km

INTRODUCTION: TO THE RUBICON

The legend SPQR – *Senatus Populusque Romanus*, the Senate and People of Rome – emblazoned on the standards of the city's all-conquering legions in the last few centuries before Christ was both a potent symbol of the source of the republic's power and a reflection of the smouldering tension inherent in its system of government.

This partnership between the haves and have-nots of the republic enabled it to survive defeats that would have fatally crippled more hierarchical states and to ultimately emerge as master of the Mediterranean world. But its very success proved the undoing of this system. Exploitation of the opportunities made available from conquest drove a wedge between the partners, one that widened until the conflict-resolution mechanisms of the political process broke down completely and force became the sole means of securing and retaining power.

It was for this reason that on the morning of the ninth day of the month Sextilis in the year 706 *ab urbe condita*, since the founding of the city of Rome, two armies, both Roman, faced off against each other on the narrow plain north of the River Enipeus in Thessaly, Greece. The battle fought that day – more properly named Palaepharsalus, after the ancient city in the foothills on the northern edge of the plain, rather than Pharsalus (modern Farsala) south of the river – was the culmination of a process of social disintegration that had been unfolding for nigh on 100 years. The two protagonists involved, Julius Caesar and Gnaeus Pompey, the greatest warlords the city of Rome had ever produced, were bringing to a climax a social struggle that had been playing out for generations, and doing so on an unprecedented scale, pitting more of their fellow citizens against each other on a single field than had ever been witnessed before. The significance of this battle may be appreciated from the fact that to this day the date we assign to it – 9 August, 48 BC – is based upon a calendar drawn up by the victor.

Rome's constitution, the basis for the legal and political structure that emerged after the expulsion of the city's last king in 509 BC, represented a series of compromises between the patricians, who aspired to centralize power within their own oligarchic elite, and the plebeians, who demanded popular representation in government. What emerged was a model of divided government. The plebeians conceded elite guidance of state policy, both in the collegial atmosphere of the senate and through the informal monopolization of the offices of the republic by the established families, in return for the enfranchisement of the tribal assemblies and the veto power of the tribunes.

This system of checks and balances did succeed in keeping a lid on the smouldering antagonism between the two halves of the political equation. These internal divisions were further sublimated during Rome's succession of life-or-death struggles with an ever widening circle



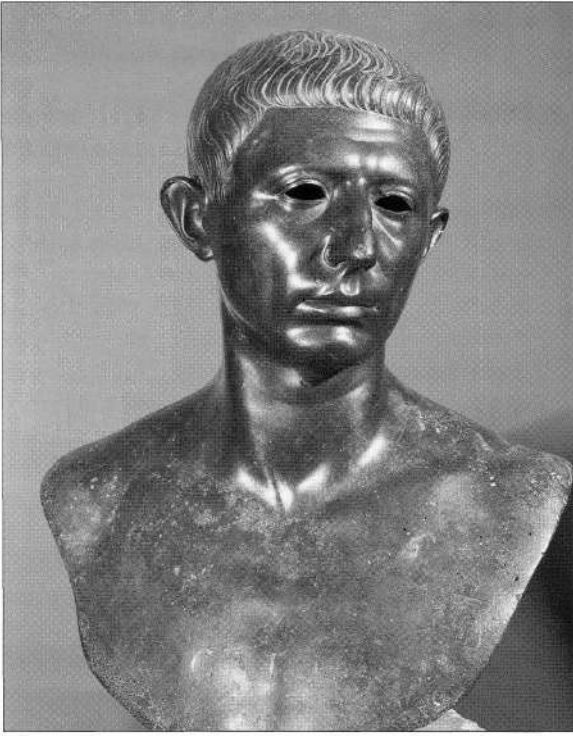
FAR LEFT The coins of Rome, issued by private mints, were vital in conveying propaganda throughout a largely illiterate republic. Here Sulla is depicted as imperator returning in triumph after his victory over Mithridates. (© Andreas Pangerl, www.romancoins.info)

LEFT Sulla was the first of Rome's warlords to march on the city itself. Though far from unprovoked – his command having been revoked by Marius on dubious grounds – his action had a corrosive effect on the integrity of the republic. The phrase 'Sulla did it – why can't I?' became proverbial among the ambitious. (© Andreas Pangerl, www.romancoins.info)

of neighbours, first to survive as an independent state and then, as success bred success, to impose the *Pax Romana* over the known world. By 146 the republic had triumphed over all her foes: she had repelled the barbarian Celts; subdued her Italian kin, the Etruscans and Samnites; seen off the interloper Pyrrhus of Epirus; triumphed over Carthage in two epic wars; and humbled the heirs of Alexander in Macedon and Seleucia. In that year two watershed events – the final annihilation of Carthage and the subordination of Greece – symbolized the climax of this phase of expansion. In the brief pause that ensued while assimilating these fresh triumphs and before seeking new worlds to conquer Rome could at last draw breath and reflect on what this transition from city state to multinational empire meant for the social fabric of the republic.

There was one man perceptive enough to appreciate that, beneath its glittering façade, the foundations of the republic were under mounting stress. The backbone of the Roman military machine were the yeoman peasantry, the self-sufficient farmers who traditionally had been conscripted for the campaign season then released to work their family plots. But as the campaigns stretched out ever longer, both in terms of duration and distance from Italy, many of them were spending years away from their families, returning as heroes only to find their farms had fallen into debt or disrepair and had been incorporated into the great estates, or *latifundia*, of the aristocracy. In order to make the land economically viable the new owners had a ready source of manpower available; the very slaves the armies of Rome were sending home by the thousand from each successful campaign. Victims of their own success, homeless legionaries and their families were becoming an increasingly common sight on the streets of Rome.

Tiberius Gracchus understood the root cause of this distress and, upon being elected tribune of the people for 133, resolved to do something about it. He was successful in pushing through land-reform legislation but his innovations inflamed the jealousy and suspicion of the aristocracy whose collective interests found political expression in the senate. Tiberius was murdered in a partisan brawl and his supporters purged. It was an ominous precedent, for the person of the tribune was supposed to be inviolate. Now that an issue had been resolved through violence, the psychological barriers against resorting to its use would be correspondingly lower next time. This was the beginning of the downward spiral for the rule of law in Rome. The next stage in the cycle



Marcus Cato the Younger, the conscience of the republic and dedicated antagonist of Caesar throughout his career. (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

was reached when Gaius Gracchus, the younger brother of Tiberius, pushed for further reform as tribune in 123 and 122. He made the same enemies among the aristocracy and he, too, paid for it with his life.

Two distinct factions were emerging on opposite sides of the fault line that was growing ominously wider in Roman society. On one side were the *optimates*, the self-proclaimed best men of the aristocracy who dominated the senate. On the other were the *populares*, the self-appointed representatives of the people, who used their appeal in the assemblies to challenge the oligarchy's monopoly of power.

If by their responsibility for the deaths of the Gracchi the *optimates* had earned the hatred of the plebeians, they earned their contempt by the mismanagement of the war against King Jugurtha of Numidia which broke out in 110. The senate's ineptitude, susceptibility to bribery and complicity in assassination led to the election as consul in 107 of a *novus homo* (new man) named Gaius Marius.

In order to bring Jugurtha to heel Marius recruited a new model army that for the first time

abolished the property clause qualification for service, enabling the enlistment of the *capite censi*, those too poor to afford their own armour or weapons. This class included many of the dispossessed former legionaries from the country. Having outfitted these men at the state's expense, Marius gave them a new lease of life by leading them on campaign.

In the event there was little campaigning to do in Africa; a young nobleman named Lucius Cornelius Sulla induced Jugurtha's father-in-law to hand the king over to Rome. But the state would soon have need to call on Marius again. He was elected to the first of an unprecedented five consecutive consulships in 105 to deal with a new barbarian threat from the north. Two migrating tribes, the Teutones and the Cimbri, during the course of their debouch through western Europe, had inflicted a series of stinging defeats on the Roman armies sent to stop them. Marius retrained and re-equipped the legions and when the tribes marched on Italy he annihilated them at Aquae Sextae (102) and Vercellae (101).

Once the external threat receded, internal conflict erupted again. Rome's Italian allies, frustrated at being denied citizenship, seceded in 91, sparking the Social War. Marius was competent but cautious in the field compared to the bold leadership of Sulla. Accordingly, in 88 the senate voted Sulla the command of the army marching east to subdue King Mithridates of Pontus. Marius conspired with the assemblies to have the Asian command transferred to him. But he had underestimated the political implications of extending recruitment to the *capite censi*. These men were loyal to their commander, not the state. When Sulla refused to surrender control of the army his legions marched on Rome. Having imposed his authority, and with Marius on the run for his life, Sulla at last departed for the east. He drove Mithridates out of Greece and had



Detail from *The Battle of Vercellae* (1729) by Giovanni Tiepolo. Although this baroque artwork contains numerous anachronisms it captures the essence of this overwhelming Roman victory, which eliminated the barbarian threat to the republic once and for all. (Author's collection)

crossed the Hellespont when news arrived that Marius had rallied the *populares*' cause and retaken Rome. Sulla postponed the final reckoning with Mithridates to return home. By the time he arrived Marius was dead but his *populares* faction had to be defeated in a ferocious battle at the Colline gate of Rome before Sulla could enter the city, liquidate his opponents, and have himself appointed dictator in order to undertake constitutional reforms that dramatically enhanced the political power of the *optimates*.

After the death of Sulla, power theoretically returned to the senate but this body, unsure of its position, leaned on the military prowess of two of Sulla's lieutenants. One of these, Gnaeus Pompey, wiped out the *populares* diehards in Sicily and Africa easily enough but in Spain he struggled to suppress the Marian general Sertorius, a brilliant guerrilla leader. He returned to Italy in 71 to find the country still in an uproar over the slave revolt of the gladiator Spartacus, who had repeatedly swept aside the best Rome could throw at him. Sulla's other would-be successor, the plutocrat Marcus Crassus, had finally succeeded in running Spartacus to ground. Pompey arrived in time to sweep up the remnants. He and Crassus shared the consulship in 70 but it was Pompey to whom the

senate turned to deal with the pirates who were plaguing the Mediterranean. Granted extraordinary powers Pompey scourged the sea lanes of this threat within weeks. He was next granted command in Asia to replace Licinius Lucullus and finally bring Mithridates to heel. Pompey far exceeded his brief; brushing aside Mithridates, who was hounded into suicide, he subdued Armenia, drove deep into the Caucasus, annexed Syria and conquered Judea. An immensely wealthy Pompey returned to Rome in 62 hailed as the new Alexander but was unable to come to terms with the senate, which, inspired by the Stoic Cato the Younger, rejected his settlement of the eastern frontier and refused to grant land to his demobilized veterans.

Pompey needed support. He turned to Crassus, and through him to the nephew of Marius who had inherited the remnant of the *populares* faction, Julius Caesar.

Caesar was the scion of an ancient family whose connections, along with a series of advantageous marriages and an outrageous amount of vote-buying, had secured him a series of magistracies and priesthoods, including the office of Pontifex Maximus. Caesar was so deeply in debt he needed the backing of Crassus to take up proconsular authority in Spain, where he displayed a talent for swift and decisive action.

Returning to Rome Caesar prevailed upon Crassus and Pompey to join with him in a mutually advantageous relationship known to history

as the First Triumvirate. With the support of his partners, Caesar was elected consul for 59. In office he rammed Pompey's eastern settlement and land-bonus legislation through a cowed senate. To seal the bond between them Pompey took Caesar's daughter Julia as his wife. Caesar appointed himself proconsular authority in the provinces of Cisalpine Gaul, Illyricum and Gallia Narbonensis for five years.

Caesar had orchestrated the formation of the Triumvirate very much as the junior partner. His achievements in Gaul made him at least the equal of his peers in both military reputation and financial resources. In a series of lightning campaigns that combined his instinctive tactical genius with a total disregard for human life, Caesar completely overran Gaul, eliminating a threat that had hung over Rome since the time she had been saved by her geese centuries earlier. In carefully crafted dispatches home Caesar thrilled his fellow citizens by recounting his bridging of the Rhine to campaign in Germany and his crossing the Channel to reconnoitre Britain, exploits that possessed no strategic value but served solely to enhance his own legend by burnishing the glory of Rome.

In 56 the Triumvirate was renewed at a conference in Luca. Crassus and Pompey would take office as consuls the following year; Caesar would be granted an extension of his Gallic command for an additional five years; Pompey would be granted proconsular authority in Spain, Crassus in Syria. But the arrangement began to break down in 54. Julia died in childbirth and with her the bond between her husband and father. Crassus, meanwhile, had taken it upon himself to gratuitously invade Rome's new neighbour, Parthia. In 53 his army was shot to pieces by Parthian archers at Carrhae and his head wound up serving as a prop in a royal theatrical performance.

The beauty of the Triumvirate was its inherent stability; no one member could stand against the other two. But now Crassus was no longer available as a counterweight if Caesar and Pompey were to fall out. And there were powerful forces determined to bring about exactly this scenario. Caesar had many enemies in the senate who were determined to thwart his ambition to return to Rome and, with all the resources of Gaul behind him, seek the consulship. They were determined to strike him at his most vulnerable. By denying him the right to seek office in absentia they would force him to come to Rome to campaign in person after he had laid down his Gallic command. Stripped of the immunity of office – and more importantly, of his legions – he would be open to prosecution for his manifold offences. But to make this strategy viable the *optimates* would need the support of



The Triumph of Marius by Giovanni Tiepolo (1729). The victories of this *novus homo* at Aquae Sextae and Vercellae made him the leading man in Rome; his actions over the balance of his career would tip the republic into chaos. (Author's collection)



Genocide as propaganda: the Roman elephant crushes the Gallic serpent. The sale of slaves captured during his Gallic campaigns made Caesar wealthy enough to play the dangerous game of Roman politics. (© Andreas Pangerl, www.romancoins.info)

Although originally a political match, Pompey's marriage to Cornelia blossomed into a genuine relationship; his first priority after Pharsalus was to be reunited with his wife, as depicted in Titian's sentimental portrait. (Scala/Art Resource, NY)



Pompey, whom they prevailed upon to understand that Caesar was no longer his partner but his rival.

In part this gravitation towards Pompey on the part of the *optimates* was necessitated by the near anarchy prevailing in Rome. In the words of the historian Appian, by the late 50s 'the republic had for some time been in a chaotic and unmanageable state. The magistrates were elected by violence or corruption, with criminal fanaticism and the use of stones or swords; the shameless offering of bribes now reached extreme levels.' In the aftermath of one particularly savage street brawl the partisans of the losing demagogue broke into the senate house and piled up the benches to make a funeral pyre, burning down the building in the process. On the advice of Cato, in 52 Pompey was elected sole consul to restore order in the capital; as if this were not enough he was also granted proconsular command of Spain for five years, the irreconcilability of these offices being circumvented by Pompey's being permitted to remain in Rome and govern the province through his legates. Pompey was moving away from Caesar; his new wife, Cornelia, was the daughter of a leading *optimatus*, Metellus Scipio.

Caesar's declared intention was to proceed directly from his Gallic command into a second consulship, standing for election *in absentia* and remaining in Gaul until he could enter Rome to celebrate his triumph and take office as consul on the same day, just as Pompey had done at the end of 71. As a magistrate he would be immune to prosecution prior to his undertaking a fresh command.

At a meeting of the senate on 29 September 51, Pompey made his position clear: it would be legitimate to appoint a successor to Caesar at any time after 1 March of the following year. When asked what he would do if Caesar retained his army and sought the consulship, Pompey gave the mild but meaningful reply, 'You might as well ask what if my son chooses to raise a stick against me?'

Caesar struck back against his foes in the senate by deploying the weapon of choice in Roman politics: massive bribery. One of the consuls elected to serve in the year 50 was his bitter enemy Gaius Marcellus, but the other, Lucius Aemilius Paullus, was in his pocket. More importantly, Caesar's Gallic treasure secured him the advocacy of the tribune Gaius Scribonius Curio, who wielded his veto power extensively in defence of his patron when debate over Caesar's future recommenced in the senate on 1 March.

That summer the senate decreed that both Pompey and Caesar should each send a legion to the east in preparation for a campaign against Parthia. Caesar complied, but Pompey chose this moment to ask for the return of a legion he had loaned to the Gallic campaign years earlier, meaning Caesar lost two legions. Adding insult to injury the legions were never dispatched to the east but remained in Capua.

As the deadlock persisted the portents for civil war grew increasingly ominous. 'I do not see peace



According to tradition, Caesar crossed the River Rubicon here at the modern town of Savignano-Sul-Rubicone. As this photo indicates, the river was certainly no physical obstacle; but for its significance as a psychological barrier it has become proverbial. (Courtesy Milko Anselmi)



Close up of the bridge at Savignano-Sul-Rubicone. The current span is a modern replica of the republican original, which was destroyed in an Allied bombing raid during World War II. (Courtesy Milko Anselmi)

into next year', one of Cicero's correspondents lamented in August, reflecting a no-doubt widespread anguish. 'Nor have I found any plan to adopt for my own situation; and I am sure that resolving this question will trouble you as well. For I have obligations and close relationships with the one group, whereas I love the other cause but hate the men.' The length and breadth of the republic, from all social strata, citizens were forced to take sides, decisions that cut across friendships and families. Few faced a more poignant choice than Marcus Brutus; his mother, Servilia, was Caesar's mistress but he sided with the *optimates*, even though Pompey had been responsible for the death of his father when he backed the losing faction in the ensuing power vacuum after the death of Sulla.

Pompey himself remained remarkably sanguine about the situation. When some pointed out that if Caesar were to march on Rome they



could not see how he could be stopped, Pompey jovially replied that, 'whenever I stamp with my foot in any part of Italy there will rise up forces in an instant.'

On 1 December Curio made a last bid to reach a compromise. He introduced a motion that both Caesar and Pompey lay down their proconsular commands simultaneously. The senate, eager even at this stage to seize hold of any way out of the impasse, voted in favour by a margin of 370 votes to 22. Cicero articulated the guilt behind their decision when he confessed: 'It is more expedient to concede Caesar's demands than to fight, for it is too late in the day for us to resist a force which we have been building up against ourselves for ten years.' But the consul Marcellus was made of sterner stuff. He responded by dismissing the senate with the imprecation: 'You have won Caesar for your master.' Then, amid wild rumours that Caesar was already marching on Italy, he proceeded to Pompey's villa, presented him with a sword, and charged him with the defence of the republic.

By this stage Pompey was committed to the inevitability of a confrontation with Caesar. Although previously content with merely indulging the no-compromises policy of the *optimates*, he now actively conspired against Caesar, levying troops and stiffening the spine of senatorial backsliders like Cicero, whose doubts melted away under the direct influence of the great man's charisma. Describing Pompey in a personal interview on 25 December as 'quite contemptuous' of Caesar and confident in the strength of the republic, Cicero couldn't help but note his gathering relief, 'as I heard such a man, courageous,

Cicero denounces the conspiracy of Catiline to the Senate.

Typically, the crisis escalated into insurrection and was only put down by force. With its political institutions rendered impotent and military power the only source of authority the republic was clearly dying.
(© AAA Collection)

experienced and supreme in prestige, discoursing in such a statesmanlike fashion on the dangers of a false peace.'

Caesar had in fact advanced only as far as Ravenna, where Curio personally brought him news of developments. Caesar sent a counter-proposal: if he were allowed to retain just two legions and remain governor of Cisalpine Gaul and Illyricum prior to entering upon his consulship he would surrender Transalpine Gaul and the legions stationed there. When the consuls again turned him down Caesar sent Curio back to Rome with a manifesto that was delivered on 1 January, the day the new consuls took office. Caesar reiterated all he done on behalf of the republic but concluded with an ominous ultimatum: 'that he would lay down his command at the same time as Pompey, but that if Pompey should retain his command he would not lay down his own, but would come quickly and avenge his country's wrongs and his own.'

The following day the senate voted that Caesar must disband his army by 1 March or be considered a traitor. The resolution was immediately vetoed by the new tribunes, Marcus Antonius and Quintus Cassius Longinus, loyal to Caesar.

The senate did not meet on the 3rd or 4th but when debate resumed on the 5th it was no less heated. On the 7th, with Pompey's troops filling

A vignette from Lucan's *Civil War* depicted in an 18th-century print by Richard Westall; Caesar is momentarily halted on the banks of the Rubicon by 'a mighty image of his country in distress, grief in her face.' (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery/The Bridgeman Art Library)



the city, Antony and Longinus were warned not to attend the senate. Taking the hint, they fled Rome, taking Curio with them, all three disguised as slaves. In their absence the *senatus consultum ultimum* was passed, branding Caesar an outlaw.

Caesar learned of the senate's decree later that same day. If he had not already determined that his honour, his rights, even his life could only be defended by force he did so now. And for Caesar the best mode of defence was always attack. He had eight legions in Gaul, of which the VIII and XII were already on the march at his summons, but only one, the XIII, was currently on hand in Ravenna, giving him at most 5,000 men and 300 cavalry with which to start a war. It was not much on paper; but Caesar had counted on his *fortuna* to narrow the odds in his favour before. And he knew that because of the entrenched political divisions within Roman society he remained a hero among the *populares* and would be greeted by many throughout Italy not as an enemy of the republic but as a champion of the people. The *optimates* never appreciated this. 'All persons under legal sentence or censorial stigma are on Caesar's side,' Cicero sniffed in December, 'as are all who deserve one or the other, nearly all the youth, all the desperate city rabble, some tribunes, all the debt-ridden. In fact Caesar's side lacks nothing but a cause: all else they have in abundance.' Once the senatorial elite gave the *populares* their cause – the Civil War – Caesar would not lack for moral or physical support.

On 11 January Caesar ordered the XIII legion to march the 25 miles (40km) down the Via Popillia from Ravenna and camp on the north bank of the River Rubicon, which represented the frontier between Gaul and Italy. A handful of men, dressed in civilian clothing, went ahead to infiltrate Arminium (Rimini), the first town on the Italian side of the border. Caesar spent the rest of the day very visible to the public, enjoying gladiatorial games. In the evening, making excuses that he felt unwell, he slipped away from dinner early. Leaving his companions to their meal, he climbed into a two-horse carriage and set out for Arminium, followed at a distance by the cavalry. At the crossing of the Rubicon he hesitated for a moment on its banks to reflect. The river was no physical hurdle, but it represented a tremendous psychological barrier; by crossing it Caesar would be accepting that he was no longer a servant but an enemy of the republic. Sometime around midnight on the morning of 12 January 49 BC, the commitment was made; with the remark 'let the die be cast' (either in Latin, *Alea jaecta est*, or Greek, *Anerriphtho kubos*), Caesar crossed and the Civil War began.

CHRONOLOGY

PRE-50BC

146 BC	Sack of Carthage and Corinth; Rome is master of the Mediterranean world
133 BC	Tiberius Gracchus elected tribune of the people, initiates reform programme
132 BC	Murder of Tiberius Gracchus
124 BC	Gaius Gracchus elected tribune of the people
121 BC	Civil strife and suicide of Gaius Gracchus
110 BC	Outbreak of Jugurthine War
107 BC	Marius elected to first consulship
106 BC	Birth of Pompey and Cicero
105 BC	Marius brings the Jugurthine War to a successful conclusion
105–101 BC	Marius elected to five consecutive consulships to deal with the threat of the Cimbri and Teutones; victories at Aquae Sextae (102) and Vercellae (101)
100 BC	Birth of Julius Caesar
91–89 BC	The Social War between Rome and her Italian allies
88 BC	Command in the campaign against Mithridates of Pontus given to Sulla; Marius has the decision reversed; Sulla marches on Rome; flight of Marius; Sulla departs for the East
87 BC	Marius returns to Rome; defeat and massacre of Sullan supporters
86 BC	Marius holds seventh consulship; death of Marius
83 BC	Sulla returns to Rome; defeat and massacre of Marian supporters
82–79 BC	Dictatorship of Sulla
78 BC	Death of Sulla
77–71 BC	Pompey campaigns in Spain against Marian remnant under Sertorius
73 BC	Outbreak of third war with Mithridates
73–71 BC	Revolt of Spartacus; final defeat by Crassus
70 BC	First consulship of Crassus and Pompey
67 BC	Pompey given extraordinary powers against the pirates
66 BC	Pompey given extraordinary powers against Mithridates
64 BC	Pompey subdues Pontus, Armenia, Syria and Judea; reorganizes the East
63 BC	The consul Cicero suppresses the conspiracy of Catiline
62 BC	Pompey returns to Rome; the Senate refuses to ratify his eastern settlement and rejects land grants for his veterans
60 BC	Formation of First Triumvirate; Pompey, Crassus, and Caesar
59 BC	Caesar elected consul; Pompey's demands met; Pompey marries Caesar's daughter Julia; Caesar receives the provinces of Cisalpine Gaul, Illyricum, and Gallia Narbonensis for five years
58–51 BC	Caesar conquers Gaul; crosses Rhine into Germany; crosses Channel into Britain
56 BC	Triumvirate renewed at conference of Luca
55 BC	Second consulship of Crassus and Pompey; Caesar receives Gaul for an additional five years; Pompey receives Spain; Crassus receives Syria
54 BC	Death of Julia; Crassus invades Parthia

- 53 BC** Defeat and death of Crassus at Carrhae
- 52 BC** Political street-fighting creates anarchy at Rome; Pompey elected sole consul and given a five-year command in Spain
- 51 BC** Pompey approves a law sponsored by Caesar's enemies in the Senate requiring a five-year interval between holding a magistracy and being appointed to a province

50 BC

The crisis over Caesar's political future deepens

- 1 December* The Senate votes 370–22 in favour of Curio's motion that both Caesar and Pompey lay down their commands; Marcellus dismisses the Senate

49 BC

- 2 January* The Senate passes a decree requiring Caesar to lay down his command by 1 March or be considered an enemy of the republic; the motion is vetoed by the tribunes Antony and Cassius
- 7 January* The Senate passes its ultimate decree; flight of Antony and Longinus
- 11 January* Caesar leaves Ravenna; he crosses the Rubicon that night
- 12 January* Caesar takes Arminium
- 13 January* Caesar takes Fanum
- 14 January* Caesar takes Ancona
- 15 January* Antony seizes Arretium
- 17 January* Pompey leaves Rome
- 21 January* Curio occupies Iguvium
- 3 February* Caesar takes Firmum
- 6 February* Caesar takes Castrum Truentium
- 15 February* Caesar reaches Corfinium
- 19 February* Pompey leaves Luceria for Brundisium
- 21 February* Corfinium surrenders
- 4 March* The consuls sail from Brundisium
- 9 March* Caesar reaches Brundisium
- 17 March* Pompey evacuates Brundisium; Caesar enters the city the next day
- 1 April* Caesar returns to Rome
- 19 April* Caesar arrives at Massilia; the siege commences
- 23 April* Cato flees Sicily to join Pompey
- 5 June* Caesar departs Massilia for Spain
- 23 June* Caesar arrives at Ilerda
- 27 June* Battle at Ilerda
- 28 June* Destruction of Fabius' bridges
- 10 July* Caesar's new bridge constructed
- 19 July* Caesar begins to divert the Sicoris
- 25 July* Pompeians quit Ilerda
- 29 July* Pompeians brought to bay in camp
- 2 August* Pompeians surrender; Caesar is master of Spain
- Mid August* Campaigning in Africa, Curio is annihilated by King Juba of Numidia
- Late October* Caesar arrives at Massilia to oversee the surrender of the city
- Early December* Caesar returns to Rome; Pompey declared supreme commander of the republic at Beroea; begins march to Epirus



This 1st century BC relief from Hispalis (Seville) of two legionaries shows them equipped with leg greaves, which only officers still wore by the outbreak of the Civil War. (© AAA Collection)

Apart from his missing *caliga* (sandals), this modern statue portrays a legionary of Caesar's day in full combat array, armed with *pilum* (javelin) and *gladius* (sword) and protected by his *scutum* (shield), chain-mail armour and helmet of Coolus or Montefortino type. (The Art Archive/Museo della Civiltà Romana/Dagli Orti)



48 BC

4 January	Caesar departs Brundisium for Greece
5 January	Caesar lands at Palaeste
Early January	Caesar seizes Oricum and Apollonia
Mid January	Caesar and Pompey face off on the banks of the Apsus
10 April	Antony lands with reinforcements at Nymphæum
Mid April	Caesar and Pompey race for Dyrrachium; siege begins
1 July	Caesar's attack on Dyrrachium, Pompey's failed breakout attempt
9 July	Caesar defeated; he withdraws from Dyrrachium
13 July	Caesar reaches Apollonia
21 July	Domitius marches from neighbourhood of Heraclia to join Caesar
27 July	Caesar and Domitius rendezvous at Aeginium
29 July	Caesar reaches and sacks Gomphi
30 July	Caesar reaches Metropolis
1 August	Caesar makes camp on the plain of Pharsalus
5 August	Pompey makes camp on the plain of Pharsalus
9 August	Battle of Pharsalus
28 September	Pompey assassinated
2 October	Caesar lands at Alexandria; beginning of Alexandrine War
November– December	Flight and death of Longinus; collapse of Caesarian position in Spain

47 BC

27 March	Caesar restores the throne of Egypt to Cleopatra
7 June	Caesar departs Alexandria
2 August	Battle of Zela; <i>veni, vidi, vici</i>
24 September	Caesar lands at Tarentum on his return to Rome
17 December	The African campaign commences; Caesar arrives at Lilybaeum
25 December	Caesar sails for Africa
28 December	Caesar lands at Hadrumetum

46 BC

2 January	Battle of Ruspina
4 April	Caesar commences siege of Thapsus
6 April	Battle of Thapsus
13 June	Caesar sets sail from Utica
25 July	Caesar returns to Rome
21 September	Caesar celebrates 12 days of triumphs and games in Rome
5 November	Caesar leaves Rome
2 December	Caesar arrives in Spain

45 BC

17 March	Battle of Munda; end of the Civil War
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OPPOSING COMMANDERS

THE CAESAREANS

Julius Caesar (c. 100–15 March 44). In his commentaries Caesar made the observation *quantum in bello fortuna posset* – how great the power of fortune was in war. Few commanders have been so exposed to personal danger so often in the course of their campaigns as Caesar. From personally leading a defenceless convoy across the Hellespont under the oars of an enemy fleet to swimming for his life in the harbour at Alexandria to being completely surrounded on an open plain by hostile cavalry at Ruspina, Caesar escaped from near certain doom so many times it is little wonder he came to consider himself as living a charmed life under the personal protection of the goddess Fortuna herself.

But at the same time, Caesar made his own luck. Lucan observed that he was ‘successful always in his use of headlong speed of warfare’. Indeed, his trademarks were *celeritas* (speed) and *improvisum* (surprise). No matter what the scenario, his first impulse was always to strike immediately with what forces he had available, appearing where and when he was least expected and counting on the psychological shock generated by his actions to compensate for his own deficiencies in numbers and organization by upsetting the calculated timetables of his enemies. Having thereby evened the odds, he counted on the superiority of both the men under his command and his own inspired leadership to carry the day in battle.

This consuming self-confidence endowed Caesar with an extraordinary charisma which by itself could achieve prodigies. It was Caesar’s only weapon against a republican naval commander who caught him dead in the water while crossing the Hellespont in pursuit of Pompey. As fearless as he was defenceless, Caesar demanded the man’s surrender, and he promptly handed over his ships. And Caesar was a master of psychological ploys that could inspire his own men as well as intimidate the enemy, from rallying his beaten army after Dyrrachium to facing down two mutinies so effectively the perpetrators begged to be allowed back into his service.

Sometimes this egotism went too far. Frustrated at the delay in getting reinforcements from Brundisium to his base at Apollonia in Epirus, Caesar disguised himself as a courier and commandeered a small boat to slip through the republican blockade and take charge in person. Even when a storm blew up Caesar urged the crew on, reminding them, ‘Your cargo is Caesar and Caesar’s luck!’ In this case his *fortuna* was expressed through the good sense of the sailors in returning to port. Appian records that Caesar was criticized for this exploit, which ‘did credit to a soldier but not to a general’.

Unlike his enemies, who had taken up arms in defence of the republic, Caesar’s cause was always Caesar. In stark contrast to the camps



The self-assurance and resolve characteristic of Caesar's lieutenant Mark Antony while on campaign can be discerned in this bust, but not the self-indulgent dissolution that was his hallmark in times of peace. (The Art Archive/Museo Capitolino Rome/Dagli Orti)

of his republican rivals, where every decision was subject to a babel of opinions, every decision in Caesar's camp was Caesar's alone. Entirely at the behest of this towering personality, the Caesarean war machine lurched and reeled back and forth across the Mediterranean according to no apparent design because at no time was there a Caesarean grand strategy for winning the Civil War. Because of Caesar's supreme assurance that any crisis great or small could be resolved through the personal application of his genius, the theatre of operations was dictated entirely according to the needs of the moment as he perceived them. It also meant that bursts of manic, all-consuming energy would be followed by troughs of leisurely torpor, most notably during the pleasure cruise down the Nile with Cleopatra in the aftermath of the Alexandrine campaign.

Appian summed up both the great strength and the enduring vulnerability of Caesar's mode of warfare: 'he always exploited the dismay caused by his speed of execution and the fear engendered by his daring, rather than any strength created by his preparations.' Caesar never seems to have allowed issues like bottlenecks in supply chains, tenuous lines of communications, or any other issues related to logistics inhibit his decision-making at any point. As such he was a product of his era; his unique brand of instinctive genius would be impossible to replicate today because a Roman army could meet its essential provisioning, transportation and matériel needs by living off the land. Where there was fodder for the pack animals and trees to build ships, for example, Caesar could maintain a freedom of movement on a par with any rival. But even granted the low technological threshold of the Classical period, Caesar pushed his capacity for improvisation to the limit time and again. His supply situation was so bad in Africa, for example, that at one point his cavalry were reduced to feeding their horses with seaweed. It is a curious fact that during the course of the Civil War in the Balkans, in Africa, and twice in Spain, Caesar's various enemies possessed numerical superiority, fortified and well-provisioned strongholds, control of the countryside and as often as not at least parity in naval capacity, yet none of them properly exploited these advantages to impose an effective Fabian strategy targeted at exacerbating Caesar's consistently inadequate logistical situation. Instead of avoiding a direct confrontation with Caesar in order to focus on denying him access to essential supplies by adopting a scorched-earth policy, harrying his foraging teams and cutting off his communication routes, each of his enemies in turn gave him the decisive battle he wanted. This may have been the greatest gift from *fortuna* of all.

Mark Antony (c. 83–30), through his mother, Julia Caesaris, was a distant cousin of Julius Caesar. While in Greece to study rhetoric, he joined the cavalry in the legions of the proconsul Aulus Gabinius en route to Syria. In the ensuing campaign, during which he first experienced Egypt, he honed his skills as a cavalry commander. In 54 Antony joined Caesar's staff in Gaul and went on to represent his political interests in Rome as tribune in 50. Fleeing the city, he joined Caesar on the banks of the Rubicon. During the Civil War, Antony served as Caesar's second in command, bringing reinforcements across from Brundisium, performing creditably at Dyrrachium, and leading the left wing of the army at Pharsalus, proof of Caesar's confidence in

him. When Caesar became dictator he appointed Antony his master of the horse, or deputy. In this capacity Antony remained to govern Italy in 47 while Caesar campaigned in Africa and Spain. The anarchic conditions prevailing in Rome when Caesar returned, the outcome of Antony's dissolute and inept administration, led Caesar to dismiss Antony from all political responsibilities and his personal circle. The two men did not see each other for two years but were reconciled in 44, when Antony was chosen as partner for Caesar's fifth consulship.

Gaius Scribonius Curio (d. 49) was a renowned orator who served as tribune in 50. He became a supporter of Caesar in return, it was alleged, for Caesar paying off his substantial debts. Under Caesar's orders he occupied Iguvium and Ancona during the Italian campaign and was elected praetor in 49. Caesar then ordered him to secure Sicily and Africa. Victorious over the Pompeian Varus he was lured into a trap at the Bagradas river and slain by the Numidian King Juba.

Domitius Calvinus was a tribune in 59 and elected consul in 53. He threw in his lot with Caesar upon the outbreak of the Civil War. He commanded Curio's cavalry in Africa, being one of the few to escape the disaster at the Bagradas river. Accompanying Caesar to Greece he was ordered into Macedonia to prevent Scipio Metellus from linking up with Pompey. After Pompey broke out from Dyrrachium he nearly caught Calvinus at Heraclia but with just hours to spare Calvinus was able to escape and rejoin Caesar. He commanded the central bloc of Caesar's legions at Pharsalus. Calvinus was subsequently ordered to uphold Caesar's interests in Asia but his position was weakened when he was required to dispatch two of his three legions to bail Caesar out of his predicament in Alexandria, and he was defeated by Pharnaces of Pontus at Nicopolis. He retained Caesar's favour, however, and continued to serve under him, pursuing Pharnaces after his defeat at Zela and being mentioned in the African campaign.

Publius Cornelius Sulla (d. 45) the nephew of the dictator Sulla, he was elected consul in 66 (to assume office in 65) together with Publius Autronius Paetus, but both were discovered to have committed bribery and were disqualified from office. He was soon after implicated in the Catiline conspiracy, but was not convicted, having Cicero and Hortensius leading his defence. In Caesar's absence Sulla led the counterattack that thwarted Pompey's breakout attempt at Dyrrachium at the beginning of July. He was subject to some criticism for failing to follow up this advantage but Caesar fully exonerated him, pointing out it was not the task of a subordinate to make such a decision. Caesar retained enough faith in Sulla to place him in command of the right wing of his army at Pharsalus.

Decimus Junius Brutus Albinus (d. 43) served as a legate in Caesar's army during the Gallic wars, where he exhibited his prowess in naval combat by crushing the revolt of the Veneti in a naval battle off north-western Gaul in 56. Caesar assigned him command of the naval blockade of Massilia in 49. Although consistently outnumbered, he succeeded in driving off every attempt to relieve the city by sea. He subsequently suppressed the revolt of the Bellovaci in Transalpine Gaul.

Gaius Trebonius' (d. 43) father was an *eques* but had not been a magistrate, and the son was considered a *novus homo*, one of several in Caesar's circle. He served as quaestor around 60 and was tribune of the



So fond was Caesar of his mistress Servilia that, according to Plutarch, he specifically instructed his officers to allow her son Marcus Junius Brutus, who was serving under Pompey, to go free if he were ever cornered. Brutus, portrayed here in this 16th-century bust by Michelangelo, did indeed escape the debacle at Pharsalus before offering Caesar his surrender. The offer was joyfully accepted and afterwards the two men appeared entirely reconciled. (Corbis)

plebs in 55, where he lent his name to the *Lex Trebonia* that gave five-year commands to Pompey and Crassus. Subsequently he spent five years as a legate to Caesar in Gaul. In 49 Trebonius commanded at the siege of Massilia. Elected praetor in 48, he was ordered to Spain the following year to restore the collapse in Caesar's authority created by the rapacity of Longinus, but was unsuccessful.

Publius Cornelius Dolabella (d. 43) was Cicero's son-in-law. Even in an era of often conflicting loyalties Dolabella stands out for his opportunism. He first took the side of Pompey but afterwards went over to Caesar. He was given command of a naval squadron in the Adriatic but was driven off by Pompey's fleet. He was later present at Pharsalus. A notorious dissolute, to escape the urgent demands of his creditors Dolabella had himself adopted as a plebeian and elected tribune, whereupon he introduced a bill proposing that all debts should be cancelled. This was bitterly resisted by the political establishment and led to serious disturbances in the city. Caesar, on his return from Alexandria, took Dolabella with him on campaign in Africa and Spain.

THE REPUBLICANS

Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (106–48). Lucan sums up Caesar's great rival as in substance amounting to no more than the sum of his reputation, 'the shadow of a great name'. He characterizes Pompey as 'a lofty oak... clinging with roots no longer strong, by its own weight it stands firm.' There is some truth to this impression of immobility. Throughout his contest with Caesar, Pompey exhibited a tendency towards micromanagement that could, in the brief intervals when Caesar did not possess the initiative, rebound to his advantage. It was typical of Pompey's attention to detail, for example, that during his meticulously planned and flawlessly executed combined arms operation against the southern extension of Caesar's siege lines at Dyrrachium he had ordered his men 'to make protective coverings of osier for their helmets' to ward off the missiles peppering them from the ramparts.

But throughout most of the campaign Pompey consistently remained one step behind his rival. Given Pompey's advantage in numbers and logistics this was not inherently fatal to his cause; while the contest continued to match the *diligentia* of Pompey against the *fortuna* of Caesar, they were evenly matched. It was only when Pompey offered battle on Caesar's terms that the balance swung decisively in Caesar's favour.

Though Lucan portrays Pompey as a man who, 'declining towards old age and grown milder through long experience of civil life had now in peace unlearned the general's part', there is no evidence Pompey was in decline either physically or in terms of his mental acuity. Rome never produced a greater master of forward planning and logistical detail and it was immediately evident Pompey had lost none of his edge in this department upon the outbreak of the Civil War. The moment Caesar crossed the Rubicon

In his youth Pompey had been compared physically as well as militarily to Alexander; this bust represents him later in life. At the outbreak of the Civil War he was in his late fifties but had lost none of his mental acuity or physical vigour. (Alinari/Art Resource, NY)

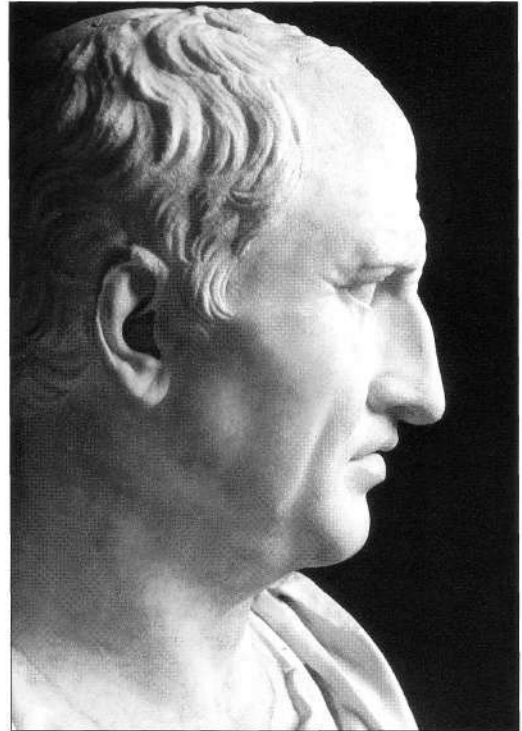


his rival activated a network of recruitment, financial, supply, transportation, communications and diplomatic resources that spanned the Mediterranean. From the centre of this web Pompey monitored the tremendous volume of inward and outward correspondence, keeping the system focused and responsive. At the same time he was an inspiration to the green recruits he assembled in Beroea, not only supervising but taking part in their training regimen, according to Plutarch, 'performing all his exercises as if he had been in the flower of his youth, conduct which raised the spirits of his soldiers extremely.'

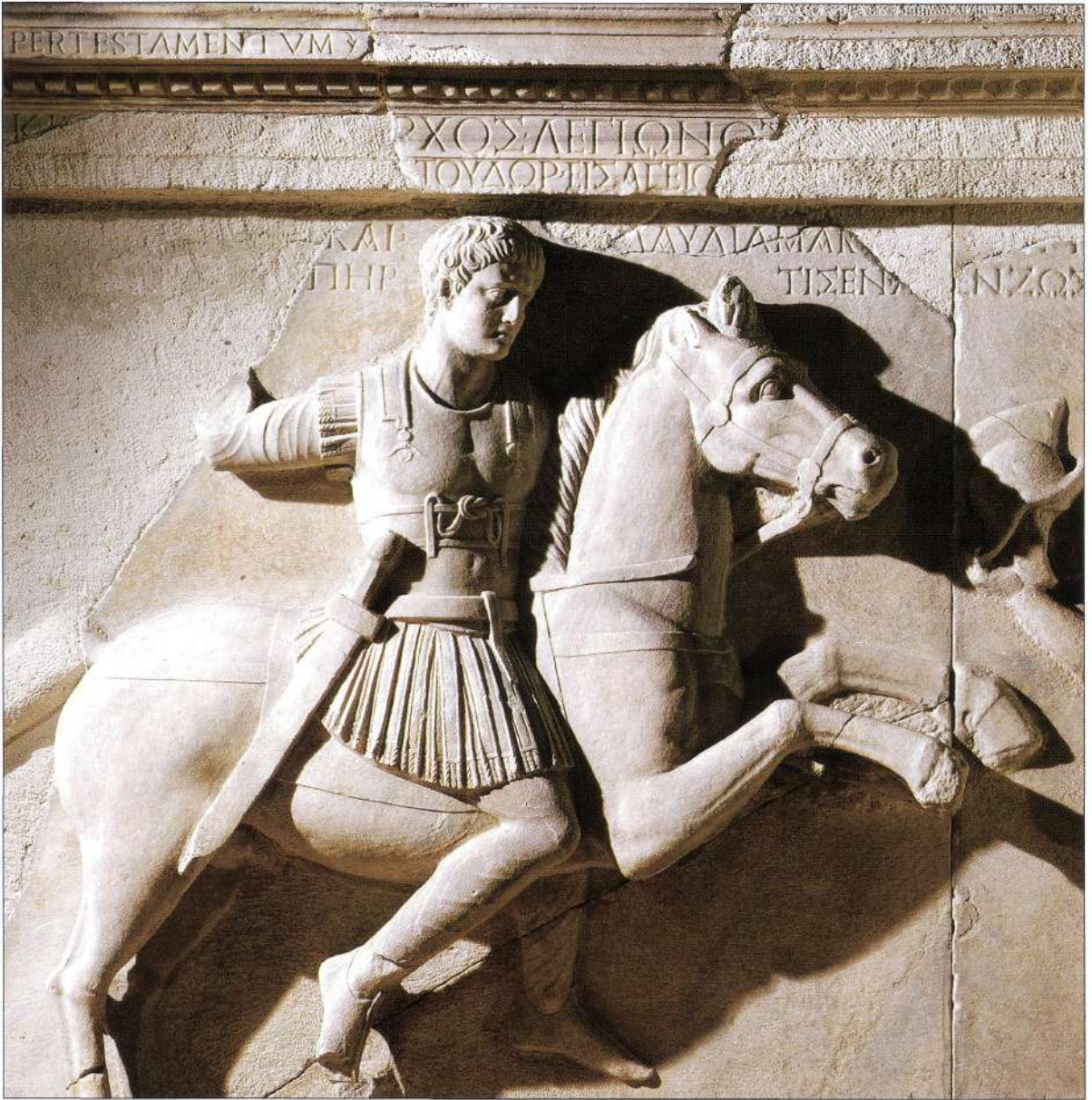
What was missing was the aggression that Pompey had shown in his youth and this raises the question of to what extent he had really been tested in his previous campaigns. There is some truth to the bitter remark of Lucullus, the man Pompey replaced in command against Mithridates, that his successor was a carrion bird who took no prey on his own but lived off the kills of others. Pompey displayed plenty of dash in overwhelming scattered Marian loyalists after their defeat by Sulla, the remnants of Spartacus' freedom fighters after their defeat by Crassus, and Mithridates after he had been softened up by Lucullus. He also looked good while carving a broad swathe through the petty states of the east, and displayed a mastery of combined arms while clearing the Mediterranean of pirates. But on the one occasion he had met an equal, a Roman mind with a Roman army in the person of Sertorius, his vulnerabilities had been exposed. It is likely that Pompey projected his experience with Sertorius onto his approach towards Caesar; this would explain his extreme caution throughout most of the campaign.

At times, however, this caution shaded into a serious lack of initiative and a failure to exploit strategic opportunities. Allowing himself to be surprised by Caesar's winter voyage from Italy to Epirus could have worked to his advantage had he subsequently used his naval supremacy to more effectively blockade Brundisium and the other Italian ports, thereby cutting Caesar off from the reinforcements that he needed in order to meet Pompey on anything like even terms. Furthermore, Pompey looked ponderous when he let Caesar slip away after his debacle at Dyrrachium, and he neglected the opportunity to return to Italy and reclaim Rome in the aftermath of this victory, which would have left Caesar stranded in the Balkans, a strategic cul-de-sac. Most remarkably, he owed his defeat at Pharsalus to failing to anticipate Caesar's masking of an infantry reserve behind his cavalry, a tactic that, according to both Frontinus and Dio, Pompey himself employed to secure victory over King Oroeses of the Albanians in the battle of the River Cambyses 17 years previously.

However, it is the measure of Pompey that Caesar never faced a more dangerous foe. His missed opportunities notwithstanding, prior to leading his army out to battle on the morning of 9 August, Pompey had assessed the relative balance of power between Caesar and himself accurately, formulated an effective strategy designed to maximize the



The contribution of the famed orator Marcus Tullius Cicero to the republican camp upon his eventual arrival consisted entirely of the sort of unsolicited advice and backbiting criticism typical of the squabbling grandees Pompey was saddled with throughout the Civil War. Pompey's fiery son Gnaeus would have stabbed Cicero to death for his defeatist attitude after Pharsalus had Cato not intervened. (Corbis)



resources at his disposal and implemented it quite successfully. No one had ever before or would ever again seize the initiative from Caesar as completely as Pompey did after Dyrrachium. Caesar's victory at Pharsalus, therefore, must represent the single greatest military accomplishment of his career.

Titus Labienus (d. 45). In the shuffle of allegiances at the start of the Civil War nothing hurt Caesar more than the defection of the man who had been his right hand throughout much of the Gallic campaign. Labienus first saw service in Cilicia under Servilius. As a tribune of the people in 63, Labienus prosecuted Gaius Rabirius for treason at Caesar's instigation; in the same year, he carried a plebiscite which indirectly secured for Caesar the title of Pontifex Maximus. He went on to serve as a legate throughout Caesar's Gallic campaigns, standing in for Caesar

This detail from the relief decorating the tomb of Prefect Tiberius Flavius Miccalus, mid-1st century BC, depicts the prefect on horseback accompanied by his two legionaries. (The Art Archive/Archaeological Museum Istanbul/Dagli Orti)

during his absences. His chief exploits in Gaul included his decisive intervention at the battle of the Sambre river in 57, the defeat of the Treviri under Indutiomarus in 54, his expedition against Lutetia (Paris) in 52, and his victory over Camulogenus and the Aedui in the same year. But, either out of loyalty to the republic or resentment at a lack of recognition, Labienus deserted to Pompey after Caesar crossed the Rubicon; Caesar, out of scorn, sent his baggage after him.

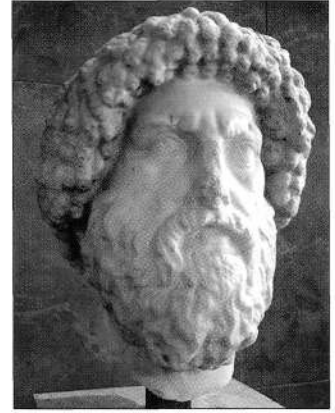
His defection was considered significant at the time but Labienus appears to have contributed little to the *optimates'* cause beyond merciless cruelty and arrogant bluster. It was the failure of the cavalry strike force under his command at Pharsalus that contributed above all else to Pompey's ruin.

After the battle, Labienus fled to Corcyra and thence to Africa, where he let slip a golden opportunity to take revenge upon Caesar at Ruspina. After the defeat at Thapsus he joined Pompey's sons in Spain but his luck finally ran out at Munda; according to the sources, it was his mismanagement of a manoeuvre at a critical moment in the battle that led to Caesar's victory and, with it, his own death.

Gnaeus Pompeius (d. 45) was the oldest son of Pompey the Great by his third wife, Mucia Tertia. His younger brother was Sextus, from the same mother. Placed in command of the Egyptian squadron of his father's navy, Gnaeus displayed great initiative in seizing or destroying Caesar's ships while at anchor at Oricum and Lissus, effectively wiping out Caesar's entire fleet. Gnaeus fled to Africa in the wake of Pharsalus. Sextus, who had been left with Pompey's wife, Cornelia, on Lesbos during the campaign, joined his brother after the murder of their father. After Caesar's victory at Thapsus, the brothers escaped once again, Sextus joining Gnaeus in the Balearic Islands, which he had been posted to occupy. They crossed over to Spain where they raised yet another army. Brought to battle at Munda, Gnaeus was defeated. Wounded, he attempted to flee but was overtaken and killed.

Scipio Metellus (d. 46) was Consul in 52. The adopted son of Metellus Pius, with whom he campaigned against Sertorius, he was a member of the *optimates* faction in the senate, and became Pompey's father-in-law in 52. Ordered to secure Syria for the republic he subsequently marched two legions across the Hellespont and, after sparring with Domitius Calvinus in northern Greece, he linked up with his son-in-law at Larisa. He commanded the central bloc of Pompey's army at Pharsalus. After escaping to Africa, he was appointed nominal authority over the *optimates'* cause there and commanded the republican army at Thapsus. Attempting to flee with a squadron of ships in the aftermath of his defeat, he was killed in the course of a naval battle at Hippo Regius.

Marcus Porcius Cato Uticensis (95–46) was known as Cato the Younger, great-grandson of Cato the Elder. A follower of the Stoic philosophy, renowned for his asceticism and moral inflexibility, his daughter, Porcia, would become the second wife of Marcus Brutus. A military tribune who was given command of a legion in Macedon in 67, on his return to Rome in 65 he was elevated to the senate and was elected to the gamut of republican offices, including quaestor, tribune, and praetor. A bitter foe of Caesar, he joined Pompey in Greece after failing to hold Sicily against Curio. He was left behind in Dyrrachium when Pompey marched south in pursuit of Caesar. After Pharsalus Cato



Bust of King Juba I of Mauretania, now in the Louvre. A hereditary enemy of Caesar, his support was vital to the republican cause in Africa.

escaped by sea to Cyrenaica and then endured an epic march across the Libyan coast to Africa. Offered command of the *optimates'* forces, he refused on the grounds he was outranked by Scipio Metellus. After Thapsus he committed suicide.

Lucius Afranius (d. 46) was Pompey's oldest confidant, having served under him since the campaign against Sertorius. He played a pivotal role at the battle of the Sucro in 75, turning Sertorius' right flank and storming his camp. During his campaign against Mithridates, Pompey entrusted the defence of Armenia to Afranius, who routed an opportunistic invasion by the Parthians, pursuing them back across the border as far as Arbela. Afranius was subsequently given command against the Arabians of Amanus; his victory against them cleared the way for Pompey's advance into Syria. Afranius was elected consul in 60. When Pompey was granted Spain as a proconsular province in 52, Afranius, together with Marcus Petreius and Marcus Varro, governed in his stead. However, the Pompeians were outmanoeuvred and forced to surrender by Caesar during the Ilerda campaign in 49. Caesar pardoned them on condition they not take up arms against him again; Afranius, along with Petreius, promptly broke his word, embarked with as many troops as he could gather and sailed to rejoin Pompey. After Pharsalus, Afranius escaped to Africa. Following the defeat at Thapsus he was apprehended by Caesarean troops, by whom he was later executed.

Juba (d. 46) was a hereditary ally of Pompey's, his father Hiempsal having been established on the throne of Numidia by authority of the *imperator*. In addition, Juba had become involved in a violent altercation with Caesar, then praetor, as far back as 62, and his enmity was only intensified when the tribune Curio in 50 had proposed Rome's annexation of Numidia. When Curio landed in Africa the following year on Caesar's behalf, therefore, Juba was only too pleased to march against him, wiping out his army at the Bagradas river. After Pompey's death the presence of the headstrong Juba among the *optimates* regrouping in Africa made their already attenuated command structure even less coherent. Though not fully committed to the Thapsus campaign, Juba accrued more than his share of its misfortune; his people having turned against him, he ended his life in a bizarre murder/suicide pact with his erstwhile ally Petreius.

THE LEGIONS OF THE LATE REPUBLIC

Long before Caesar crossed the Rubicon the republic of Rome had ceased to have a national army. What it had was a number of private militias, loyal solely to the warlords who raised, funded and led them. The only role left to play for the duly constituted but increasingly redundant authorities in Rome was to offer one of these budding *imperators* the legitimacy they sought by indulging their private ambitions with a veneer of constitutional propriety.

The legions that fleshed out these personal armies, however, retained consistent distinctive national characteristics in terms of organization and equipment. These could be traced back to the reforms undertaken by the consul Marius at the end of the 2nd century BC.

The legions that had triumphed over Hannibal, Phillip V, and Antiochus III had been drawn from the *adsidui*, those Roman citizens owning property of at least 400 *denarii* in value. To satisfy the increasing pressure for manpower to police the ever expanding borders of the republic, Marius had taken the progressive lowering of the property qualification to its logical conclusion and abolished the restriction altogether. As a corollary the old method of recruitment – join the army, bring your own arms and armour – was superseded by one in which the state provided standardized weapons and equipment.

This had the immediate effect of homogenizing an army that had previously been stratified along class lines into distinct units – the *triarii*, the wealthiest and best equipped veterans, *principes*, *hastati*, and the *velites*, the poorest rank, men unable to afford armour who served as light skirmishers.

The next step in broadening the pool of those eligible to serve in the legions was taken after Rome's allies were granted citizenship rights in the wake of the Social War. This led to the abolition of the *ala sociorum*, the separate legions of the allies. From now on the legions of Rome would be better described as the legions of Italy. Unless faced with a supreme crisis, however, a Roman general would never stoop to inducting non-Italians into a legion. Foreigners who fought for Rome did so in their own units; legions raised in the field would consist of Italian colonists inhabiting the region in question, not the local population.

Marius also instituted the most significant revision to the structure of the legions since the time of Camillus, who had swept the Gauls from the streets of Rome in the early 4th century BC. The

A relief portraying two officers, a centurion and *optio*, from the late republican era. Men such as these formed the backbone of any Roman army; centurions were expected to lead by example and suffered disproportionate casualties as a result. (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)



Two legionaries and a cavalryman from the altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus. The iron boss running the length of the Roman *scutum* (shield), which the legionary would use offensively to punch his opponent, is clearly visible. (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)



Two legionaries of the late republican period from the altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus. (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)



tactical unit of the old legion was the maniple. Three maniples made up a cohort, and ten cohorts constituted a legion. Marius retained the ten cohorts but subdivided them into three maniples of two centuries. Each of the centuries, or approximately 80 men, was commanded by a centurion up front and an *optio* in the rear and had a *signifer* (standard bearer) attached. A legion therefore had a total complement on paper of up to 4,800 men but in practice this was rarely attained, especially by legions that had been on campaign for protracted tours of duty; Caesar's VI legion, for example, after its exertions at Dyrrachium, Pharsalus and Alexandria, fielded less than a thousand men at Zela. In battle under optimal conditions the legions would form up in a *triplica acies* formation of three horizontal lines. The front line consisted of four cohorts, arranged ten wide by eight deep, the second and third lines of three cohorts each arranged twelve wide by six deep. Since each legionary required six feet (1.8m) of frontage, all three lines required a total frontage of roughly 720ft (220m).

The new legions were more flexible in terms of formation because individual units composed of identically trained and equipped men could adjust more easily to the tactics of the new enemies and the environments of the new battlefields that the armies of the republic were encountering as they probed ever farther from their Mediterranean heartland. A well-drilled army could now deploy in squares as easily as lines. Generals communicated with their officers via couriers or through the display of the *vexillum*, a rectangular coloured banner mounted on a pole; where necessary communications would be relayed through the *cornicen* (trumpeter) and *signifer*. There were two classes of standard: those used as rallying points for individual maniples, and the *aquilae*, the eagle standard that represented the legion as a whole. Bearing this standard was a great honour, and its loss a terrible disgrace.

In battle each legionary carried a large oval shield (*scutum*) described by Polybius as being curved, 24in (60cm) wide, at least 44in (1.1m) long, and as 'thick as a palm'. It was constructed out of planks glued together rather like modern plywood, surrounded by an iron rim that could

withstand blows on its edge, and with an iron boss running down its length, thicker in the middle, that could be used offensively to punch an opponent.

By Caesar's day chain mail worn over the tunic was the standard body armour of the legionary. Greaves were no longer used except by centurions. The Montefortino-style helmet was being phased out in favour of the Coolus type, which featured a similar horsehair crest but had larger neck and cheek-pieces that offered better protection.

The essential offensive weapons of the legionary were his javelin (*pilum*) and his sword (*gladius*). Through generations of trial and error the *pilum* had been refined by Caesar's day as a throwing weapon. Its narrow point and long, thin iron shank were designed for penetration. Furthermore, upon impact the shank would distort, twisting downwards under the weight of the shaft, not only making it impossible for an enemy to retrieve and hurl back at its owner but rendering the victim's shield unusable.

As another of his reforms, Marius had introduced new training and drill regimens based on those of the gladiatorial schools. These encouraged the legionary to wield his *gladius*, a straight and double-edged cut-and-thrust weapon approximately 24in (60cm) long with a V-shaped tip, more effectively in the thrust role, striking directly at the torso of an enemy while keeping the *scutum* in his face.

A legion had approximately 300 cavalry divided into ten squadrons of 30 horsemen attached to it, each squadron being commanded by a *decurio*. By Caesar's day most of Rome's cavalry needs were being met by *auxilia* from foreign nations, primarily Spaniards, Africans, Celts and Germans. The same applied to light armed and missile troops, Cretan archers and slingers from the Balearic Islands being popular choices.

Another of Marius' reforms was to increase the mobility of the legions by reducing the size of the baggage train (*impedimenta*). He was only able to do this by transferring most of the weight to the individual legionary, who was now expected to carry his own arms, armour, shield, entrenching tool, bedroll, rations, two pickets, mess tin, water bucket, and sickle himself. The total weight of this burden amounted to an estimated 80–100lb (35–44kg) – hence the grumbling self-appellation of the legions as 'Marius' mules'. Each squad (*contubernium*) of eight men was allowed one actual mule, which carried heavier items including the squad's leather tent, the millstones it used to grind grain for the evening meal, and perhaps its pickaxes, turf-cutters, and wicker baskets for moving earth. For obvious reasons the footwear of the legionary, the *caliga* sandal made of leather and studded with hobnails, had to be rugged and durable.

A Roman army would construct fortified camps for security while on the march. A typical Roman field camp was roughly half a mile (800m), square and surrounded by a ditch 12ft wide and 9ft (3.6m x 2.7m) deep. The earth from the ditch was used to build a parapet which was then studded with sharpened wooden stakes to present a spiked front to any would-be aggressor. Inside the perimeter the tents of the soldiers and their officers were arranged so that each unit always occupied the same location and was grouped in combat formation for rapid deployment.

Every legion contained specialists in engineering and construction, so if given time a Roman army could construct bridges, manufacture siege equipment and build transport or even combat vessels. Although



Representation of a Gallic soldier, called the Vachères Warrior, typical of those fighting as cavalry on both sides during the Civil War. (The Art Archive/Museo della Civiltà Romana Rome/Dagli Orti)

bonuses might be forthcoming upon completion of particular tasks, no one ever got rich on a legionary's salary, which barely covered expenses. The real money was in loot and plunder, of both goods and human beings for the slave markets; hence the appeal of a bold, visionary and successful commander. Ambition may have been the driving force for those warlords engaged in pushing the frontiers of Rome ever deeper into the unknown, but greed was the motivation of the men who flocked to their standards.

THE CAMPAIGN

THE RUBICON TO BRUNDISIUM

Caesar brought two major psychological weapons to his campaign in Italy. The first was the shock generated by his speed of action. The power brokers of the republic were caught off guard and kept off balance by Caesar's lightning advance through the peninsula. Detaching Antony and Curio to secure his flanks by taking Arretium (Arezzo) on the Via Cassia and Iguvium (Gubbio) on the Via Flaminia, thus controlling the approaches to Rome, Caesar bypassed the city and progressed down the east coast from Arminium to Corfinium (Pentima) in the space of just over a month. As city after city fell, Caesar's legend grew, spreading panic before him; in Lucan's words, 'empty rumour, speedy messenger of quickening war, augmented genuine fears' among the populace, alienating them from the republic that was failing to defend them.

If Caesar's blitzkrieg was a natural extension of his tactics in Gaul his attitude in victory was entirely uncharacteristic. The same warlord who had been so pitiless towards barbarian peoples now adopted a policy of *clementia*, of forgive and forget, towards his enemies in the heartland of the republic. 'Let us try in this way to regain, if we can, the good will of all and to have a lasting victory,' Caesar instructed his legates: 'since the rest have not been able to escape hatred by cruelty or to hold their victory for any length of time, except for Sulla, whom I do not intend to imitate. Let this be a new method for conquest, to protect ourselves with compassion and generosity.'

But the main reason for the ease of Caesar's victory remained that he was advancing into a power vacuum. Garrisons in town after town – Iguvium, Auximum (Osimo), Asculum (Ascoli) – capitulated without a struggle. The only veteran legions available to Pompey with which to confront Caesar were the two his rival had recently dispatched for the abortive war against Parthia. Neither could be trusted to take the field against their old commander.

Conceding Italy to Caesar appears to have always been Pompey's intention in the event of war. According to Appian, when senator Marcus Favonius archly enquired as to when Pompey intended to start stamping his foot and produce the armies he had promised, Pompey replied, 'You will have them, if you will follow me and think it no disaster to abandon Rome, and even, if need be, Italy as well.' Though Cicero, for one, felt that Pompey was imitating the conduct of Themistocles rather than Pericles when the circumstances were more like those of Pericles than they were of Themistocles, those *optimates* committed to the struggle against Caesar had little choice but to follow in his train when Pompey departed from Rome on 17 January. It was a decision

This abbreviated republican-era inscription memorializes a pep talk Caesar gave his troops the day after entering Italy: 'The dictator Gaius Caesar having crossed the Rubicon addressed his comrades-in-arms in the civil war here in the forum of Rimini.' © William P. Thayer 1997



unprecedented in the history of the republic; never before had the city been deserted by its magistrates. Such was their unseemly haste they failed to follow Pompey's instructions to take with them the contents of the treasury housed in the Temple of Saturn.

Once alerted to the evacuation of Rome, Caesar immediately surmised Pompey intended to quit Italy. His position strengthened by the arrival of reinforcements from Gaul, including the veteran XII and VIII legions, Caesar hastened to cut Pompey off.

The wisdom of Pompey's decision not to confront Caesar with unreliable troops, and the weakness of his authority in the inchoate republican chain of command when compared to the absolute freedom of action enjoyed by Caesar, were vividly illustrated when an old political enemy of Caesar's, Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, assembled 20 cohorts at Corfinium and prepared to make a stand. Pompey practically begged Ahenobarbus to fall back and link up with him: 'With divided forces we cannot hope to combat with the enemy... I entreat and exhort you... to come to Luceria on the first possible day, before the forces which Caesar has begun to collect can concentrate and divide us.'

Pompey, however, had no authority over Ahenobarbus, who had been appointed to succeed Caesar as proconsul of Transalpine Gaul, and he was determined to dig in. When Caesar arrived on 15 February he was notified the neighbouring town of Sulmo desired to submit to him but was being prevented by a garrison of seven cohorts. Antony was dispatched to resolve the situation; the garrison promptly defected and joined Caesar's siege of Corfinium, enabling him to effectively surround the city. The siege only lasted six days; the garrison surrendered in its turn and was similarly incorporated into Caesar's army. Ahenobarbus and the other *optimates* leaders were released.

Pompey had already set out for the port city of Brundisium (Brindisi), which he reached on 25 February. Not enough transports were available to ship his entire army across the Adriatic in one convoy; the bulk of the republican forces, and the political leadership, were ferried over on 4 March but Pompey and 20 cohorts were still in the city when Caesar arrived outside its walls on five days later. Caesar immediately commenced constructing siege works; since he had no fleet he attempted to trap Pompey by building two moles, one on either side of the narrow harbour mouth, linking them together by a chain of rafts anchored mid-channel. These rafts were 30ft (9m) square, and on each fourth one was erected a two-storey turret armed with catapults. To top this threat Pompey fitted out a large number of merchant ships with three-storey towers, packed them with missile weapons, and ordered them into battle. These engines of war fought an artillery duel for several days and Caesar had only succeeded in blocking half the deepwater channel to the harbour when Pompey's fleet appeared on the horizon.

On 17 March the transports and their escorting galleys ran the gauntlet of Caesar's artillery, sailing in single file through the blockade into the harbour. By nightfall Pompey's legions were embarked; as they began to sail out, his light armed auxiliaries abandoned the walls and raced down to the docks. Caesar's men stormed the city but, delayed by boobytraps left behind, were only able to snare the two transports that ran afoul of the breakwater.

In little more than two months Caesar had overrun all Italy. But the

victory was a hollow one for his rival had escaped with his army intact. The first round went to Caesar; there would be a second.

Before this could happen Caesar needed to secure his rear against the seven legions holding out for Pompey in Spain. He paused in the capital at the beginning of April only long enough to call a rump session of the senate and make provincial appointments: Marcus Aemilius Lepidus as *praefectus urbini* to represent him in Rome, the rest of Italy to the charge of Antony, Sicily to Curio, Sardinia to Quintus Valerius, Illyria to Antony's brother Gaius, and Cisalpine Gaul to Licinius Crassus, the surviving son of his erstwhile triumviral colleague. He also gave orders for two fleets to be constructed as quickly as possible on the Adriatic and Tyrrhenian coasts, appointing as admirals Hortensius Hortalus and Cicero's estranged son-in-law Cornelius Dolabella. Caesar met his need for funds by raiding the treasury, which had been left behind in the precipitate flight of the *optimates*. In all the city only one man, the tribune Metellus, was prepared to condemn Caesar's grand larceny. Caesar ignored him and proceeded to the doors of the treasury. Finding them locked, and the keys missing, he sent for smiths to force them open. When Metellus attempted to intervene again Caesar's mask slipped a little; he snapped that the tribune would be put to death if he persisted, adding this was 'more disagreeable for me to say than to do'. Metellus chose this moment to conclude discretion was in fact the better part of valour. With the treasury at his mercy, as Lucan wryly remarks, 'for the first time Rome was poorer than a Caesar.'

His financial needs met, Caesar set off for Spain in order, as he is reputed to have said, 'to fight an army without a leader, so that later I can fight a leader without an army'.

After a march of just ten days Caesar arrived under the walls of the Greek city state of Massilia (Marseilles) on 19 April. The city barred its gates to him and gave command of its defence to Ahenobarbus, who slipped into the harbour at the command of seven merchant ships he had rounded up and paid for himself, manning them with his own slaves and tenant farmers.

Caesar invested the city with siege lines on its landward side and to cut it off from the sea he ordered the construction of a dozen galleys at Arelate (Arles) on the Rhône. These were completed in 30 days; in the meantime Caesar ordered Gaius Fabius to move the VII, IX and XI legions up to the passes of the Pyrenees, dispatching the VI, X and XIV legions to link up with him. When the fleet was ready Caesar appointed Decimus Brutus to command it, left Gaius Trebonius with the VIII, XII, and XIII legions to continue the siege, and moved on to Spain with his escort of 900 German cavalry.

On 23 June Caesar joined Fabius near Ilerda (Lérida) in Hispania Citerior (Nearer Spain), where five legions had been assembled by two of Pompey's legates, Lucius Afranius and Marcus Petreius. The third legate, the scholar Terentius Varro, remained in Hispania Ulterior (Further Spain) with another two legions.

The legates controlled the town, and the stone bridge that spanned the deep, fast flowing River Sicoris (Segre). This gave them an advantage over Caesar's army, which had both of the wooden bridges it constructed washed out in floods (Lucan paints a vivid picture of Caesar's army being 'left floating shipwrecked upon the plain'). Cut off



This 15th-century print of Caesar's ships under construction highlights Caesar's strategic blind spot during the Pharsalus campaign - he was consistently on the back foot when it came to contesting Pompey's naval dominance. (British Library/HIP/Art Resource, NY)

from the east bank, Caesar resorted to the temporary expedient of constructing another bridge 22 miles (35km) the north of his camp, floating the construction crews across the river at night in boats patterned on the Celtic currachs he had first encountered in Britain five years earlier. But to properly secure both banks Caesar undertook another of his legendary feats of engineering. In an area approximately three miles north of Ilerda, where the river divided around an island, he ordered his legionaries to dig several 30ft-wide (9m) trenches in the banks of the Sicoris, and in the island, too, with the intent of diverting enough water into the flood plain to make the river fordable.

Afranius and Petreius, aware that if this gambit succeeded Caesar's cavalry, which outnumbered theirs, could use the east bank to cut them off, decided to pull back to Octogesa (Ribarroja), 27 miles (43km) to the south on the far bank of the River Iberus (Ebro). Posting a skeleton detachment to defend the town and bridge, they moved their army to the east bank of the river.

Leaving one legion behind to guard the camp, Caesar stationed his pack animals in lines both above and below his man-made ford to slow the current and marched his army across the river in pursuit.

The route to the Iberus led through the plain before rising into hill country and then mountains. Afranius and Petreius struggled for several days to shake off Caesar's cavalry, which constantly harassed their rearguard and slowed their escape. Caesar finally brought them to a complete halt on 29 July. Pulling his army out of camp at dawn, ostensibly in retreat towards Ilerda, he instead circled back into the hills, slogging through the rough terrain undetected until making the high plateau behind the enemy's camp, cutting them off from the passes that led down to the Iberus.

Rejecting the option of giving battle, Caesar settled down to let hunger, thirst, and demoralization do the work for him. With their army melting away in desertions, Afranius and Petreius set out back to Ilerda. But their every move was checked and on 2 August they were forced to throw themselves on the mercy of Caesar's *clementia*. He accepted their surrender, either disbanding their legions or inducting them into his

own. Caesar sent Longinus with two legions against Varro, who submitted in turn, and ordered a general assembly of the provincial tribes at Corduba (Cordova) to secure their loyalty. Appointing Longinus governor and leaving him with four legions, Caesar departed Spain at Gades (Cadiz), taking ship to Tarraco (Tarragona) and thence proceeding overland to Massilia, where he arrived in late October.

Caesar was just in time to oversee the surrender of the city, which had put up a doughty resistance over the past seven months. The relentless pressure applied by Trebonius on land and the string of victories by the green and consistently outnumbered little fleet of Decimus at sea had finally ground the defenders down. Leaving a garrison of two legions behind at Massilia, Caesar, who in his absence had been nominated as dictator by his henchman Lepidus, began the return leg to Rome. On the way he was forced to sidetrack to Placentia (Piacenza) where a mutiny had broken out. The four legions stationed there had just returned from Spain and were bitter over the lack of bonuses and plunder. Caesar had to resort to disbanding the veteran IX legion, ignoring the appeals of his men to reinstate it until after decimating the ringleaders.

Caesar had swiftly, and almost bloodlessly, secured his rear in preparation for the next phase of the contest with Pompey. The news when he returned to Rome in December was less reassuring; his subordinates had signally failed to match his own high standards.

Curio had easily cleared Cato out of Sicily in April. In August he sailed with two legions for Africa, where he swiftly routed Pompey's legate in the province, Attius Varus, beneath the walls of Utica (Bordj bou Chateur). As Varus took refuge in the city and Curio prepared to lay siege he received word that Juba, the King of Numidia, had dispatched an army under the command of his general Saburra to the relief of Pompey's legate. Curio rushed all but five cohorts of his army to intercept this force, which he checked and then began to pursue back down the valley of the Bagradas river.

What he didn't know was that Saburra was under orders to lure Curio away from the coast and deeper inland where the main army of the king was waiting for him under the hot African sun. Trapped on the open plain, Curio's army was surrounded by the Numidian cavalry and pressed together into a knot so tight, Lucan writes, that 'every corpse stood erect, crushed in a mass'. The army was wiped out and the cohorts left behind at the camp, abandoned by their transports, were butchered by Juba after they surrendered.

Compounding this disaster were two reverses in the Adriatic. Dolabella and his entire fleet of 40 galleys were captured by a Pompeian naval force. Attempting to rescue him, Gaius Antony, advancing with 15 cohorts through Illyricum, was isolated, surrounded, and forced to surrender, the survivors being incorporated into Pompey's army.

For Pompey had not wasted the breathing space he had given himself by withdrawing to Macedonia. While the government-in-exile convened at the provincial capital, Thessalonica (Thessaloniki), Pompey had assembled at Beroea (Veroia) nine legions of Roman citizens; the five which he had brought over from Italy; one from Cilicia; one from Greece; and two from Asia, raised by the consul Lentulus. In addition he had distributed amongst the legions a large number of veteran re-enlistees from Thessaly, Boeotia, Achaea, and Epirus, including the

prisoners taken after the defeat of Gaius Antony. He had also summoned the two legions currently in Syria with Scipio. He had raised 3,000 archers from Crete, Sparta, Pontus, Syria and other states, plus two 600-strong cohorts of slingers and 7,000 cavalry.

Even by contemporary Roman standards, by which men experienced on horseback were welcomed from any quarter to compensate for the republic's deficiencies in this arm, Pompey's cavalry was a remarkably polyglot agglomeration. The despots and petty kings of more than a dozen cities and states under Rome's aegis in the east were personal clients of Pompey's and they responded to his summons by dispatching to him the riders of many nations. Deiotarus had brought 600 Gauls and Ariobarzanes 500 from Cappadocia; Cotys had supplied another 500 from Thrace under the command of his son Sadalas; there were 200 from Macedonia under Rascypolis; Pompey's son Gnaeus had brought 500 Gauls and Germans in the service of Gabinius from Alexandria; 300 arrived from Galatia, a gift from Tarcondarius Castor, who had come in person, and Domnilaus, who had sent his son; 200, mostly mounted archers, had been sent from Syria by Antiochus of Commagene. Pompey himself had conscripted 800 horsemen from his slaves and shepherds, adding contingents of Dardani, Bessi, Macedonians, Thessalians, Pamphylians, Pisidians and representatives of other tribes and states.

Pompey was aware of the limitations of many of these heterogeneous peoples, both in practical terms and as fodder for Caesarean propaganda harping on the spectacle of the so-called saviour of the republic being so dependent on foreign allies. According to Appian, 'He did not intend to use them all for battle', but for scouting, garrison duty and other support tasks for his legions.

Pompey's trump card was the massive fleet he had assembled from all the ports of the eastern Mediterranean. The ships from Egypt were commanded by his son Gnaeus, those from Asia by Decimus Laelius and Gaius Triarius, those from Syria by Gaius Cassius, those from Rhodes by Gaius Marcellus and Gaius Coponius, the Liburnian and Achean fleets by Scribonius Libo and Marcus Octavius. The overall command of the 500 to 600 ships of the navy was assigned to Marcus Bibulus.

For all this impressive spectacle, nagging questions remained about the coherence of the republican war effort and the fighting quality of the troops gathered under its standards. Cicero, who had joined Pompey in Greece in June 48, immediately had misgivings, lamenting that the armies gathering there 'were not ready for war' and that so many of the republican leadership were 'so cruel in their speech that I shuddered at the very thought of victory... The point is, there was nothing good but the cause.'

Nevertheless, in December the government-in-exile finally named Pompey commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the republic, with full authority over all Rome's legions and fleets. Pompey responded by giving a pep talk in which he reminded his audience that, whatever their temporary geographic dislocation, it was they who represented the true heritage of Rome: 'Every sane man thinks his own country is wherever freedom is. It was with this in mind that we crossed from Italy and came here.' Then, after dispatching the families of the republican elite (including his own wife, Cornelia, and son, Sextus) to the safety of the city of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos, he commenced the march west

BALKANS THEATRE OF OPERATIONS JANUARY-APRIL 48 BC



- Balkans Theatre of Operations January-April 48 BC**
1. Pompey is named Commander-in-Chief of the republic by the senate-in-exile at Beroea; he begins the march to winter quarters in the port cities of Epirus
 2. The bulk of the republican navy – 180 galleys – are stationed at Corcyra under Bibulus.
 3. On the night of 4 January, Caesar sails from Brundisium with seven legions and 500 cavalry, landing the next day south of Palaeste.
 4. Bibulus intercepts Caesar's transports returning to Brundisium, catching and burning 30 of them with their crews.
 5. Caesar takes Oricum.
 6. Caesar takes Apollonia.
 7. Alerted to Caesar's presence, Pompey accelerates his march and occupies Asparagium.
 8. Caesar advances to the south bank of the river Apsus.
 9. Pompey advances to the north bank of the river Apsus.
 10. Antony sails from Brundisium with four legions and 800 cavalry. Evading pursuit, he lands at Nymphaeum.
 11. Antony marches south via Lissus to link up with Caesar.
 12. Pompey breaks camp to intercept Antony; unable to do so, he doubles back to Asparagium.
 13. Caesar links up with Antony in the vicinity of Elbasan.
 14. Caesar dispatches Longinus into Thessaly with the XXVII legion and 200 cavalry.
 15. Caesar dispatches Sabinus into Aetolia with five cohorts and a few cavalry.
 16. Caesar dispatches Calvinus east along the Via Egnatia with two legions and 500 cavalry to intercept Scipio.
 17. Scipio with the two Syrian legions encounters Calvinus in the upper reaches of the river Haliacmon.
 18. Caesar marches down the south bank of the river Genusius. He and Pompey face off on opposite banks.
 19. Caesar fakes a withdrawal to Elbasan then breaks for Dyrrachium. Pompey races for the city but Caesar arrives first. Siege of Dyrrachium commences.

along the Via Egnatia, the great Roman highway across the Balkans, to take up winter quarters in the cities along the Adriatic coast. Considering his total naval superiority, and the lateness of the season, Pompey anticipated adhering to a timetable that gave him several more months' respite in which to drill his army into effective fighting condition. He was to be rudely surprised.

BRUNDISIUM TO DYRRACHIUM

Pompey should have known that with Caesar one must always expect the unexpected. For Caesar it was imperative to confront Pompey as far away from Italy as possible and as soon as possible. That meant immediately confronting Pompey in the Balkans. But Caesar's strategic options were limited. The passage through Illyricum was slow and dangerous; a relief column advancing through the province under Aulus Gabinius the following year was harried by a Pompeian fleet and suffered greatly at the hands of local tribes. Taking this route only invited Pompey to slip back across the Adriatic and into Rome.

The only alternative was to transport his army by ship directly across the Straits of Otranto. Though a ship could make the distance from Brundisium to Epirus in 12 to 15 hours with a favourable wind, it was risky to sail in winter, dangerous to sail at night, and suicidal to do so in the face of the overwhelming naval superiority of the enemy. Caesar gave orders to prepare for all three at once. He did not even hesitate when, after just 11 days in the capital, he arrived at Brundisium to find an inadequate number of transports available, insufficient stores of provisions and equipment, and not even the complete army assembled. Appian records him instructing his officers: 'I shall not be prevented from starting out either by the winter season or the slowness of other people or by lack of the appropriate stores. In place of all these I think swiftness of action will serve. You understand war, and I put it to you that the mightiest weapon of war is surprise.'

Even after giving orders that no personal belongings, no baggage, and no slaves be loaded to accompany the expeditionary force, there were still only enough ships for seven under-strength legions – 20,000 men – and 500 cavalry. At dusk on 4 January (6 November by the modern calendar) the fleet set sail.

Drifting on the wind and tide farther south than Caesar had aimed for, he arrived the following morning on the rugged coast of Epirus south of the village of Palaeste (Palasē). The main republican naval contingent, 120 ships under Bibulus stationed off the island of Corcyra (Corfu), was caught napping; the most they could do was intercept approximately 30 of Caesar's transports making the return voyage to Brundisium and burn them together with their crews.

In the meantime Caesar had pushed his army up the steep track that led into the mountains from the beach. He fell on the surprised garrisons of Oricum and Apollonia, taking both cities without bloodshed.

Pompey was still marching with his host through the Candavian Mountains near Lake Ohrid, some 62 miles (100km) from the coast, when he received news of Caesar's landing. Ordering the march accelerated he was able to cut Caesar off from occupying any more of the Adriatic

Caesar landed on this coastline near the village of Palaeste (modern Palasë) in southern Albania after his daring dash across the strait of Otranto. The dome-like structure in the right foreground is one of the innumerable defence bunkers that represent the legacy of Marxist dictator Enver Hoxha. (Courtesy Edison Ypi)



coastline by beating him to Asparagium, where the Via Egnatia branches off to Apollonia to the south and Dyrrachium (Durrës) to the north. Caesar advanced no farther than the southern bank of the River Apsus (Semeni). Pompey moved down to make camp on the north bank, but his attempt to bring Caesar to battle failed in spectacular fashion when the bridge across the river collapsed under the weight of his leading cohorts. Both sides settled down to a protracted stalemate.

Despite Caesar's repeated appeals it was not until early April that Antony, who had assembled four full-strength legions, a cadre of slingers and 800 cavalry, felt confident enough of the conditions to embark from Brundisium with a second convoy. His ships were buffeted by a strong south wind past Apollonia and Dyrrachium, from which a squadron of 20 republican galleys under Coponius gave chase. Just as Antony's fleet was on the verge of being overhauled, the wind, which had blown all but two of his transports into the bay of Nymphaeum (Shengjin), shifted to the west, wrecking 16 of the pursuing galleys on the shore. On 10 April Antony disembarked his army and set out southwards in search of Caesar.

Determined to prevent any reinforcement of Caesar, Pompey broke camp that same night and set off in a series of forced marches to intercept Antony. Caesar marched upriver the next day, forded the Apsus and in a flanking march successfully linked up with his legate. Pompey promptly withdrew west to Asparagium, making camp on the north bank of the River Genusus (Shkumbini). Caesar, now with 11 legions at his disposal – definitely the VI, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII (all veterans) and the XXVII, probably the XIII, VII, XIV and the Alaudae – began expanding his theatre of operations. He sent Lucius Cassius Longinus into Thessaly with the XXVII legion and 200 cavalry and Gaius Calvisius Sabinus into Aetolia with five cohorts and a few cavalry to secure the provinces and organize grain convoys. He also dispatched Domitius Calvinus east along the Via Egnatia with the XI and XII legions and 500 cavalry to intercept Scipio, who had entered Macedonia with the two Syrian legions he was bringing to Pompey. Caesar then followed Pompey west to Asparagium, keeping to the south bank of the Genusus; though he now possessed only seven legions to Pompey's nine, still Pompey refused his offers of battle.



Looking north towards Dyrrachium (modern Durrës) from Petra, the high point overlooking the bay and the site of Pompey's camp. (Courtesy Edison Ypi)

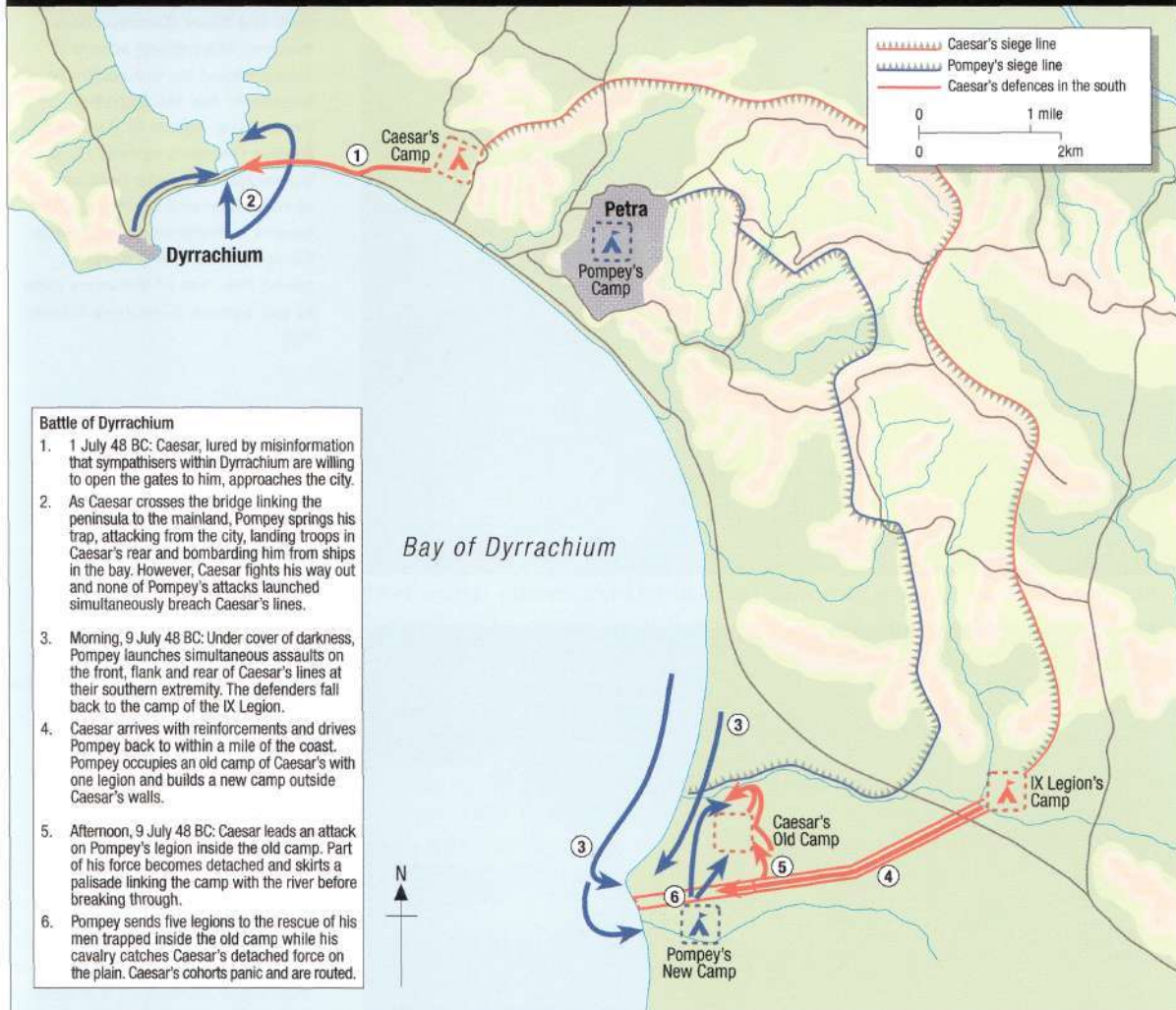


Looking south from Petra towards the far end of Caesar's defensive lines, where Pompey's combined arms operation finally succeeded in breaking the siege. (Courtesy Edison Ypi)

Pompey could afford to play for time because his supply situation remained superior to Caesar's. This was made dramatically evident when Pompey's son Gnaeus succeeded in forcing his way past the blockade at the harbour mouth of Oricum and burning or towing off Caesar's galleys, and then destroying all 30 of the transports Antony had left at Lissus (Lezhë).

Caesar needed to force the issue so he resorted to another subterfuge. Striking camp, he appeared to set off east but then crossed the Genusus upriver and doubled back through the foothills west towards Dyrrachium. Taken off guard, Pompey scrambled north up the Via Egnatia but Caesar beat him to the coast, constructing a camp two miles south of Dyrrachium. Pompey was forced to go into camp another two miles south of Caesar on the high spur of land called Petra, overlooking the bay.

BATTLE OF DYRRACHIUM 10 JULY 48BC



Unable to storm Dyrrachium, with Pompey brooding behind him while still refusing to give battle, Caesar adopted a strategy calculated to astound the world again with his capacity for out-of-the-box thinking. Despite having the smaller army, and despite the fact Pompey could still receive supplies by sea, Caesar commenced building a line of fortifications along the hills surrounding Petra with the intention of walling his rival up against the coast.

Pompey responded by constructing defensive lines of his own and for the next few weeks the two sides fought running battles as they struggled to demarcate the front line, Pompey determined to stretch Caesar's lines as far inland from the coast as possible, Caesar to keep Pompey's army as hemmed in as possible. The defences consisted of a string of forts linked by palisades and ditches, and these were not flimsy structures intended merely to define boundaries; according to Lucan, Caesar was 'not content to raise up hasty walls of crumbling turf alone' but incorporated 'huge boulders, blocks torn from quarries, and the homes of Greeks and dismantled city walls' into the fortifications. By the



Remains of an ancient bridge now called Ura e Haxhi Beqarit over the River Genusus (the modern Shkumbini) where it was crossed by the southern branch of the Via Egnatia (from Asparagium to Apollonia). During Caesar's retreat from Dyrrachium he was held up at this river and his rear guard fought a sharp encounter with Pompey's pursuing cavalry, giving the rest of the army time to get across. (Courtesy Edison Ypi)



Ottoman bridge Ura e Kamares (the bridge of Kamare) over the Shkumbini. (Courtesy Edison Ypi)

time this frenetic bout of construction had concluded, Caesar's lines stretched for more than 15 miles (24km), enclosing an area of 21 square miles (34 square km). This stretched his manpower correspondingly thin at fewer than 1,500 soldiers per mile.

Pompey had the opposite problem. His lines, roughly eight miles long, sheltered his army within a space of approximately 16 square miles (26 square km). These cramped conditions were made worse when Caesar's engineers dammed or diverted those streams that flowed into the bay through his enclosed territory. In addition to lack of fresh water, Pompey struggled with supplies of fodder for his cavalry and especially his

pack animals which, with grazing land swiftly depleted, began to die in their hundreds, their rotting corpses enhancing the prospect of disease.

Caesar had abundant fresh water, fuel and pasture; what he lacked was grain, which Pompey was bringing in by ship. Caesar's men resorted to mixing roots with milk to make a kind of bread; in response to the taunts of their better-fed enemy, they tossed some of these loaves into Pompey's lines. When these were brought to Pompey he is said to have wondered out loud what kind of beasts he was up against.

This stalemate was mirrored farther east where Calvinus and Scipio confronted each other on either side of the River Haliacmon. Farther south, Caesar dispatched Quintus Fufius Calenus to link up with Longinus and Sabinus and enter Achaea. This independent detachment occupied Delphi and Thebes by consent, took other cities by force and kept Pompey's legate in the province, Rutilius Lupus, behind defensive works he had constructed across the isthmus to keep the Caesareans at bay.

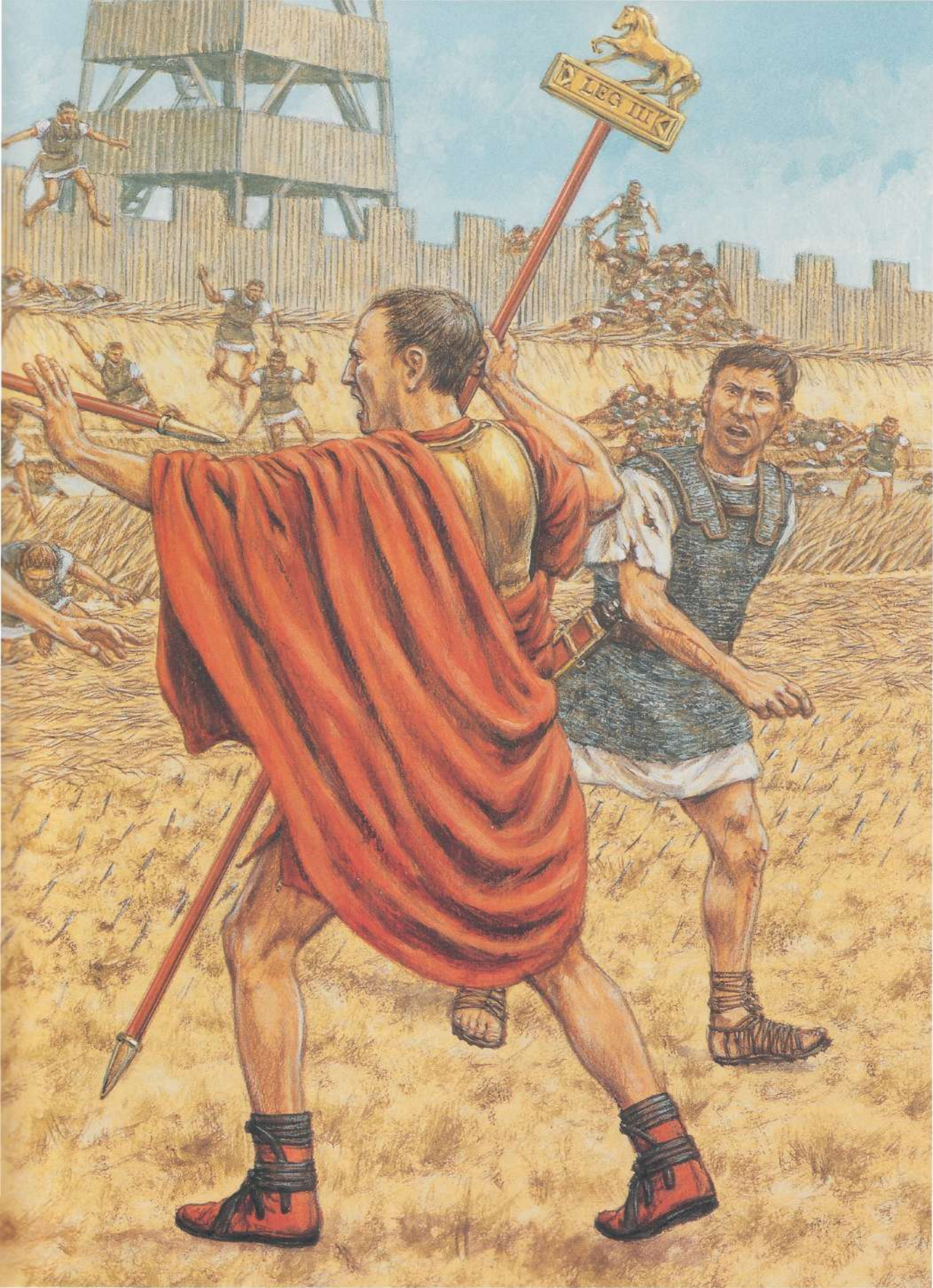
By the end of June Pompey's situation was getting embarrassing. He had to do something to regain the initiative; subterfuge played a major part in his plan. Caesar was deceived into believing operatives inside Dyrrachium were prepared to surrender the city to him. At the appointed hour on the evening of 1 July, as Caesar approached the gates across the bridge that connected Dyrrachium to the mainland, he suddenly found himself under attack from three sides simultaneously; from the city itself, from missile weapons fired by republican ships in the bay, and by a detachment landed on the shore behind him.

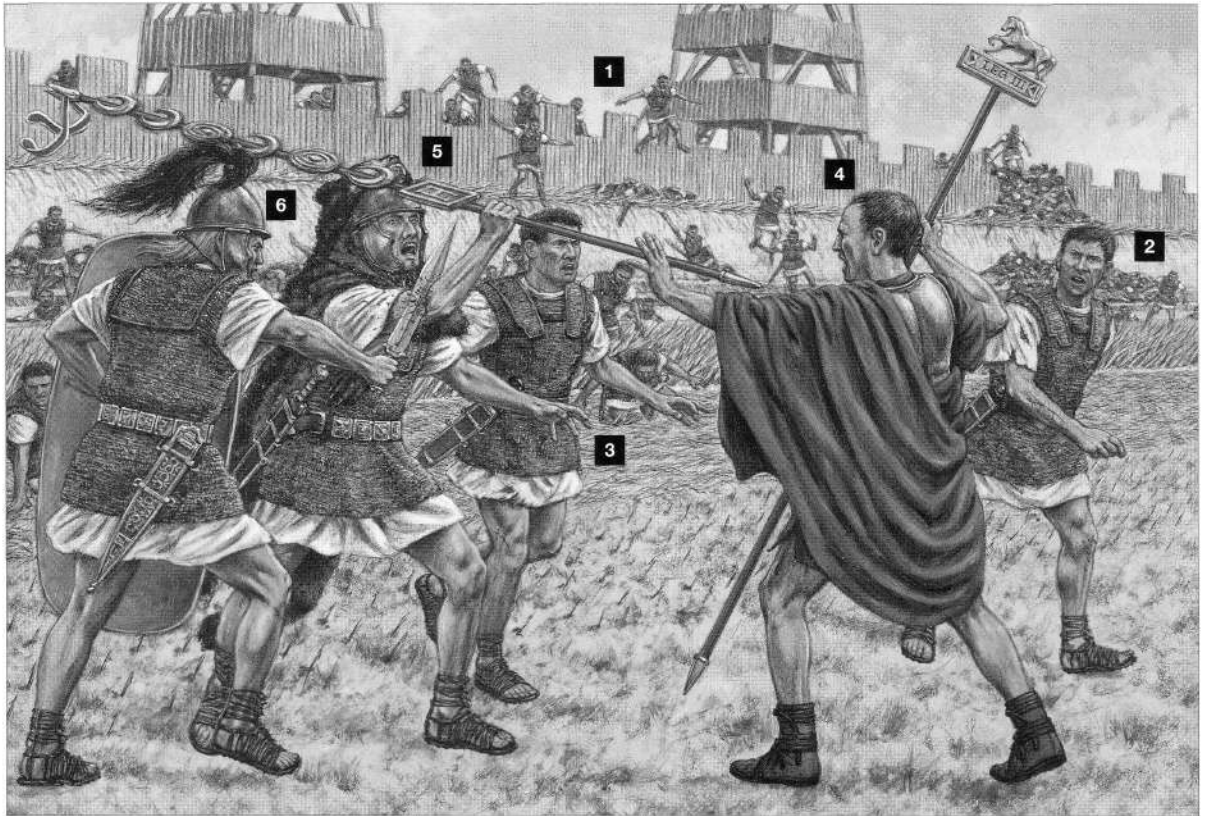
With Caesar fully occupied in extricating himself from this trap Pompey launched his main assault on Caesar's line of fortifications, attacking three separate points simultaneously to prevent Caesar's legates from being able to concentrate their defence. Yet at dawn the next day Caesar's lines remained intact. He claims only 20 fatalities on his side to 2,000 on Pompey's, but he concedes it was a desperate

The Via Egnatia, the main Roman highway across the Balkans, begins in Dyrrachium. (Courtesy Edison Ypi)









THE COLLAPSE OF CAESAR'S COUNTERATTACK AT DYRRACHIUM, 9 JULY 48 BC,
(pages 46–47)

On the morning of 9 July 48 BC, Pompey finally succeeded in breaking through the siege lines with which Caesar had pinned him to the coast south of Dyrrachium. Having rolled up the local garrisons he occupied an old camp sited between Caesar's lines and his own and ordered the construction of a new camp outside Caesar's entrenchments. Caesar arrived in time to stabilize the situation tactically but he stubbornly refused to admit his strategy of blockade had failed. Instead of withdrawing and opening up a war of movement he scraped together all the reserves he could muster – 33 cohorts – and led them in two columns against the old camp. The attack was a disaster. The left-hand column succeeded in storming the camp but the right-hand column struck the free-standing rampart linking the camp with the River Lesnikia and followed it for some distance before finally breaking through and entering the open space between the river and the north wall of the camp. Pompey meanwhile led five legions directly to the rescue of his garrison while sending his cavalry sweeping around to the east of the camp. Suddenly threatened, Caesar's right-hand column tried to fall back but its retreat bottlenecked at the gaps in the rampart and panic broke out. With their right flank disintegrating and Pompey's reinforcements advancing on their other flank,

Caesar's left-hand column also collapsed. Discipline was abandoned as men pushed and clawed each other in the jam to get out via the narrow gaps in the ramparts. Many chose to leap from the battlements, falling into the ditches below; (1) as Caesar later recollected, "the first men in were crushed and the rest used their bodies to provide a way out to safety for themselves". (2) Those who survived thought only of escape, many of them having cast aside their shields, their helmets, even their weapons in their flight. (3) Caesar did everything in his power to halt the rout, haranguing his men to stand their ground, even manhandling them as they pounded past him. (4) Already very visible in his paludamentum, the red cloak worn by a general, he has removed his helmet so his men can see his face. In one hand he holds the standard of a legion, hoping it will serve as a rallying point. But not even the presence of their legendary commander can turn the tide on this day. So all-pervasive was the panic that, according to Appian, "One man actually inverted his standard and menaced his general with its butt-end". (5) This man, a signifer, or standard bearer for a maniple, distinguished by his bearskin helmet, had his arm sliced off by one of Caesar's German bodyguards. (6) This example notwithstanding, Caesar's efforts to rally his cohorts were in vain; even he admits "not a single man halted." As night fell Caesar could only tally the loss of nearly 1,000 irreplaceable officers and men and with them admit the loss of the strategic initiative to Pompey.

struggle; the entire garrison in one redoubt was wounded in the course of the battle, having been peppered with 30,000 arrows, one centurion taking 120 missiles in his shield.

Pompey received a second chance a few days later when two of Caesar's Gallic cavalry commanders defected, bringing with them their retinues and some very useful intelligence. Caesar's defensive works held by his IX legion at the southern end of his line, the furthest from his camp, were incomplete. His engineers had brought a double row of fortifications down to the shore at this point, the northward-facing one with a 15ft wide ditch and 10ft high ramparts, the other 200 paces behind it, facing south as a precaution against Pompey landing troops in Caesar's rear. But the two palisades were not yet connected by a transverse barricade facing the sea.

In the early morning of 9 July Pompey surreptitiously moved six legions down to the southern terminus of his lines and under cover of darkness attacked Caesar's inner line. As dawn broke Pompey landed two seaborne divisions of light-armed and missile troops, one behind Caesar's outer line, the other in the gap between the two lines. Taken in front, rear and flank, the defending cohorts collapsed. Responding to the smoke signals being sent up in alarm Antony and then Caesar himself arrived with reinforcements and temporarily stabilized the situation. But Pompey had occupied an old camp on the River Lesnikia between Caesar's lines and his own, and now ordered the construction of a new camp south of Caesar's outer line.

Determined to salvage something from the situation, Caesar assembled 33 cohorts from three legions and launched an attack on the old camp before Pompey could fully restore it. The legionaries on the left wing of this assault force stormed the ramparts and swiftly came to grips with the defenders but those on the right struck a palisade leading from the camp to the river. Assuming this was the rampart, they followed it for some distance before realizing their mistake and breaking through into the narrow space between the river, the old camp and the sea.

From his new camp Pompey ordered five legions directly to the rescue, while sending his cavalry sweeping in an arc behind the old camp that brought them directly into the path of Caesar's right wing. These troops broke and fled, becoming jammed in the choke points they had left in their line of retreat by their failure to level the palisade properly. Caesar's entire strike force subsequently collapsed, many legionaries being crushed by their comrades in the general panic, the survivors streaming in full flight past their frustrated commander.

Pompey called off his pursuit, leaving Caesar free to sneer afterwards that the enemy could have won the war on that day had they but possessed a commander who knew how to win. But no amount of bluster could disguise the magnitude of Caesar's defeat; by his own admission he had lost 32 centurions and military tribunes and a corresponding number of standards, along with 960 rank-and-file legionaries, and his record of events does not account for the number of wounded, which must have been substantial.

The balance had undeniably shifted in favour of Pompey. The sting of defeat was a new sensation for Caesar; recovering from this tactical reverse in a worsening strategic situation presented his leadership qualities with the greatest challenge they had ever faced.

DYRRACHIUM TO PHARSALUS

With his siege lines broken, Caesar had no reason to remain on the coast. Pulling back inland would put distance between him and Pompey's fleets, giving him a better chance to regroup. Garrisoning Apollonia with four cohorts, Lissus with one and Oricum with three, and leaving behind his wounded, Caesar began to withdraw south through Epirus.

At dawn the next day Caesar had nearly completed the crossing of the River Genusus at Asparagium when Pompey's cavalry caught up with him, engaging in a fierce fight with his rearguard. The rest of Pompey's army arrived that morning. The two sides faced off on each bank of the river, having reoccupied the camps they had constructed at the beginning of April. Caesar again gave Pompey the slip, falling back to Apollonia and then up the valley of the Aous river into the highlands. Following the River Drino to Lake Pambotis, Caesar's army crossed the Pindus range via the Katera Pass, entering the plain of Thessaly at Aeginium (Kalampaka).

After giving up the chase Pompey returned to Asparagium and called a council of war. Afranius recommended he immediately return to Rome. Caesar was in no condition to stop him, and Pompey's fleets were roaming at will throughout the Mediterranean; in the ensuing days Brundisium would be placed under blockade by Laelius while Cassius would catch half of Caesar's navy under Pomponius in port at Messana (Messina) in Sicily, burning every ship there, and come within an ace of inflicting the same punishment on the other half under Sulpicius at Vibo (Vibo Valentia). Once Pompey had brushed aside the usurper's grip on the capital, he could also strip Gaul and Spain from Caesar's grasp before returning to the east for a final trial of strength with his rival. But Pompey disregarded this advice, ostensibly because he feared

During their retreat from Dyrrachium Caesar's weary legions would have emerged onto the plain of Thessaly here at Aeginium (modern Kalampaka), in the shade of the spires of the Meteora. (Author's collection)



BALKANS THEATRE OF OPERATIONS JULY-AUGUST 48BC



Balkans Theatre of Operations: July-August 48 BC

1. Evading Pompey's pursuit, Caesar retreats from Dyrrachium to Apollonia.
2. Caesar marches up the valley of the rivers Aous and Drino to link up with Calvinus and Drino to link up with Calvinus.
3. Pompey gives up the pursuit of Caesar and returns to Asparagium.
4. Calenus links up with Longinus and Sabinus and advances on Achaia; Delphi and Thebes come over to Caesar.
5. Lupus fortifies the isthmus to keep Calenus out of Achaia.
6. Calvinus withdraws to Bitola.
7. Scipio advances to Larisa.
8. Pompey marches east along the Via Egnatia to surprise Calvinus.
9. At the last moment, Calvinus learns of Pompey's advance and escapes to the south.
10. Caesar and Calvinus link up at Aeginium.
11. Caesar sacks Gomphi.
12. Metropolis surrenders to Caesar.
13. Caesar camps in the plain on the north bank of the river Enipeus, across the road to Pharsalus.
14. Pompey links up with Scipio at Larisa.
15. Pompey marches south for Pharsalus; encountering Caesar, he turns off the road and makes camp.
16. 9 August: Battle of Pharsalus.



that without his support Caesar might take the opportunity to surprise and overwhelm Scipio, who was still in Macedonia.

Pompey in turn set out to surprise Calvinus, and nearly succeeded in doing so. Marching east along the Via Egnatia, he was in the process of crossing the Diavat Pass before Calvinus, who had fallen back to a position near modern Bitola and had received no word from Caesar, became aware of his presence. With just four hours to spare he broke camp and fled south into the valley of the upper Haliacmon river. After Caesar's couriers finally located him the two armies were reunited at Aeginium, bringing together every man under arms other than those on garrison duty in the coastal strongholds or with Calenus engaged in menacing Athens.

Pompey again declined to pursue. Continuing to follow the Via Egnatia, he finally turned off to the south to rendezvous with Scipio, who had advanced to Larisa.

The fertile plain of Thessaly, with its abundant fields of ripening wheat, must have presented a welcoming sight to Caesar's long-suffering legions. But other demands could only be met by the towns of the region, which, after receiving word of Dyrrachium, all shut their gates against the presumed loser in the Civil War. Caesar gave one of them, Gomphi (Paleo Episkopi), the opportunity to satisfy his needs. When this request was refused he unleashed his veterans, who made short work of the defences and took what they needed in plunder. According to Appian, 'As one would expect of men who had been starving, they stuffed themselves endlessly with everything and became disgracefully drunk, particularly the Germans who were quite ridiculous when they were under the influence.'

This hill (viewed from the southwest) on the northern edge of the plain of Pharsalus was the site of Pompey's camp. (Author's collection)



Kaloyiros, viewed from the south-east. After the fall of its camp the remnant of Pompey's army retreated to the temporary safety of this height. When Caesar commenced surrounding them with siege lines they withdrew through the hill country to the north. (Author's collection)

Caesar moved on to Metropolis (Paleo Kastro) the next day; after displaying the unfortunate city fathers of neighbouring Gomphi, he found this town much more compliant. In fact, apart from Larisa, which was occupied by Scipio, all the cities of Thessaly swung over to Caesar.

Moving on, Caesar next encamped astride the ancient road from Larisa via Palaepharsalus (Krini) to Pharsalus (Farsala) where it crossed the north bank of the River Enipeus, near the modern village of Vasili.

When Pompey, marching south from Larisa, emerged onto the plain at Palaepharsalus he immediately appreciated that Caesar's control of the bridge across the Enipeus made a further advance pointless. Turning off the road, he encamped about one mile to the west on a gentle slope among the foothills above the modern village of Avra, sending detachments to hold and fortify the neighbouring heights of Kaloyiros and Mavrovouni. His logistical situation was excellent; Appian confirms that Pompey had supplies coming from every direction by sea and land, all of which could be channelled down the secure route from Larisa, and, with his superior cavalry able to guarantee access to the river, he had no shortage of water.

THE BATTLE

OPPOSING PLANS

Every day after Pompey's arrival on the plain of Pharsalus Caesar drew out his army and offered battle. But he was stymied on every occasion by the limitation inherent in ancient warfare; other than by ambush (as Rome found out to her cost at Lake Trasimene in 217) or by accident (as Rome found out to her advantage at Cynoscephalae in 197), a battle could only be initiated if both sides considered it to their advantage. In response to Caesar, Pompey would draw out his army but advance it no farther than the slopes of the hills that bordered the northern edge of the plain. Unwilling to cede the advantage of the high ground, Caesar would disengage each time.

Caesar had anticipated this response from Pompey but was prepared to play along, marshalling his lines a little closer to Pompey's camp each day in order to boost the morale of his men. Having proved his point, Caesar finally decided to break camp and march initially north-east for Scotussa but to keep on the move thereafter. He remained confident his veteran troops were better conditioned to life on the road than Pompey's army, 'which was unused to hard effort', and hoped to lure his rival into battle on better terms somewhere along the way.

On the morning of 9 August (7 June by the modern calendar), Caesar's troops struck their tents and fell into line of column at the gate in preparation for the march out. Initially they took no heed as Pompey's army emerged from its camp and took its accustomed position along the foothills. But then Caesar's lookouts reported something was different on this occasion; Pompey had moved his army off the slopes and it was advancing onto the plain, swinging counterclockwise as it did so to face south-east on the level ground between the heights and the river.

This is the perspective of the plain of Pharsalus from the site of Caesar's camp looking west towards Mt Dogantzes (far left) and north-west towards the line of hills bordering the plain where Pompey had established his camp. (Author's collection)



It was the opportunity Caesar had been waiting for; 'we shall not easily get the chance again', he snapped to his officers. He ordered the march halted and displayed a purple flag, the signal for battle. The camp must have burst into a hive of frantic activity as men scrambled to drop their packs and make ready for combat. Caesar was so intent on not losing the moment he ordered the rampart levelled in places and the ditch filled in with its debris so his army could march out in full cohorts. Posting a guard of 2,000 of his oldest men on the camp, Caesar led his legions onto the plain. Sensing the mood of their commander, and relishing the prospect of avenging the reverse at Dyrrachium, spirits among Caesar's legions were high; as he rode among them he spied one of the centurions in his X legion, a re-enlistee named Caius Crastinus, urging on the men in his cohort. When Caesar called on him by name Crastinus stretched out his arm in salute and, according to Plutarch, cried in a loud voice, 'We shall conquer nobly, Caesar; and I this day will deserve your praises, either alive or dead.'

Why had Pompey decided on battle? Historians both ancient and modern have advanced several hypotheses; that Pompey was anxious not to lose the confidence his men had accrued in breaking Caesar's blockade at Dyrrachium; that with the season advancing and the corn now ripening, Fabian tactics would have an ever diminishing impact on Caesar's capacity to provision his army; that the prospect of allowing Caesar to remain at large indefinitely in the east was an insult to his authority among the client kings of the region and a threat to his prestige in Rome.

But none of these factors outweighed the positive results Pompey was enjoying from the strategy he had adopted of keeping Caesar isolated and on the run. Considering the resources at his disposal balanced against the fighting quality of his opponent, a war of attrition remained the better option. As Appian relates, Pompey 'thought it risky to stake everything on a single engagement against men who were well trained and desperate and against Caesar's famous good luck.'

Pompey's problem, one that had plagued him since the outbreak of the war, remained that while there was never any question about Caesar being entirely master in his own household, Pompey, according to the very tenets upon which he had taken up arms in the first place, could never be more than first among equals. As he was the appointed defender of the republic, the republic had a vested interest in his performance, and the representatives of the republic – senators, office holders, and office seekers – incessantly swarmed around him. United as they were solely by their hatred of Caesar, needling and critiquing their delegated champion was their only contribution to the war effort save squabbling with each other. Too eager to finish off the upstart Caesar and return to Rome to commence the political (and financial) purge of his supporters, they had been urging Pompey to seek a final confrontation since Dyrrachium. That Caesar had been prepared to offer battle every morning since their arrival at the plain of Pharsalus only inflamed them further. Though Pompey warned them that Caesar was forced to do this because of his inferior supply situation, and that precisely for this reason the best response was to do nothing, they accused him of deliberately drawing out the campaign only in order to prolong his extraordinary authority over them. Pompey, the champion of the republic, found himself being derided in his own camp as King of

Kings, and Agamemnon, because Agamemnon, too, had kings under his command in war.

That Pompey offered Caesar the decisive confrontation he wanted against his better judgement is illustrated by the less than enthusiastic exhortation Appian records him making on the morning of the battle: 'I still wanted to wear Caesar down, but you yourselves have invited this contest', he told his men; 'Advance then, as you have been demanding.'

That Pompey still retained deep misgivings about the quality of the forces under his command can clearly be appreciated from the tactical dispositions he revealed at an eve-of-battle council of war in the republican camp. To the astonishment of his subordinates, he claimed that Caesar's army would be routed before the battlelines even met. It was simply a matter of deploying the superior republican cavalry to turn Caesar's flank and encircle him from the rear. The republican infantry would therefore serve as the anvil, the massed cavalry as a giant hammer; Caesar's army would be crushed between them. Unstated but implicit in this master plan was the fact that it would minimize the possibility of the republican legions being subjected to the protracted trial of strength with their Caesarean counterparts that Pompey had consistently sought to avoid.

Labienus enthusiastically endorsed Pompey's proposed plan of attack, not least because, at the head of the republican cavalry, the glory of Caesar's downfall would largely accrue to him. He assured the council Caesar's army was but a shadow of that which had conquered Gaul and swore an oath not to return to camp from the battlefield save in victory. Pompey praised his zeal and swore an oath in the same terms, followed by all the others. The misgivings of its commander notwithstanding, the council separated in buoyant spirits and with high hopes.

OPPOSING ARMIES

When Pompey marched out to battle on the morning of 9 August he left seven cohorts of legionaries plus Thracian and other allied auxiliaries to guard his camp and the neighbouring forts. The remaining 11 legions, or 110 cohorts, 47,000 men in total, he drew up on the plain in a classic *triplica acies* formation, divided vertically under the command of three subordinates. Stationed on the wings and in the centre were those legions in which Pompey placed most confidence. Afranius was charged with command of the right wing, which incorporated the Cilician legion along with those cohorts he had been able to salvage from Spain. The centre of the line was held by Scipio with the legions from Syria, veterans of the debacle at Carrhae. The left wing under Ahenobarbus included the two legions, renamed I and III, that Caesar had handed over to the senate for the abortive Parthian campaign prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. Filling the spaces between these already blooded units were the raw recruits. As a precaution, Pompey had dispersed approximately 2,000 *evocati*, or re-enlisted veterans from his previous campaigns, throughout their ranks in order to stabilize and, if possible, inspire them. Pompey took up a position behind the left wing in order to oversee the course of the battle.

To meet this challenge Caesar arrayed his men in a formation that matched Pompey's deployment identically, albeit in an attenuated

View from the south-west looking across the River Enipeus (the 'river with difficult banks' mentioned by Caesar) anchoring the far right of Pompey's line. (Author's collection)



Mt Dogantzes, the dominant feature of the plain of Pharsalus, viewed from the south-east behind Caesar's lines (Kaloyiros is to the right in the middle distance). This is the view Caesar's legions would have had as they faced up opposite Pompey's lines on the morning of the battle. (Author's collection)



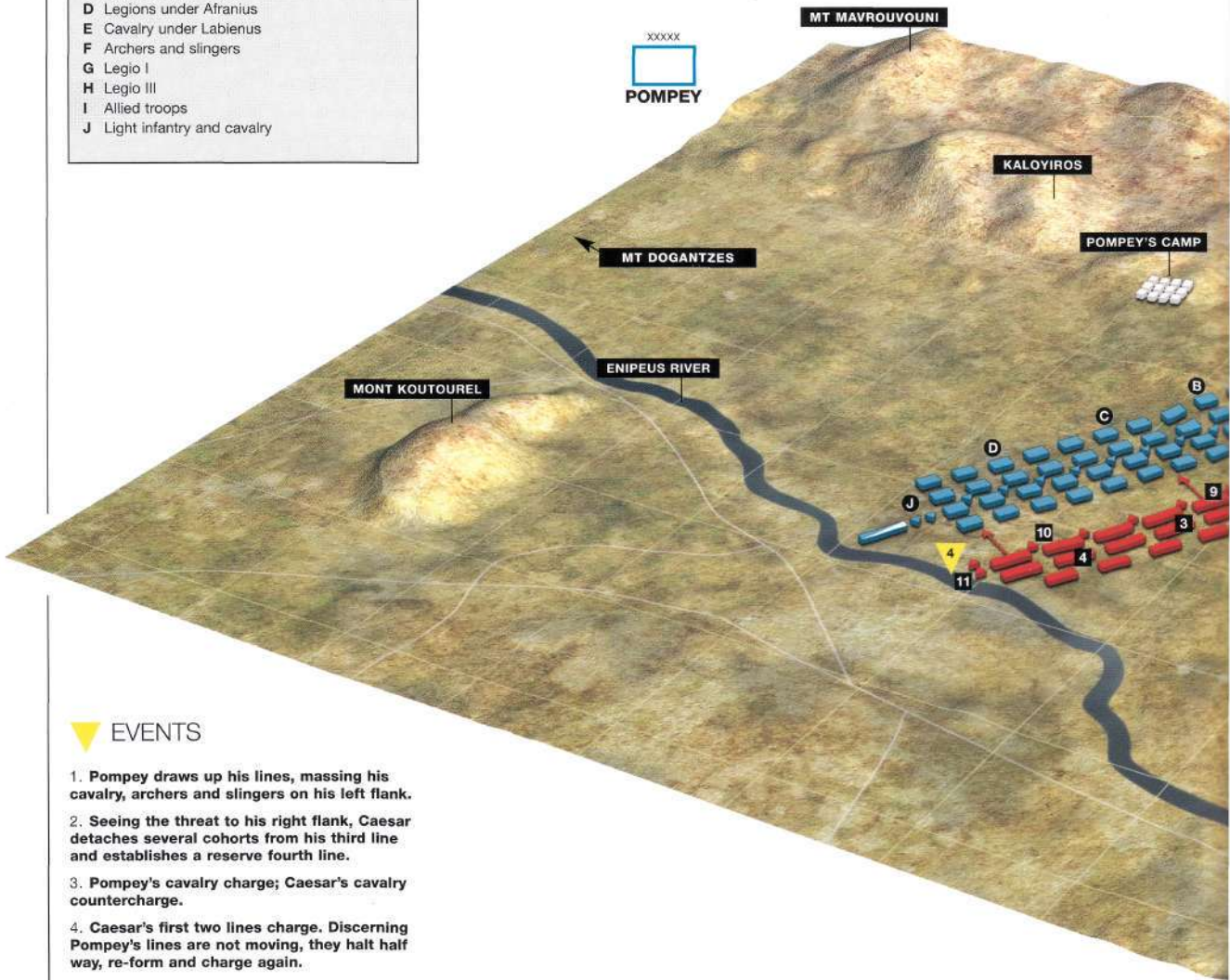
manner. He too drew up his nine legions, or 80 cohorts, 22,000 men in total, in the *triplica acies*, each similarly divided vertically under the command of three subordinates. On the left wing, its flank resting on the river, he placed the IX legion, its ranks so depleted after Dyrrachium the VIII was positioned next to it, in such a way, in Caesar's words, 'as to make virtually a single legion out of the two'. Antony led this wing; the centre was led by Calvinus, resuming his contest with Scipio; while the right wing, on the flank of which Caesar's premier legion, the X, held the place of honour, was directly under Sulla, though Caesar himself monitored operations from this vantage, opposite his rival.

Pompey's cohorts would have averaged out at roughly 420 men each, with a front of 42 men. Since each Roman legionary occupied a total width of six feet, each cohort therefore was approximately 250ft wide. Since in the standard deployment of a legion *triplica acies* there were four cohorts in the first line and three cohorts in each of the second and third

POMPEY'S FORCES

- A Pompey
- B Legions under Ahenobarbus
- C Legions under Scipio
- D Legions under Afranius
- E Cavalry under Labienus
- F Archers and slingers
- G Legio I
- H Legio III
- I Allied troops
- J Light infantry and cavalry

XXXXX
POMPEY



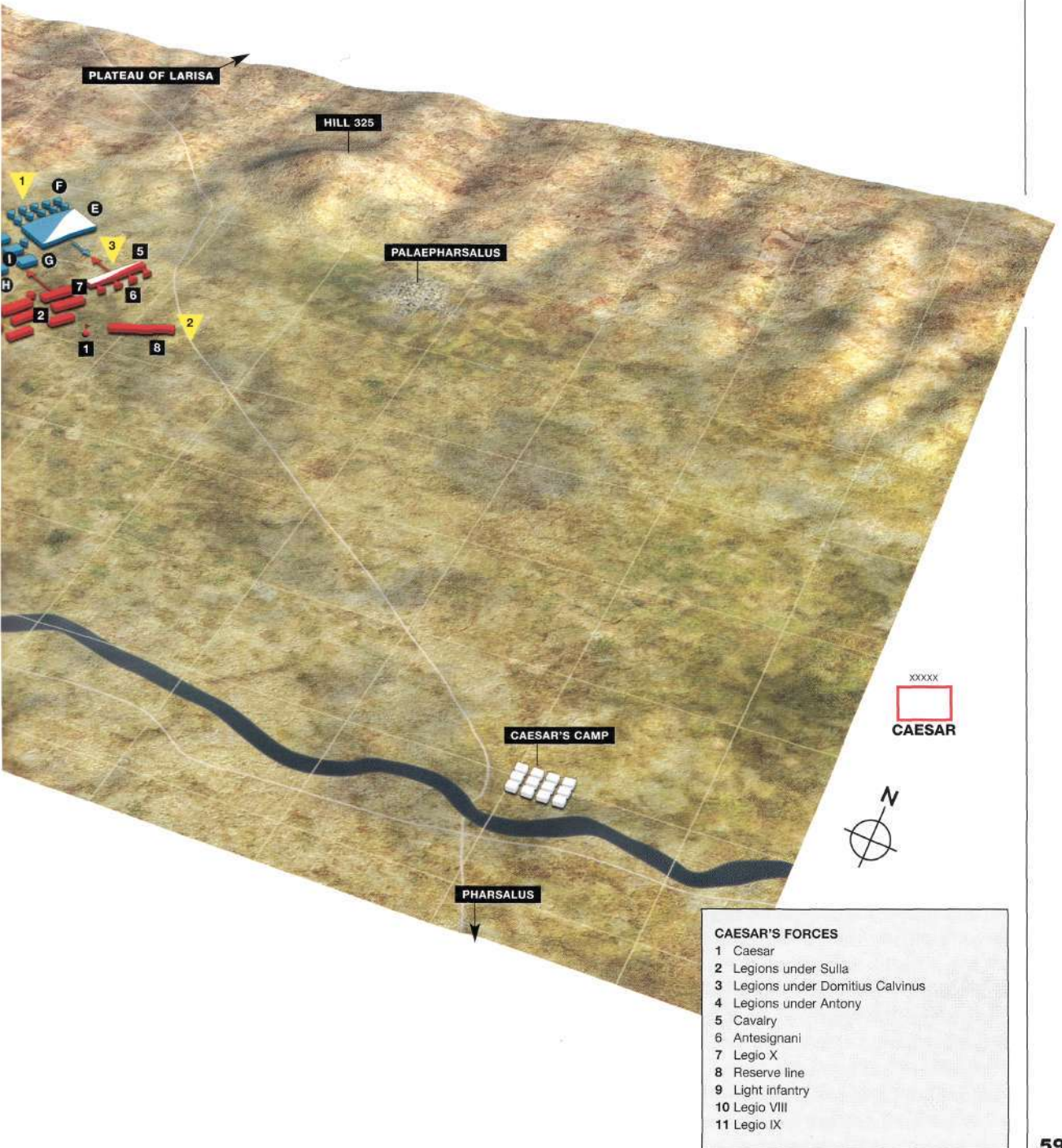
EVENTS

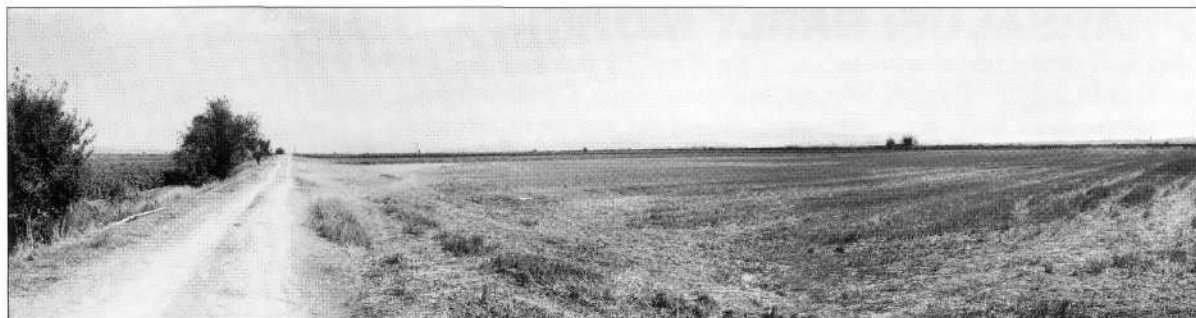
1. Pompey draws up his lines, massing his cavalry, archers and slingers on his left flank.
2. Seeing the threat to his right flank, Caesar detaches several cohorts from his third line and establishes a reserve fourth line.
3. Pompey's cavalry charge; Caesar's cavalry countercharge.
4. Caesar's first two lines charge. Discerning Pompey's lines are not moving, they halt half way, re-form and charge again.

PHARSALUS: EARLY MORNING, 9 AUGUST 48 BC

Pompey draws up his army between the River Enipeus and the hills bordering the northern edge of the plain of Pharsalus. Though outnumbered two-to-one, Caesar eagerly accepts this offer of battle. Seeing Pompey massing his cavalry, archers and slingers on his left flank, Caesar detaches several cohorts from his third line and stations them at an oblique angle in reserve.

Note: Gridlines are shown at intervals of 1km (1093 yds)





Pompey's legions, looking north-east, east, and south-east, would have seen Caesar's army draw up against them across the length of this panorama. (Author's collection)

lines, Pompey's 11 legions, or 110 cohorts, would have had a front of $4 \times 11 = 44$ cohorts, which would have occupied a width of approximately $44 \times 250\text{ft}$; $2\frac{1}{4}$ Roman miles, or 3.3km. Since there is no indication of how deep Pompey's cavalry were arrayed there is no way to estimate the exact length of his line of battle, but it must have been at least 4km wide, facing essentially south-east between the modern villages of Krini in the foothills and Bitsiler on the river.

In order to meet this challenge Caesar was forced to stretch his ranks very thin. His cohorts were barely 275 strong, little more than half the establishment strength of 480, and his lines could have been no greater than six ranks deep. Had Pompey been more confident of his legions, he might have waited for the opportunity to seek battle on a more open field, where in addition to giving his cavalry greater room for manoeuvre he would have been in a position to thin but widen the lines of his infantry, forcing Caesar to compensate by stretching his own lines even further, perhaps to breaking point. But considering the qualitative superiority on Caesar's side Pompey may have drawn comfort from the relatively cramped conditions at Pharsalus; the river prevented him from being outflanked on his right and the considerable depth of his legions would better enable them to absorb the shock of Caesar's assault, buying time for his cavalry to fulfil their assigned task of encircling Caesar's army and hitting it from the rear.

There is no reason to doubt Appian's claim that 'never previously had such large Italian forces met on a single field' before Pharsalus. But, thanks to characteristic Roman chauvinism, the total number of men involved on each side is difficult to estimate. As Appian notes, those Roman authorities who give the most plausible figures for the Italian troops involved 'do not enumerate the allied element, or record their names, because they were foreigners and contributed little in the way of support.' Whatever the actual figures they can have only further tipped the odds against Caesar. Whereas he had been able to scrape together at most a few thousand Greek light infantry from Dolopia, Acarnania and Aetolia during the course of the campaign, Pompey had at his disposal all the polyglot peoples of the east; Spartans and other Peloponnesians, Boeotians, Athenians, and Macedonians from Greece; Thracians, Bithynians, Phrygians, and Ionians; Lydians, Pamphylians, Pisidians, and Paphlagonians; Cilicians, Syrians, Phoenicians, Jews, Arabs, Cypriots, Rhodians, Cretan slingers and various other islanders. Many of these national units were serving under their native despots, who had chosen to exhibit their fealty to Pompey by attending his camp in person; Deiotarus, the tetrarch of eastern Galatia, and Ariarathes, the king of

Cappadocia, were there, as were two distinct Armenian contingents, those from the near side of the Euphrates being commanded by Taxiles, those from beyond it by Megabates, deputizing for King Artavasdes.

Appian describes the allies as being ranged by themselves, 'as if for display'. Though they must have made a fabulous spectacle, glittering in the morning sunlight beneath innumerable banners and standards, their actual utility was quite limited. Pompey interspersed the best of his allied contingents, the Macedonian, Peloponnesian, Boeotian and Athenian units, to fill the gaps between the cohorts, 'because he was convinced of their quietness and good discipline', Appian says. But most of the allies were deliberately stationed well out of harm's way. Appian emphasizes Caesar's contempt for them; to his men he derided them as always ready to flee and always ready to be enslaved: 'in short, you need not fight against them... I ask you to engage only with the Italian troops, even if the allies hang on your heels and harass you like a pack of dogs.'

It was in the cavalry arm that the true disparity in size between the two armies was most evident. It is unlikely that true Roman citizens took part in the battle on horseback on either side. Caesar's entire cavalry force consisted of approximately 1,000 Gallic and German recruits a long way from their distant homelands. Pompey by contrast had at his disposal 6,700 horse composed of 600 Galatians, 500 Cappadocians, 500 Thracians, 200 Macedonians, 500 Gauls and Germans from Alexandria, 200 Syrians (mostly mounted archers) and 800 from Pompey's personal household, the remnant being made up of Dardani, Bessi, Thessalians and men of other nations.

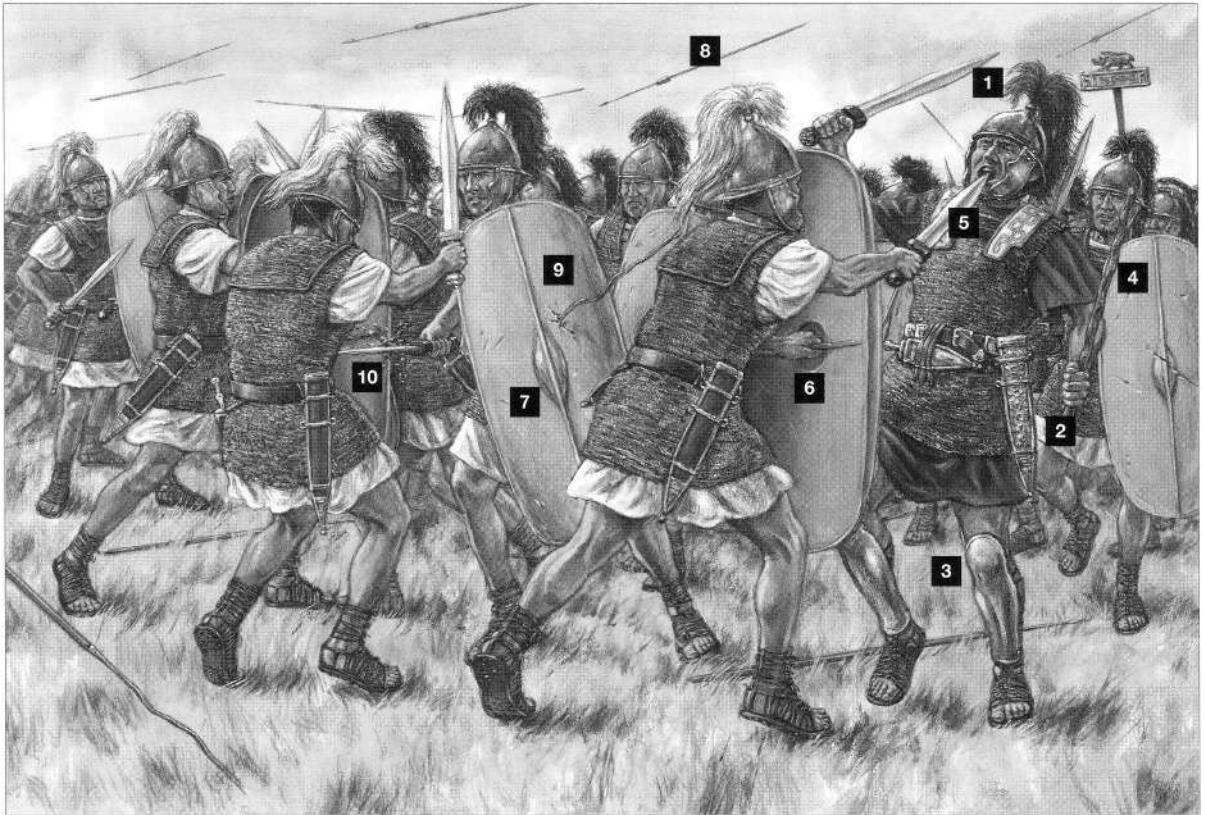
On his right flank Pompey stationed Cappadocian light infantry and 600 Pontic horsemen, just to ensure no surprises would ensue from the far bank of the Enipeus once the battle commenced. The bulk of the allied missile troops and the overwhelming majority of his cavalry were massed on the left flank of the republican line where they matched up against Caesar's horse opposite.

By making these tactical arrangements Pompey had forgone the opportunity to effect a pincer encirclement of Caesar's army by his cavalry on both flanks simultaneously, such as Hannibal had visited on the Roman legions at Cannae in 216. He may have felt the river already served effectively enough to pin Caesar's left flank. In any event, the outcome of the battle now hinged on the capacity of the republican cavalry to overwhelm their Caesarean counterparts and fall on Caesar's right flank and rear before Pompey's lines faltered under the pressure from Caesar's legions. Pompey had grounds for confidence; in the upcoming trial of strength the strike force of his cavalry, which already maintained a 6:1 numerical advantage over Caesar, would be augmented by the detachments of archers and slingers following in their wake.

Caesar must have appreciated his rival's intentions the moment he observed Pompey's cavalry massing on the republican left. Only too aware of his substantial numerical inferiority, he had already taken positive steps to help bolster the evident vulnerability of his own cavalry arm. Caesar had been experimenting with combined arms operations by detaching the youngest and fittest of his frontline troops and re-equipping and retraining them to fight as light infantry units, or *antesignani*, interspersed with the cavalry. This initiative, which had met with some success in skirmishing prior to the battle, would buy Caesar some time during the battle itself. But





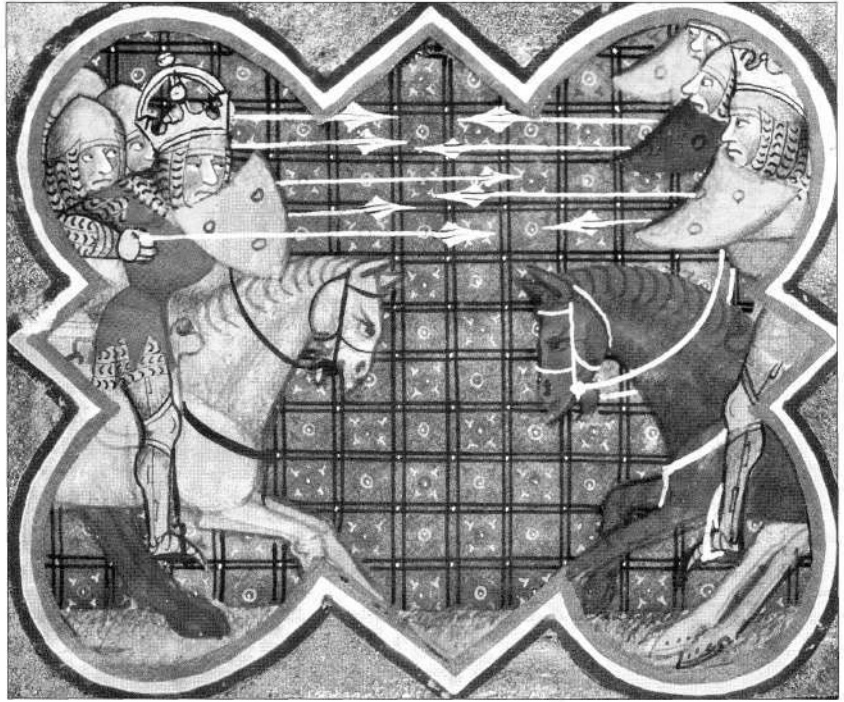


THE FRONT LINE AT PHARSALUS, 9 AUGUST, 48 BC
(pages 62–63)

On the morning of the battle, Caius Crastinus, one of Caesar's centurions in the X legion, had promised his commander victory and that he would deserve Caesar's praise, alive or dead, by the end of the day. The X legion was stationed on the far right flank of Caesar's line and according to Caesar, Crastinus, true to his word, "was the first man to run forward from the right wing, followed by about 120 picked volunteers." Crastinus (1) is here distinguished by his more conspicuously elaborate uniform and arms, especially the scabbard worn on the opposite side to that of the common legionary; (2) his leg greaves, the last remnant of the armoured protection worn by the hoplite-style fighting men of Rome's distant past; (3) and his badge of rank, the vine "swagger stick". (4) A centurion was expected to lead by example, and Crastinus was certainly no exception; in Appian's account "the army testified that he had switched from rank to rank like a man possessed and that his exploits were many and distinguished." But he was not destined to witness the outcome of the battle; Caesar

relates he was killed, "fighting heroically, by a sword-thrust full in the mouth". (5) The legionary delivering the fatal blow is showing good technique with both sword and shield. The scutum was designed to be effective in an offensive as well as defensive role, with the wielder gripping the handle in his fist (6) and using it to punch forward, hoping to drive his opponent off-balance by striking them with the thickest part of the iron ridge running its length (7). Elsewhere along the front line a few pila are still whistling through the air in both directions (8). The long, thin iron shaft of the pilum was designed to distort under its own weight upon penetrating an enemy's shield. One of Caesar's men, his scutum having been struck in this way and unable to wrench the pilum out, has resorted to hacking the metal section off, thereby at least freeing himself of the encumbrance of the wooden haft (9). Even though still not fully combat effective he has nevertheless maintained his discipline and struck home a killing blow of his own. Although the gladius was effective as a slashing weapon, Roman soldiers were trained to use their swords primarily in a thrusting role. In this instance Caesar's legionary has slipped the point of his blade past the shield of his opponent and into his torso, the most vital area. (10)

The clash of Caesar and Pompey at Pharsalus, as imagined in this 13th-century print. (British Library/HIP/Art Resource, NY)

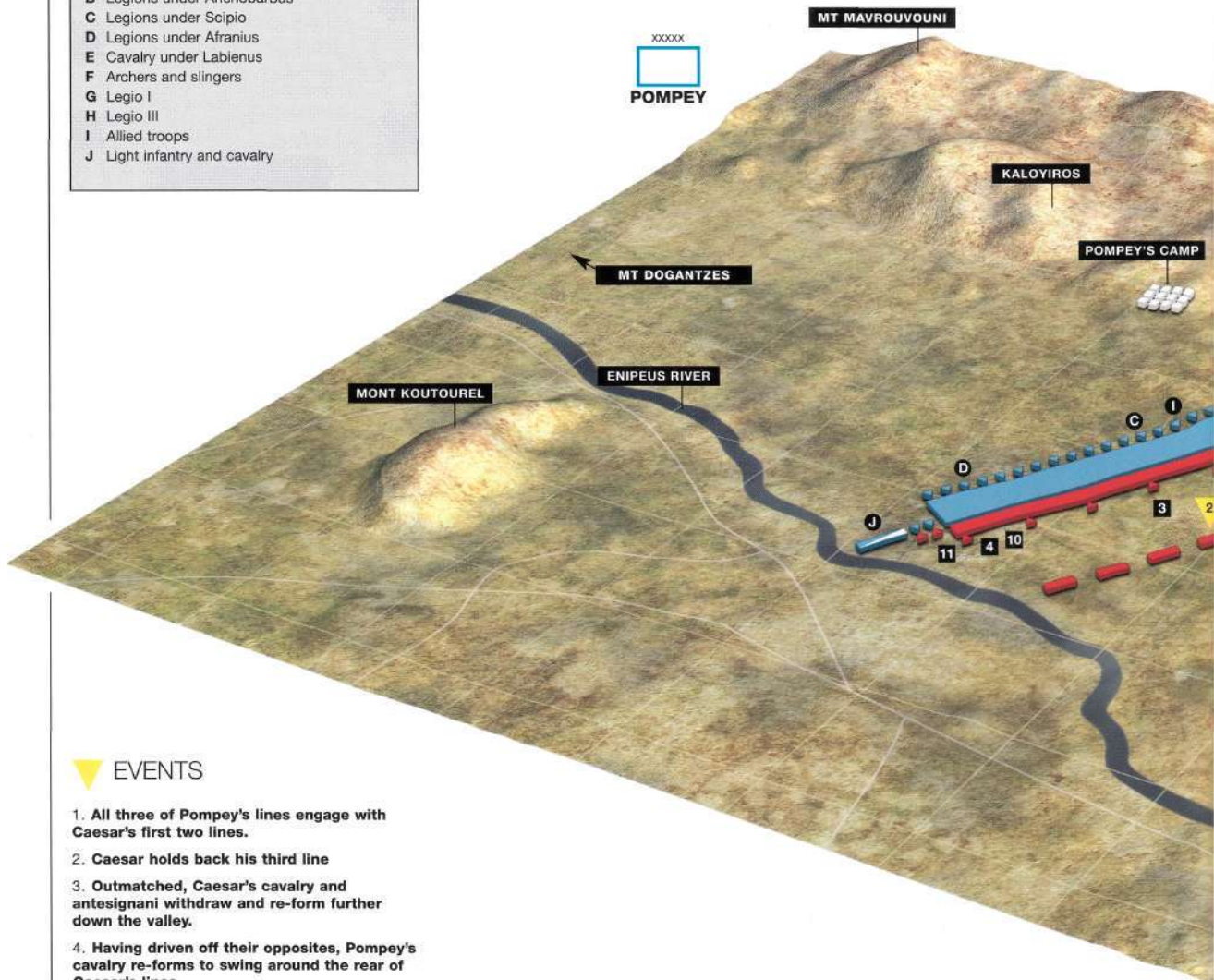


reinforcing his cavalry in such a manner could only delay its ultimately being overwhelmed, which, given the weight of numbers on Pompey's side, was inevitable.

Caesar's response to this crisis was to detach six cohorts, 2,000 men, from the legions in his third line and form them into a fourth line on his right but at an oblique angle to the rest of his army, for the present hidden from view by the cavalry screen, but ready to spring into action once Pompey's cavalry broke through. Caesar may have been influenced in making this deployment by the wisdom of the Greek general Xenophon, who had long ago pointed out in his *The Cavalry Commander* that because mounted men stood higher than those on foot, it was possible to hide infantry in the rear of cavalry, and if on a sudden 'they came out and went for the enemy... they would prove an important factor in making the victory more decisive.' In any event, Caesar was sure to emphasize to these men the critical role they would be called upon to play at some point in the battle. Plutarch relates Caesar urging them not to throw their *pila* at a distance but to 'strike them upwards into the eyes and faces of the enemy; telling them that those fine young dancers would never endure the steel shining in their eyes, but would fly to save their handsome faces.' Since inter-service rivalry is a tradition going back millennia Caesar may well have used such language, sure to strike a chord with his hard-bitten veteran infantry, to make a serious point. The key to the success of the *pilum* was, in addition to its penetrating power, its contortion upon becoming embedded in an enemy's shield. This factor, so significant in disabling the advance of enemy infantry, would be negated in relation to cavalry, who could take the missiles in their shields and while still relatively unencumbered ride down the legionary, who in turn would now lack the reach to defend himself. Caesar was aware that, on the other hand, Pompey's cavalry would lack

POMPEY'S FORCES

- A Pompey
- B Legions under Ahenobarbus
- C Legions under Scipio
- D Legions under Afranius
- E Cavalry under Labienus
- F Archers and slingers
- G Legio I
- H Legio III
- I Allied troops
- J Light infantry and cavalry



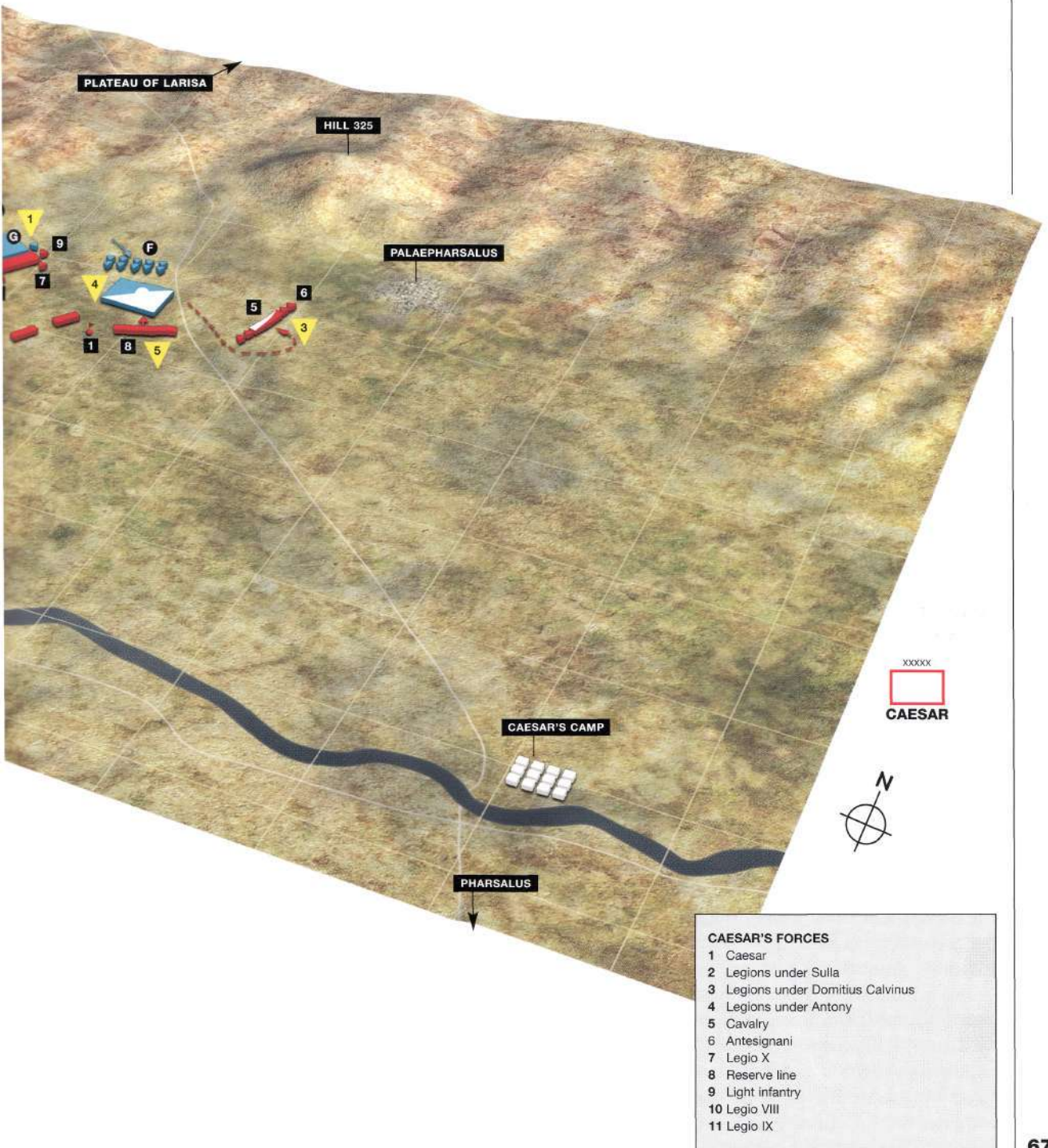
EVENTS

1. All three of Pompey's lines engage with Caesar's first two lines.
2. Caesar holds back his third line
3. Outmatched, Caesar's cavalry and *antesignani* withdraw and re-form further down the valley.
4. Having driven off their opposites, Pompey's cavalry re-forms to swing around the rear of Caesar's lines.
5. Caesar gives the order for his reserve line to attack Pompey's cavalry.

PHARSALUS: MID-MORNING, 9 AUGUST 48 BC

Caesar's first two lines charge. Seeing Pompey's lines have not moved, they spontaneously halt halfway, redress their ranks, then renew the assault. While Pompey's legions hold their ground in the close-quarters fighting, his cavalry drives off Caesar's cavalry and wheels about to encircle Caesar's flank and rear.

Note: Gridlines are shown at intervals of 1km (1093 yds)



the momentum to break through a wall of shields advancing upon them unexpectedly, shoulder to shoulder, bristling with *pila* points. The capacity for cavalry to punch through heavy infantry in such a scenario would require the invention of the stirrup and the dawn of a whole new era of warfare several centuries hence.

Caesar's last instructions to the field officers of both his third and fourth lines were to remind them they were ordered not to engage until they received the command from him via flag signal.

With their armies deployed, Caesar and Pompey, each on horseback and starkly visible in his *paludamentum*, the red cloak of the commander-in-chief, took up station behind their lines. Both sides having already issued passwords – for Caesar 'Venus *Venetrix*, Bringer of Victory', for Pompey 'Hercules *Inuictus*, the Unconquered' – the time of preparation was over and the time of battle was at hand.

THE CLASH OF ARMS

Ironically, given the eagerness with which both sides had sought this opportunity, there was a long moment of hesitation as the armies faced each other across the plain. Dio describes a pervasive silence and sense of awe: 'they did not immediately come to close quarters. Sprung from the same country and from the same hearth, with almost identical weapons and similar formation, each side shrank from beginning the battle.'

As the minutes drifted by the Italian troops on both sides remained waiting quietly, exactly in their places. It was only when Pompey noticed that his allied contingents were becoming disordered as a result of the delay and became afraid that they would initiate a general collapse of discipline before the fighting started that he gave the signal for battle to be joined. The republican cavalry initiated the charge on his left flank; within moments the plain must have reverberated to the thunder of over 6,000 horse moving in unison at speed. In response Caesar's cavalry quickly added their weight to the din while the first two lines of his infantry commenced their machine-like tread towards Pompey's waiting legions. As Dio put it, 'when the allied troops began the battle, the rest also joined in.' But the ill-discipline displayed in the republican ranks would be a harbinger of pivotal events to come.

Before Caesar's lines had advanced too far from their starting positions it became obvious something very unusual was taking place on the battlefield. In defiance of centuries of Roman military tradition Pompey's legions had not budged one iota from their posts. This was the ultimate manifestation of Pompey's lack of confidence in the fighting qualities of the men under his command. Rather than risk having them advance, only for the green recruits to lose contact with the veterans, opening holes in his lines and allowing Caesar's troops to pour through the breaches, Pompey had ordered each of his lines of battle to remain in place and take the shock of Caesar's assault upon their stationary positions.

Caesar is severely critical of this decision, which he asserts denied the republican legions the 'inborn excitement and ardour of soul, which is fired by the desire to fight,' and brought to its keenest edge in the impetus of the charge, with trumpets blaring and voices shouting in unison: 'This quality generals ought not to repress, but to encourage.'

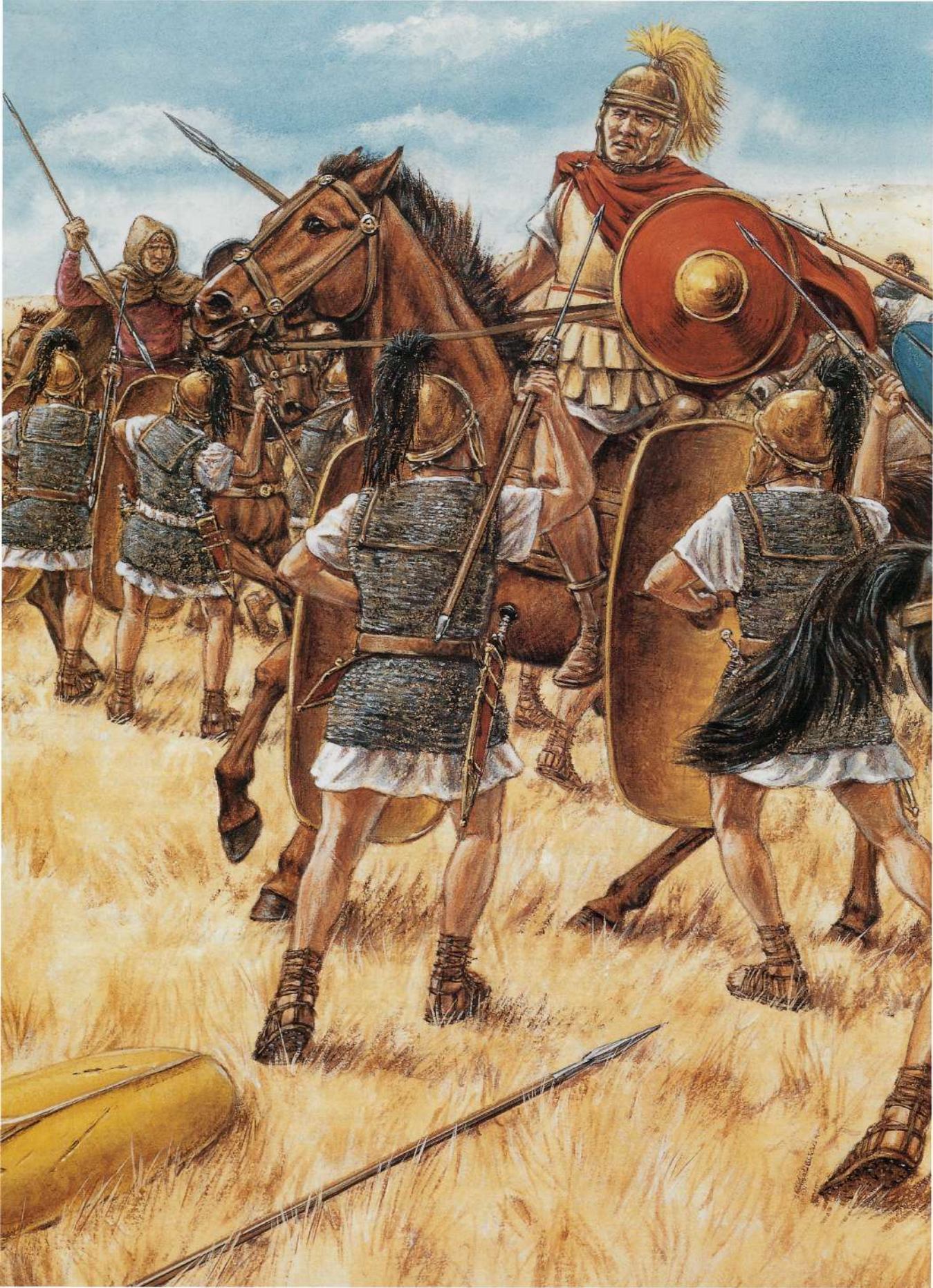


This battle relief from the Mausoleum of the Julii in St Rémy de Provence, France may represent the clash of arms at Pharsalus. (The Art Archive/Dagli Orti)

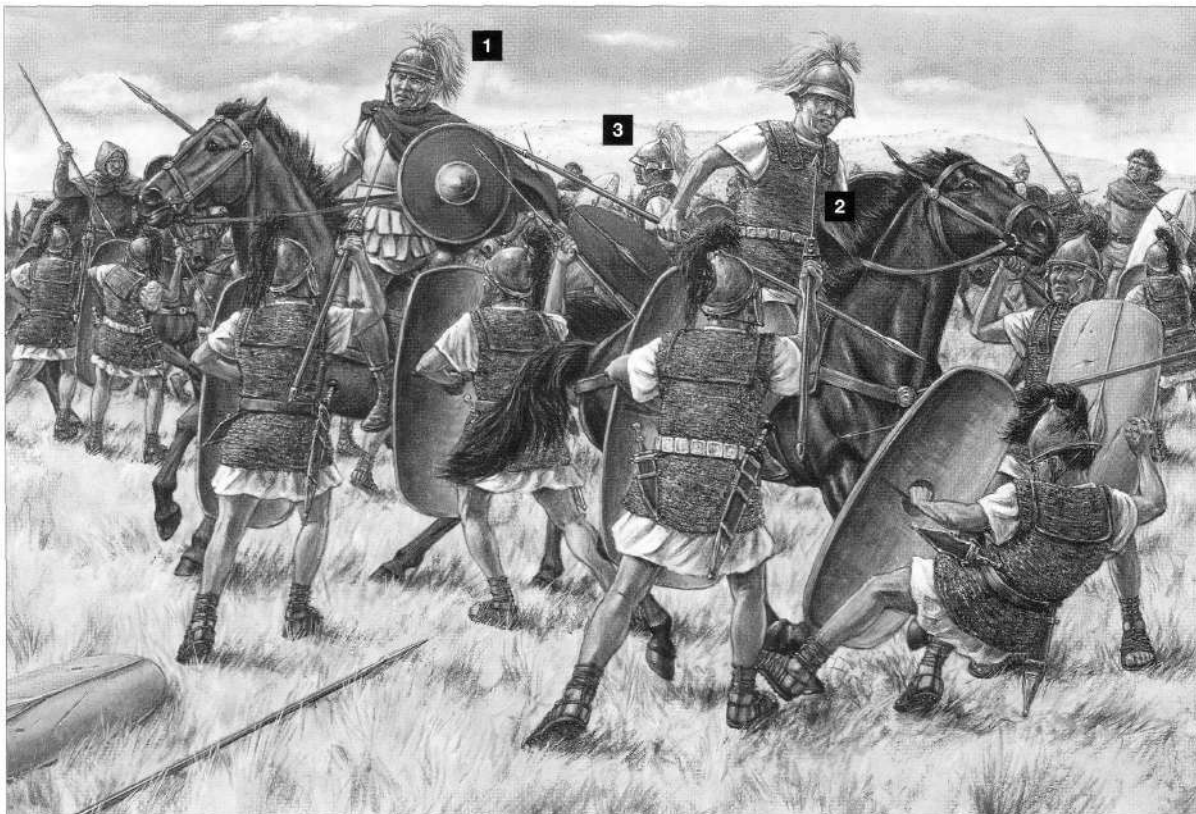
Pompey, however, must have calculated that, on balance, he stood to gain more from the fact that his lines would be firm at the moment of impact between the two sides than he would lose from his men not getting the adrenaline rush generated by forward momentum. In addition, he may have had two other considerations in mind. First, by drawing Caesar's army into his own, Pompey would narrow the distance and hence the time frame necessary for his cavalry to circle around Caesar's rear; Caesar would be forcing his own neck into the noose, as it were. Secondly, Pompey could hope that since Caesar's legions would have to cover the entire distance between the two armies at a charge instead of meeting their foe halfway they would be disorganized and physically drained once they finally came to grips with their recalcitrant rivals, thereby taking some of the sting out of the initial clash.

Against a lesser army this aspect of Pompey's defensive posture, entirely unanticipated by Caesar, might have been realized. But at this moment Caesar's legions proved worthy of their commander. Once it became obvious that Pompey's army was refusing to budge, Caesar's cohorts spontaneously halted approximately halfway across the battlefield and paused in order to catch their breath and re-dress their lines before coming on again. They hurled their *pila* once in range, drew their swords, and crashed upon the enemy in full force.

Caesar must have been gratified at this display of the discipline years under his command had instilled into his men. 'Not that the Pompeians were not up to the task', he is forced to admit. In their silent lines they took the shower of Caesarean *pila* upon their shields and responded with a volley of their own before taking the full shock of Caesar's legions bodily. Now it was Pompey's turn to be gratified; his men had kept their







CAESAR'S RESERVES ROUT POMPEY'S CAVALRY AND TURN THE TIDE OF HISTORY AT PHARSALUS, 9 AUGUST, 48 BC
(pages 70–71)

Pompey's trump card at Pharsalus was his overwhelming superiority in cavalry. He maintained a greater than 6:1 numerical majority over Caesar in this arm comprised of horsemen from many diverse peoples – Galatians, Cappadocians, Thracians, Macedonians, Gauls, Germans and Syrians, among others. (1) The individual fighting qualities within these national units was variable but both generals were aware that by massing practically his entire cavalry strike force on one flank by sheer weight of numbers they would overwhelm Caesar's horse and subsequently dominate the battlefield, enabling them to strike Caesar's legions at will anywhere along their line. To prevent this Caesar withdrew six cohorts of infantry from his legions and stationed them behind his cavalry at an oblique angle to his front line. He ordered them not to attack until they received the signal, and urged them not throw their pila at a distance but to "strike them upwards into the eyes and faces of the enemy; telling them that those fine young dancers would never endure the steel shining in their eyes, but would fly to save their handsome faces." In the event, Caesar's strategy operated like clockwork. Having brushed aside Caesar's cavalry, Pompey's

mass of horsemen wheeled about Caesar's right flank and began to subdivide into individual squadrons so as to operate more freely in Caesar's wide open flank and rear. At this moment of transition, as the impetus of their initial charge was spent and Pompey's cavalry were at their most vulnerable, Caesar gave the order for his reserve line to begin their assault. Staking the outcome of the battle on an attack by heavy infantry against cavalry that outnumbered them 3:1 and that enjoyed complete freedom of manoeuvre on an open plain was a desperate gamble but Caesar's six cohorts rewarded the faith their commander placed in them. Crashing utterly unexpectedly onto Pompey's motley agglomeration of horsemen, who must have already assumed the battle was all but won, the legionaries did as they were instructed, keeping their pila in hand and using the extra reach to jab at the faces of the riders, not at their mounts. (2) Overwhelmed by the psychological shock of the assault the leading edge of Pompey's cavalry panicked, turned about, and fled, taking the rear ranks, who had yet to come into contact with the enemy, along with them in a snowballing rout that carried them right through the archers and slingers coming up behind them and off the field altogether, not stopping until they reached the safety of the hills bordering the plain. (3) They would play no further part in the battle, the balance of which had swung decisively in favour of Caesar.



Hill 325 from the south-west; anchoring the left of Pompey's line, his cavalry fled up its slopes after their repulse by the reserve line on Caesar's right. (Author's collection)

formation and, more importantly, their nerve. Retaining unit cohesion, they gave as good as they got, man to man; Dio records how the close-quarter exchanges were rendered especially grim by the fratricidal nature of civil war, where, locked into combat with a former neighbour, colleague, or even family member, 'Many sent messages home through their very slayers.' Caesar had been denied the quick breakthrough that he may have anticipated and that Pompey had feared above all else.

However, one caveat should be noted at this point. Only the first two of Caesar's three lines were now engaged in the battle. Caesar was holding back his third line for two reasons. First, it would be needed for the decisive push at the opportune moment. Second, Caesar was well aware that if he committed all three lines simultaneously he would leave his reserve line hanging in open space; the republican cavalry would be able to ignore it as they swung into the flanks and rear of his heavily committed legions.

On the other hand, although the sources are silent on this issue, in light of subsequent events it seems likely that Pompey ordered all three of his lines to close up immediately upon contact with the enemy. No doubt this had the desired effect of bolstering the republican ranks, but it left Pompey with no reserve of cohorts that could be committed elsewhere on the battlefield in the event of any contingency.

With his anvil holding up creditably, Pompey's attention must have shifted quickly to the progress of his hammer, the republican cavalry on his left flank. At first glance, all appeared to be proceeding according to plan. Caesar's cavalry, massively outnumbered, even taking into account the light armed troops darting at the enemy from between the legs of their horses, could not withstand the pressure for long. There is no doubt they were swept aside; the question lingers as to whether Caesar allowed them to be systematically routed or gave prior instructions for



The cavalryman's arms and equipment depicted here on the funerary stele of Caius Romanius, who served during reign of Nero, had not evolved significantly in the century since Pharsalus. Note the high-pommel saddle, partial compensation for the absence of stirrups in enabling the rider to maintain his balance in the shock of combat. (The Art Archive/Museo della Civiltà Romana/Dagli Orti)

them to break off the engagement deliberately at the point of being overwhelmed so as to preserve them as a viable fighting force. Caesar himself merely remarks that, 'Unable to withstand their attack, our cavalry were driven from their positions and retreated a little', and he does not mention his horsemen again in his account of the battle. But was the total sacrifice of his cavalry arm necessary in order to secure his operational objectives? If so, why bother integrating specialist light armed troops? Plutarch may provide us with the independent confirmation we need to conclude that the withdrawal was premeditated; he relates that Caesar, '*having given the signal, his horse retreated back a little, and gave way to those six subsidiary cohorts, which had been posted in the rear, as a reserve to cover the flank.*' [my italics.]

The battle now approached its crisis. Pompey's cavalry, as far as they were aware now possessing the freedom of the entire plain, began to splinter into individual squadrons in order to go around Caesar's lines on their now open right flank. It is uncertain whether this subdivision took place according to a set plan laid down by Pompey, was executed by Labienus as specific targets of opportunity became available, or simply occurred as

the national units, never fully integrated under a cohesive command structure in the first place, began to make their own judgements about where and when to strike next. In any event the already manifest threat to Caesar's position was exacerbated by the looming spectre of Pompey's archers and slingers following up behind their all-conquering cavalry. Within moments they would be in a position to unleash a withering enfilading missile barrage into the right wing of Caesar's X legion. And there is no doubt that so deliberate a general as Pompey had specifically chosen this wing on which to concentrate his flanking assault; the right arm was the Roman sword arm, and the fighting men of the X legion would be unable to deploy their shields effectively in self defence.

It was at this moment that Pompey's cavalry, their initial momentum spent, were at their most vulnerable as they fragmented into multiple units and wheeled about in preparation for the grand encirclement of Caesar's lines. Accordingly, it was at this moment Caesar now ordered a *vexillum* to be displayed as the signal for his reserve fourth line to attack.

In order for this bold gambit to be successful it required total surprise. Caesar's fourth line therefore cannot have been stationed more than 328ft (100m) from the point or flank of Pompey's cavalry formations when they began their charge; there is no way that heavy infantry could run down horsemen otherwise. The wonder is, therefore, that they weren't identified and taken into account by the republican assault force the moment it cleared Caesar's flank. The sources speak of the legionaries of the fourth line 'leaping up' as they commenced their attack, implying they had been in a kneeling position beforehand, with standards lowered; but this would hardly suffice for camouflage on an open plain. One can only assume Caesar's cavalry angled their line of retreat to mask the advance of the fourth line for a few precious moments, enough to allow them time to come to grips with the enemy,



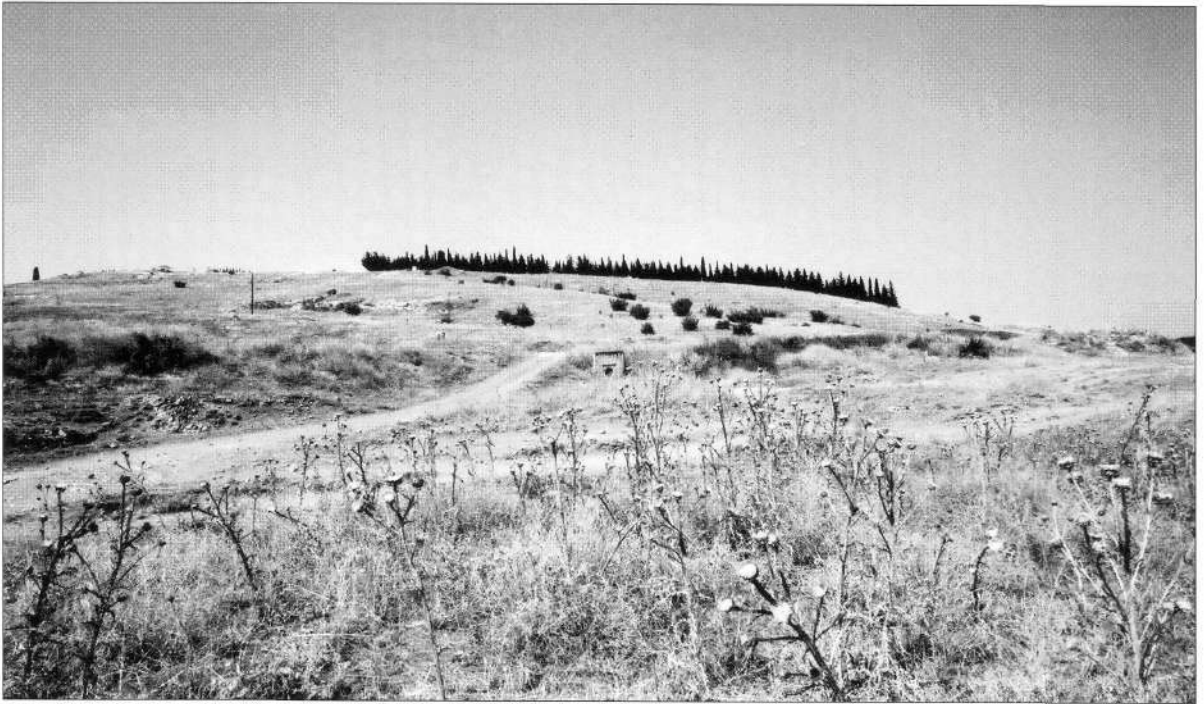
The beaten remnant of Pompey's army got as far as this hill (*mons*) in their attempted flight to Larisa. From this vantage they could have looked back south-east at Caesar's army occupying the road through the hills, cutting them off from the stream (*flumen*) running parallel to it. (Author's collection)

who were concentrating on their true quarry, the exposed backs of Caesar's *triplica acies*.

Caesar's fourth line proceeded to deliver the most decisive charge by infantry upon cavalry in the history of warfare. This total inversion of the established tenets of combat must have frozen the republican cavalry to their saddles in confusion. By the time the horsemen had recovered from their shock it was too late; the legionaries crashed upon and then through them like a wave, shouting their war cries to upset the horses and, as they had been instructed, jabbing at the faces of the riders with their *pila*.

It would have taken inspired leadership on the part of those officers in command of the republican horse for them to have done what was necessary to meet this contingency; namely use their superior speed to draw off, rally, and then charge Caesar's infantry, preferably on their flanks and at their rear. In the total absence of this leadership the cavalry resorted to using their superior speed for one purpose only; saving their own skins. Caesar relates that not one of them stood their ground. It is unlikely that his men actually had to come to grips with more than the leading edge of them; the first ranks turned and bolted, carrying those behind along with them in a snowballing rout. They fled for the safety of the hills bordering the northern edge of the plain, many of them not stopping until they had reached the slopes of hill 325, the highest peak on Caesar's right.

Pompey's hammer had been knocked out of the battle. The primary blame must rest with Labienus; determined to concentrate the strike power of his cavalry he had massed them into a single vast horde and hurled them on a narrow front straight at the enemy rather than maintaining



distinct squadrons with proper intervals between them in order to enable the effective response of successive lines to an attack on the front ranks. In the event, so precipitate was their collapse it may have inflicted collateral damage on the archers and slingers following up behind them. Lucan could have been drawing on ancient accounts when he wrote of the republican cavalry that, 'with their bridles turned about, they headlong charged at their own troops, a concentrated cloud.'

This disruption of their lines, not to mention the rising swell of panic they must have experienced after witnessing the total defeat of their cavalry, and realizing they were now isolated and fully exposed to the wrath of Caesar, would have made the archers and slingers easier prey. But it would not entirely account for how, as Caesar says, they were utterly slaughtered by the legionaries of the fourth line; for light missile troops by definition could easily avoid close combat with heavy infantry, especially those who had just completed a heroic charge across open ground into action against cavalry. This is where we can assume that Caesar's cavalry reappears on the scene, for this was a task ready-made for them.

From the moment his cavalry arm disappeared from sight after turning Caesar's flank, Pompey had been reduced to conjecturing about its fortunes by the clouds of dust being kicked up behind Caesar's lines. He would have first been made aware of the awful truth when his archers and slingers began scattering across the plain in a vain attempt to avoid being hunted down and individually liquidated by Caesar's cavalry. And then Caesar's fourth line emerged out of the fog of war, wheeled around Pompey's now fully exposed left wing and fell on the flank of legions I and III.

With all of his lines already fully committed to the struggle against Caesar's frontal assault, and his allies probably already slinking away,

The *mons* as seen from the south-west by Caesar's troops strung out along the Larisa-Pharsalus road. In antiquity the *flumen* would have flowed here in the foreground – now there is only a drainage ditch, which is obscured. (Author's collection)



End of the line. View from the *mons* looking north across the plain of Thessaly. Pompey's men making their escape would have clambered to this height only to see Caesar's troops already waiting for them in the valley below. (Author's collection)

Pompey had no reserve in place to deploy against this new threat. And now, at last, Caesar, who had been holding his third line in reserve to take advantage of just this moment, ordered these fresh cohorts into the battle. Pompey's legions were already beginning to waver as, through rumour and report filtering through the ranks, they became conscious of the threat to their left wing; under this additional pressure they at last began to give way.

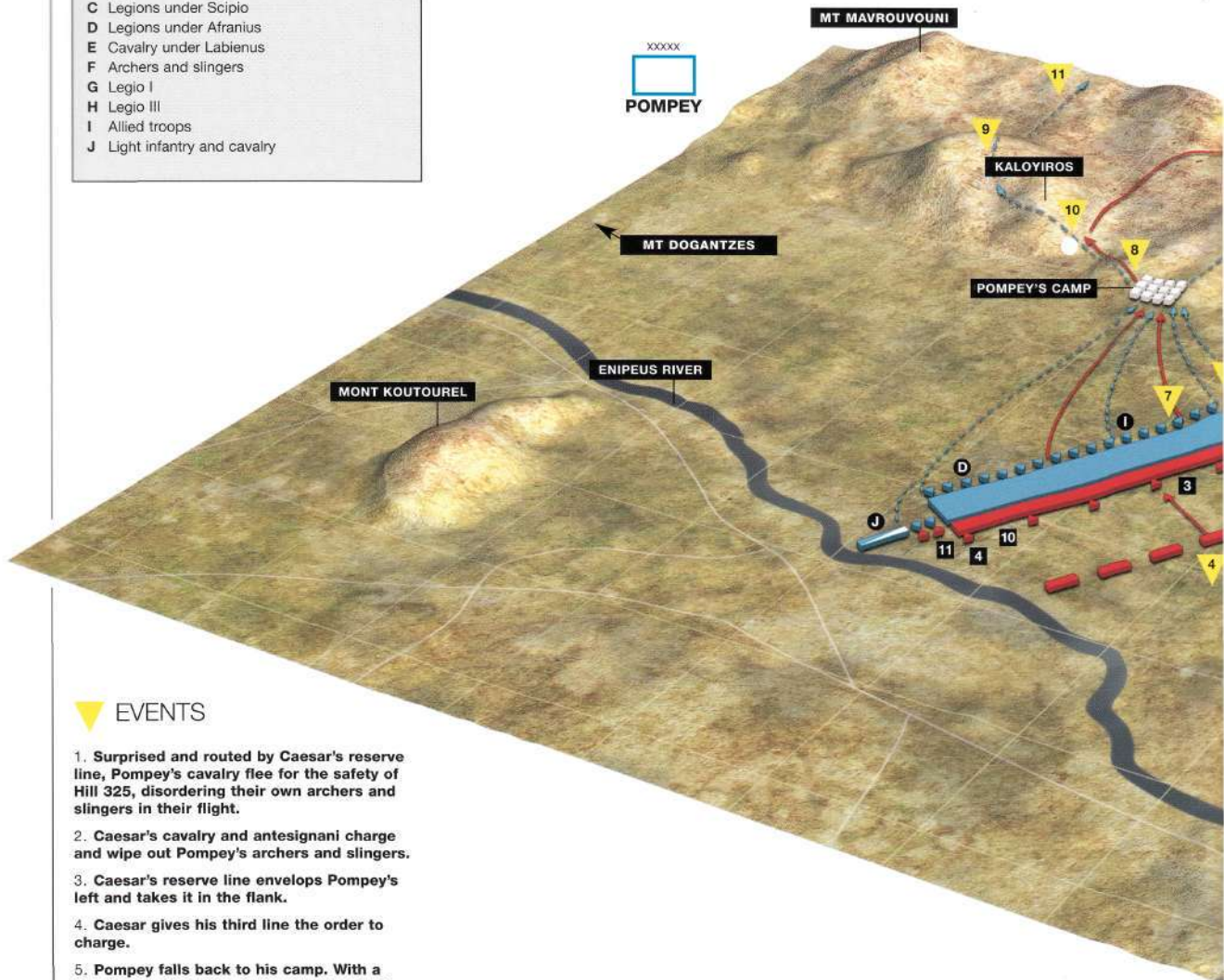
It was no sudden collapse; even on the crumbling left flank the legionaries retreated step by step, still locked in battle. It was the allies who fled headlong, making no effort at resistance but streaming back into the temporary safety of the camp. Once there they fell to despoiling the tents of their own army, 'as though these belonged to an enemy', Appian says, looting them for whatever they could carry away. By now the remainder of Pompey's legions, having witnessed the reversal of republican fortunes in this part of the battlefield, were also in gradual retreat. At first they kept formation and continued to defend themselves as far as was possible. But, subjected to relentless assault by an enemy now fired by the prospect of total victory, they finally turned and ran.

Their commander had already absented himself from the field. Looking, according to Plutarch, 'like one distracted and beside himself and without any recollection or reflection that he was Pompey the Great', he fell back into the camp. Pausing only to order those cohorts at the gate to be on their guard, he retired to his tent, utterly withdrawing from reality. Defeat, a totally new experience, had overwhelmed him.

His rival, on the other hand, appreciated the importance of fully exploiting a victory. Many of his men were wounded and even those who were not, sweltering under the midday sun and exhausted after their labours of the morning, desired nothing more than water and shade. But Caesar circulated frantically among them, urging them on to a

POMPEY'S FORCES

- A Pompey
- B Legions under Ahenobarbus
- C Legions under Scipio
- D Legions under Afranius
- E Cavalry under Labienus
- F Archers and slingers
- G Legio I
- H Legio III
- I Allied troops
- J Light infantry and cavalry



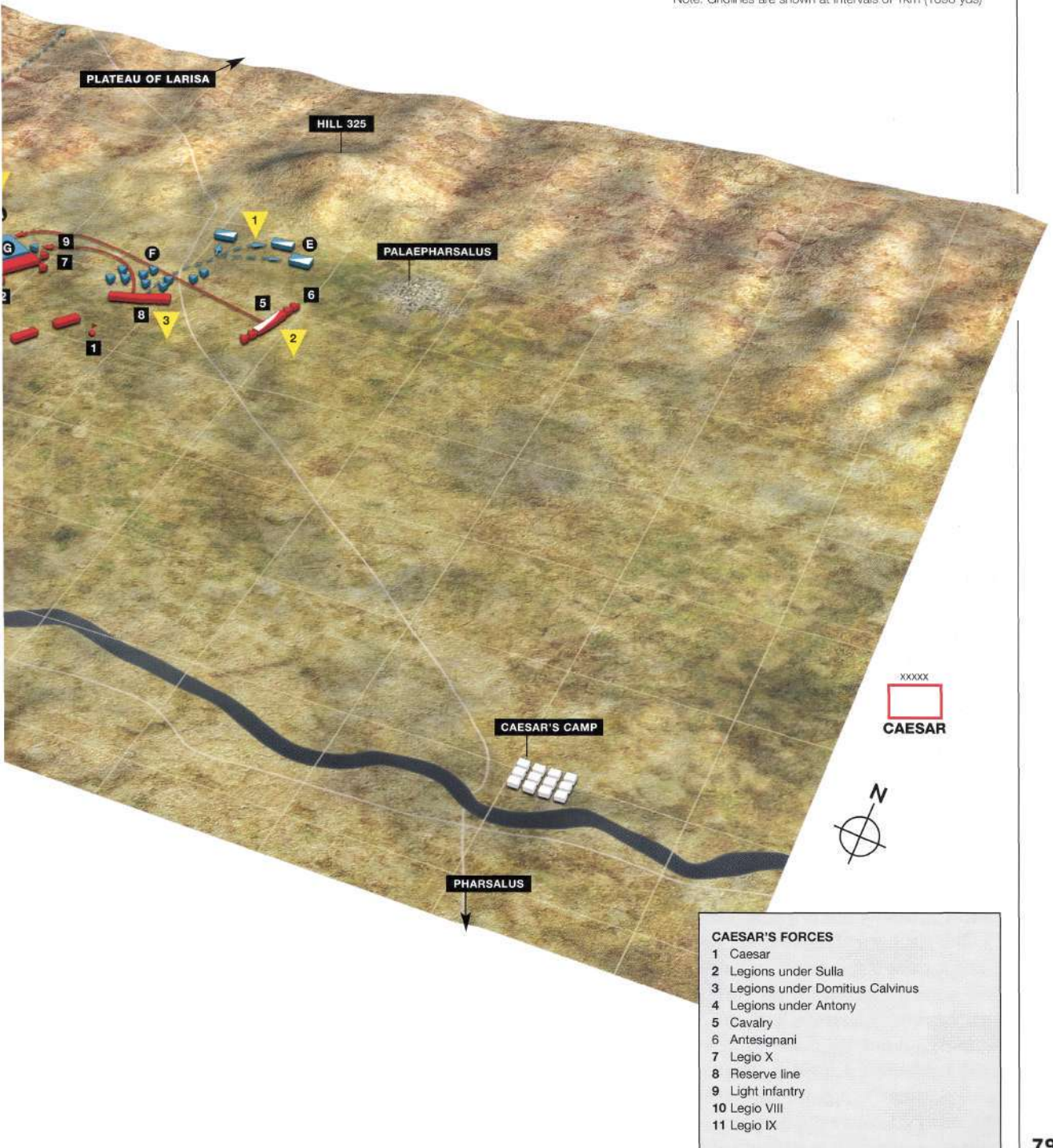
EVENTS

1. Surprised and routed by Caesar's reserve line, Pompey's cavalry flee for the safety of Hill 325, disordering their own archers and slingers in their flight.
2. Caesar's cavalry and antesignani charge and wipe out Pompey's archers and slingers.
3. Caesar's reserve line envelops Pompey's left and takes it in the flank.
4. Caesar gives his third line the order to charge.
5. Pompey falls back to his camp. With a small escort he rides for Larisa, abandoning his army.
6. Pompey's lines begin to give way. They finally break and begin streaming back towards their camp.
7. Caesar's legions break through. They pursue Pompey's fleeing men.
8. Caesar's legions overwhelm the auxiliaries on guard and storm Pompey's camp.
9. The remnant of Pompey's army retreats to the heights of Kaloyiros.
10. Caesar pursues the fugitives and commences building siege works around Kaloyiros.
11. Unwilling to be trapped on a slope with no water, Pompey's army attempts to flee through the hills, hoping to reach Larisa.
12. Taking an easier route through the hills, Caesar sets out to cut Pompey's men off.
13. Pompey's men continue round the slopes of Mavrovouni. Caesar's men join the road running north to Larisa and cut off the retreat of Pompey's army.

PHARSALUS: NOON, 9 AUGUST 48 BC

Caesar's reserve line routs Pompey's cavalry, which flees into the hills. Caesar's cavalry re-enters the battle, wiping out Pompey's archers and slingers before joining the reserve line in falling on Pompey's now exposed left flank. Caesar orders his third line to press home the attack. Pompey's legions waver then collapse. While Pompey flees, Caesar storms his camp and runs the remnants of his army to ground.

Note: Gridlines are shown at intervals of 1km (1093 yds)





The *mons* viewed from the north from behind Caesar's defence lines. Abandoned by their leaders, what was left of Pompey's army surrendered here the morning after the battle. (Author's collection)

further effort, pointing out that if they allowed the enemy to recover they would be the victors of a single day, but if they took the enemy's camp they would have decided the entire campaign in one stroke.

Having rallied his men Caesar led them in person against the fortifications of Pompey's camp. These were stoutly defended by the cohorts that had been stationed there and even more energetically by the Thracians and other auxiliaries fighting alongside them. But those republicans making a stand were quickly driven from the walls by the hail of missiles directed at them and Caesar's troops were able to force the gates; once they were inside, the slaughter began.

At this point Pompey was shocked back into his senses: 'What! Into the very camp?' he is supposed by Plutarch to have exclaimed. Putting aside his *paludamentum* for the garb of a common soldier he departed on horseback via a secure exit and with a handful of high-ranking colleagues rode hard for Larisa, reaching it before nightfall.

When Caesar entered his rival's camp he was struck by the opulence on display: artificial bowers, tents floored with freshly cut turf, others wreathed with ivy and myrtle, accoutred with embroidered carpets and hangings, and great quantities of silver laid out. 'It was easy to deduce from their pursuit of inessential pleasures that the other side had no misgivings about the outcome of the day', he notes wryly. He may have given himself a moment to reflect on the pleasant irony of encountering myrtle here in his enemy's den, for myrtle was sacred to the goddess Venus, from whom his family traced its descent.

But still the business of the day required his attention. He had Pompey's army on the run; he needed to bring it to bay before nightfall. It is a further measure of the respect he commanded among his men that he was able to rally them once more and set out in pursuit, for a Roman soldier lived by plunder and the treasures of Pompey's camp evidently offered unprecedented opportunities.

As Caesar's legions had streamed into their camp the remnants of the republican army, still some 20,000 strong, had streamed out, taking refuge on the nearby heights of Kaloyiros. When Caesar ordered this hill

surrounded by a ditch and bank, Pompey's men, aware that with no access to fresh water they could not long endure a siege, began to withdraw to the north along an adjoining ridge. They were careful to keep to broken ground as Caesar's cavalry were now roaming at will across the plain; their prize catch was Ahenobarbus, who was run down and killed after he succumbed to exhaustion.

But while the flight of the republicans through the hills offered some relief from this immediate threat it slowed the overall progress of their retreat and thus accorded Caesar an opportunity to overhaul them. Ordering the rest of his army to hold Pompey's camp, Caesar took four legions north-east until he connected with the main road to Larisa, thereby cutting off Pompey's straggling refugees.

As the beaten republicans approached the last rise (*mons*) in the hill country before it opened out onto the flat plain of Thessaly they would have seen Caesar's troops on their right drawn up in a battle line along the road running parallel to their line of march. Quickening their pace, they would have clambered to the top of the *mons*; there was the plain, stretching from the base of the *mons* (where the modern village of Kiparissos is now) as far as the eye could see, and the road to safety cutting across it, tantalizingly close. But in the valley floor below them were more of Caesar's legionaries. There was no escape.

Although darkness was falling and his men had already been pushed to the limits of human endurance Caesar ordered them to construct a ditch and bank along the eastern base of the *mons*, cutting the republicans off from the small stream (*flumen*) that flowed south-north alongside the road.

Trapped without water, many senators and other men of rank abandoned the republican war effort during the night, stealing away under cover of darkness. That evening negotiations began between Caesar and his demoralized enemy who, deserted by their leaders, were reduced to being commanded by tribunes and centurions. Having resolved to entrust their lives to his *clementia*, the following morning the remnants of Pompey's army descended to level ground to throw their weapons at Caesar's feet; nine *aquilae* and 180 other unit standards were included among the trophies of war. Sulla accepted the surrender of the outlying republican garrisons on the heights the same day. The beaten legions were swiftly incorporated into Caesar's battle order; such are the fortunes of civil war.

Caesar's victory was absolute but the final toll of the battle varies by author. Caesar himself claims the death of 15,000 republicans and the capture of 24,000 more, while conceding the deaths of a mere 30 centurions and 200 of the rank-and-file on his own side. While his tally of prisoners is most likely accurate, according to Asinius Pollio, who was one of Caesar's subordinate officers in the battle, 6,000 republican dead were recovered from the field, while Caesar's losses amounted to 1,200 legionaries. The confusion may arise from the death toll among Pompey's allied contingents, for as Appian notes, 'no enumeration at all was made of the allies, on account of their number and the low regard in which they were held.' The balance of Pompey's once mighty host had scattered to the four winds. Although Caesar's victims included ten senators and about 40 distinguished members of the equestrian order, and he accepted the surrender of others of high rank, including Varro and Marcus Brutus,

many made good their escape, including Pompey himself, Scipio, Afranius, Petreius and Labienus. The remnant of the *optimates*' leadership fled in the opposite direction to their erstwhile commander – not east to Larisa but west to Dyrrachium which Cato held with his 15 cohorts. From there they took ship for Africa, where the republican cause endured. But the tide had shifted ominously against them. One account relates that as Cicero and the other distinguished passengers departed Dyrrachium by galley, they saw all their cargo ships in flames, which the soldiers had burned because they would not follow them.

There was one loyal servant of Caesar not present to share in the spoils of victory. True to his word, the centurion Crastinus had spearheaded the first wave of Caesar's men into combat against Pompey's massed legions. Leading by example in the front line he had been killed by a sword thrust that entered through his mouth with such force it penetrated out through the back of his neck. According to Appian, Caesar, who claims to have 'considered himself most deeply in Crastinus' debt', had a tomb built in which to inter his loyal subordinate. If so, it was a unique honour; the rest of the dead were cremated in funeral pyres on the battlefield as vast as they were impersonal.

AFTERMATH

Barely pausing as he passed through Larisa, Pompey and his little entourage fled down the vale of Tepe to the Aegean shore where they hitched a ride on a passing merchant ship to Amphipolis and thence to Mytilene, where he was reunited with his wife and son, Sextus. By the time Pompey reached Cyprus he had attracted a more substantial following. At a council of war it was decided not to link up with the *optimates* regrouping in Africa without bringing some accession of strength to the cause. After ruling out an appeal to Parthia, Pompey decided to look for support in Egypt.

Egypt was currently in the grip of its own civil war between King Ptolemy XIII and his sister, Queen Cleopatra VII. Since the king was only 14 years old effective rule was in the hands of his advisers, for whom self-interest was the sole guiding principle. If they accepted Pompey's appeal for asylum, they risked making him their master and Caesar their enemy; whereas if they rejected him they risked making him their enemy

Seeking asylum in Egypt, Pompey was murdered while being ferried to shore by two renegade Romans who had once served under his command. Classical accounts describe Pompey pulling his toga over his head when he perceived the end had come, a moment captured in this 19th-century print. (The Art Archive/Galleria Nazionale Parma/Dagli Orti)





Pompey's head and signet ring presented to Caesar, an 18th-century depiction by Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini. Plutarch describes Caesar as turning away and shedding tears at the sight. (Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library)

should the course of the war go against Caesar. It was better, then, to deliver him up to Caesar, thereby removing Pompey as a threat and possibly ingratiating themselves with his rival. Accordingly, on 28 September, after anchoring off the Egyptian coast, Pompey was lured into a little boat, ostensibly in order to be ferried to the shore. Before the horrified eyes of his family he was hacked to death without ever touching land. His head and signet ring were removed in order to be presented to Caesar; his body was left lying in the surf.

Caesar had divided his forces after Pharsalus, sending Antony back to Italy and Calvinus with three legions into Asia before setting out from Larisa in pursuit of Pompey, taking just the VI legion and 800 cavalry. On the way he enjoyed one of those incredible strokes of fortune that so

reinforced his legend. When Pompey's navy broke up after Pharsalus one of his admirals set out for the Black Sea in an attempt to rouse Pharnaces of the Bosporean Kingdom against Caesar. By coincidence, this little fleet of ten ships entered the Hellespont just as Caesar's ramshackle flotilla was crossing to the Asian side. Caesar's only option was to bluff his way out of the crisis; he demanded the admiral surrender his ships, and this faceless individual did so. 'Such was the power of Caesar's reputation for success,' Appian says, 'for I can see no other explanation, and I think he never had a greater piece of luck at a desperate moment.'

While in Asia, Caesar learned that Pompey had been seen in Cyprus. Guessing that his rival would make for Egypt, Caesar, having been joined by Calenus and the XXVII legion, set sail for Alexandria. It is an indication of the toll on his manpower exacted by the campaign to date that his two legions together could only muster 3,200 men. But Caesar, as always, retained his faith in his *fortuna*, and in his own genius: 'Caesar had trusted in the reputation his achievements had earned him and had not hesitated to set out with weak support, in the belief that he would be equally safe anywhere.'

Caesar landed at Alexandria on 2 October. With Pompey dead he had no specific military reason to linger there. But he seized the opportunity to prove to the world he was now the legitimate authority in Rome by offering his mediation in Egyptian affairs.

This intervention backfired; enraged at Caesar's presumption the populace rose up against the intruder and forced him to seek refuge in the royal palace. Caesar sent urgent messages to Calvinus, ordering him to dispatch two legions, and to King Mithridates of Pergamum to come with all the troops he could raise. It was at this time Cleopatra made her move;

Approaching a gate in the battlements of Troy; according to local lore, the duel fought between Hector and Achilles occurred at this spot outside the walls. The Julii clan traced its line of descent from Iulus, son of the Trojan hero Aeneas, and Caesar paused here during his pursuit of Pompey to honour his ancestors. (Author's collection)





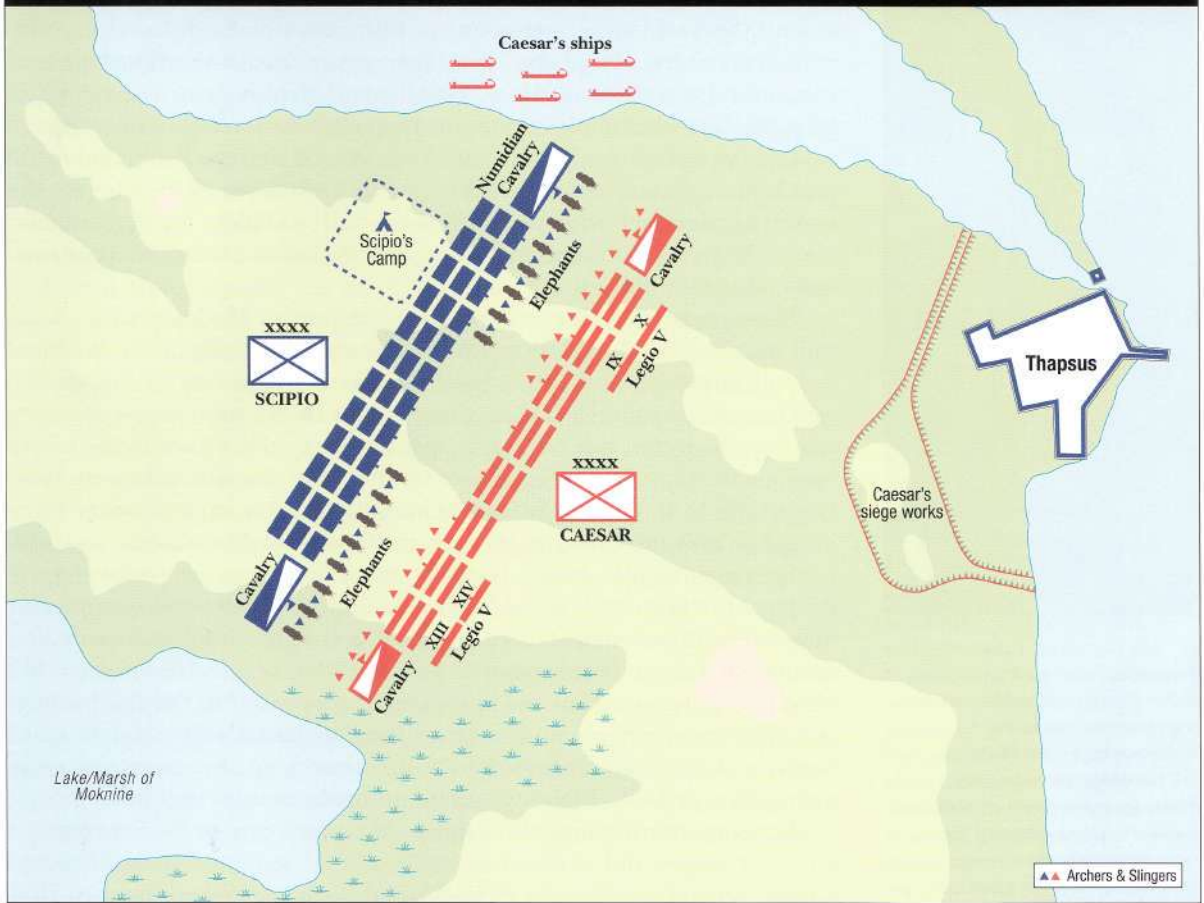
smuggled into the palace in a rolled-up carpet, she was deposited at Caesar's feet. This was exactly the kind of bold gambit that would appeal to a raconteur like Caesar, and since Cleopatra possessed, according to Dio, 'the power to subjugate everyone, even a love-sated man already past his prime', it is little wonder they immediately became intimate.

Under the circumstances it was a dangerous liaison. The king's advisers ordered the Egyptian army to march on Alexandria; Caesar and his new consort found themselves under siege in the palace while his heavily outnumbered legions struggled to retain control of the docks, their only link with the outside world. Caesar personally led a patched-together flotilla of ships to a succession of naval victories, enabling the arrival of reinforcements from Calvinus, but an attempt to secure the Pharos, the island that housed Alexandria's legendary lighthouse, one of the seven wonders of the world, went disastrously awry. When panic broke out among Caesar's troops stationed on the bridge connecting the Pharos to the mainland, they rushed to their ships to make their escape, overloading many, including the one occupied by Caesar. Even in this, perhaps the supreme crisis of his career, he refused to lose his famous *dignitas*, disregarding the Alexandrine missiles peppering the water around him, he swam to safety with one hand while holding a packet of documents above his head with the other. In addition to the battle, however, he lost his *paludamentum*, which the Alexandrians displayed as a trophy.

The situation was becoming desperate. Fortunately for Caesar, Mithridates, commanding a mixed force that had been swollen by Jewish levies on its march, had overwhelmed the Egyptian border defences at Pelusium and was advancing on the capital. As the Egyptians moved to intercept him Caesar bluffed his way out of Alexandria and, by a series of forced marches, linked up with Mithridates along the banks of the Nile. The combined armies attacked the Egyptian forces, driving them into their camp and then storming it. This time it was young Ptolemy's barge that was overloaded by fleeing men, and he was drowned, the weight of his golden armour carrying him to the bottom of the river.

Caesar's expeditionary force would have been guided into the harbour of Alexandria by the light of the Pharos, one of the seven wonders of the world. The site is now occupied by the Qaitbey fortress, much of which is constructed from material retrieved from the ruins of the Pharos. (Author's collection)

BATTLE OF THAPSUS 6 FEBRUARY 46BC

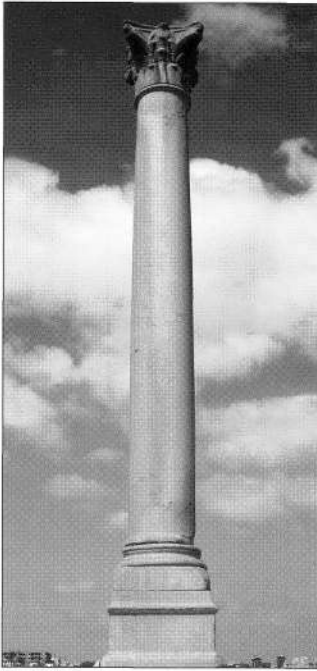


At the end of March Caesar was at last able to restore Cleopatra, now pregnant with his child, to the throne of Egypt. The couple then frittered away two more months on a pleasure cruise down the Nile. It wasn't until the first week of June that Caesar finally departed Alexandria.

The Egyptian diversion, however happy its resolution, had done nothing for Caesar's strategic situation. No one in Rome had heard from him for months, and, as Antony proved as inept at administration as he was bold in war, the city had slid into chaos. The *optimates* had been given time to regroup in Africa. Caesar's legate in Spain, Longinus, had proved so tyrannical the local populace had hounded him to his death and the entire province threatened to slip from Caesar's grasp. Finally, after dispatching two of his three legions to Caesar's rescue in Alexandria, Calvinus had been defeated at Nicopolis by Pharnaces who had overrun Pontus in the aftermath.

Caesar's first stop was Syria; from Antioch he marched against Pharnaces, securing a victory in a battle at Zela on 2 August that was so decisive he airily summed up the affair in the immortal words – *veni, vidi, vici*.

Caesar's first task upon returning to Rome was to restore order from the near anarchy that had ensued under Antony's stewardship. He then had to face down another mutiny among his legions before pressing on to Lilybaeum (Marsala) in Sicily to set sail for Africa.



Pompey's Pillar on the ruins of the Serapeum in Alexandria, giving some idea of its monumental scale. Many of the temples, libraries, and other accoutrements of classical civilization that adorned this most Greek of cities went up in flames during Caesar's embarrassingly protracted campaign here. (Author's collection)

The *optimates* in the province had not been idle in the interim. Ceding overall command to Scipio, they had raised a large, if green, army of ten legions, backed by the equivalent of four more under Juba, along with countless cavalry, a large number of light armed auxiliaries, 120 elephants, and several squadrons of ships. Gnaeus had already been dispatched to seize the Balearic Islands in order to keep close to developments in Spain.

In a repeat of the impetuosity he had exhibited at Brundisium the year before, Caesar sailed for Africa on 25 December (8 October by the modern calendar) with the forces he had available, six legions and approximately 2,000 cavalry, leaving orders that reinforcements were to embark as they arrived.

Three days later, Caesar arrived at the port of Hadrumetum (Susa) with only 3,000 infantry and a mere 150 cavalry; the rest of the fleet had become scattered and Caesar had apparently neglected to inform the captains of the other ships the whereabouts of the rendezvous. Sending ten ships to locate the missing transports, and others back to Sicily and Sardinia for supplies, Caesar moved on to occupy Ruspina (Monastir) and Leptis Minor (Lemta). The errant vessels from his expeditionary force straggled into these two ports over the next few days. Caesar was now confident enough to lead a foraging expedition into the plains outside Ruspina, but this nearly turned into a disaster when Labienus swooped on him with a mixed detachment of horse and light infantry. Heavily outnumbered, Caesar's flanks were turned and he was encircled; on the brink of suffering the same fate as Curio, Caesar succeeded in rallying his men and drawing them up in two lines, back to back, with enough space between them to organize local counterattacks. In this manner Caesar managed to retire to higher ground and hold out until nightfall.

As more reinforcements arrived, the campaign drifted through a series of sieges and skirmishes on land and sea until 4 April, when Caesar moved on one of Scipio's main strongholds, Thapsus (Ras Dimas). As the siege commenced, Scipio advanced to the relief of the city, swinging around to approach from the west on 6 April while leaving Afranius and Juba to block Caesar's retreat to the south.

Both armies deployed for battle, but Caesar had no control over what happened next – some sources say he felt the onset of an epileptic seizure and retired to his tent. Sensing a disruption in the enemy's

Looking west along the bay of Alexandria from the site of the Ptolemaic Palace. Cleopatra may have watched from this vantage as Caesar's attempt to secure both ends of the bridge connecting the Pharos to the mainland went awry and he was forced to swim for his life. (Author's collection)



ranks, his men spontaneously charged. Singled out by Caesar's archers and slingers, Scipio's elephants turned about and trampled through their own ranks while his cavalry, spooked by the appearance of Caesar's fleet off the shore behind them, panicked and fled.

As Scipio's army disintegrated, Caesar, back in command, ordered a forced march against the *optimates'* positions to the south. But Juba and Afranius had already fled. Facing no effective resistance, Caesar's men went berserk as they stormed the positions of their leaderless and hopelessly confused prey; ignoring the entreaties of their commander, they slaughtered the inhabitants of both camps to a man.

Caesar rolled up the rest of the province without difficulty. The few outstanding garrisons quickly capitulated. The leadership of the *optimates* was decimated. Afranius surrendered to Caesar, who this time showed him no mercy; Juba and Petreius consummated a bizarre murder–suicide pact in which they fought a duel to the death, the winner taking his own life; Scipio, attempting to flee onboard ship, was run down and drowned; Cato committed suicide.

After incorporating Juba's kingdom into the province of Africa, Caesar returned to Rome where he celebrated a succession of triumphs on a scale never before witnessed. He initiated a series of financial and legal reforms and even took the time to completely overhaul the calendar.

Caesar may have assumed the situation in Spain would resolve itself, but that proved to be wishful thinking. When Caesar's legions mutinied, Gnaeus stepped in to win their acclaim; the enduring magic of his family name won him the loyalty of the provincials. The survivors of Thapsus, including Sextus and Labienus, arrived to offer their services to the rogue regime, for there was no question of Caesar's enemies representing the republic any longer; they fought simply for family honour, enduring hatred, or mere survival.

Caesar's beleaguered legates in Spain begged for assistance and he responded; departing Rome at the beginning of November he covered the roughly 1,211 miles (1,950km) to Saguntum (just north of modern Valencia) in just 17 days, composing a poem about his journey on the way, and the further 280 miles (450km) to Obulco, 34 miles (55km) from Corduba, in another ten days.

Caesar's arrival surprised both friend and foe. With eight legions and 8,000 cavalry under his command he immediately moved to blockade Corduba, which was held by Sextus with two legions. Sextus appealed to his brother for help, and sparring ensued between Gnaeus and Caesar. After Caesar resolved his by now predictable supply problems by seizing Ategua (Teba) with its large stock of grain on 19 February Gnaeus retired to the south. Caesar pursued him as far as the hilltop fortress of Munda. Both sides made camp on 16 March. Caesar was preparing to move off the next morning when Gnaeus drew up his army on the slope for battle, his 13 legions flanked in the usual manner by cavalry and auxiliaries. Caesar at once drew up his army in response, its eight legions (with the X on the right and the III and V on the left) also flanked by cavalry, including a corps led by King Bogud of Mauretania.

The battle that ensued featured some of the most bitter, hard fought combat of the entire Civil War; according to Appian, 'Caesar is said to have remarked that he had often fought for victory, but that on this occasion he fought for his life as well.' The outcome hung in the



Upon the death of her father, Ptolemy XII Auletes, in 51 BC 18-year-old Cleopatra VII acceded to the throne of Egypt as co-ruler with her brother and husband, 11-year-old Ptolemy XIII. Their matrimonial ties having failed to prevent a falling out between the siblings, Cleopatra found herself in exile while Caesar and Pompey duelled in Greece. The chain of events after Pharsalus presented her with an opportunity to reclaim power. (© AAA Collection)



Returning to Rome at the end of July 46 BC, Caesar was granted an unprecedented four triumphs, celebrating his victories in Gaul, Egypt, Pontus and Africa. *The Vase Bearer* is a panel from Mantegna's Renaissance-era depiction of the celebrations. (Scala/Art Resource, NY)

balance for hours until Bogud succeeded in circling behind the Pompeian lines and striking for their camp. Labienus wheeled his cavalry about to counter this threat but the legionaries in that sector of the line misinterpreted this tactical withdrawal for a retreat and faltered. In that moment Caesar's X legion broke through and, once Gnaeus' lines were penetrated, the battle degenerated into a rout. The field was Caesar's but the laurels had been hard earned; when in the aftermath he ordered his army to surround the citadel of Munda with earthworks to blockade those Pompeians seeking shelter there, his exhausted men could do no more than pile up the bodies and equipment of the dead and thrust spears through them to pin them to the ground.

It was the end of the line for Labienus, who perished in the battle. Gnaeus made a getaway but was eventually run to ground; his head was brought to Hispalis (Seville) on 12 April for public display.



Langetti's *Suicide of Cato the Younger* depicts the gruesome last moments of Caesar's arch-enemy. His first attempt at disembowelling himself having been foiled by friends and family Cato finally succeeded in ripping off his bandages and tearing out his innards. (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)

Caesar spent the rest of the spring and summer personally supervising the smoking out of Pompeian diehards in a relentless campaign to ensure the entire province was effectively pacified. True, Sextus had slipped away, and, travelling incognito, was awaiting the opportunity to strike back, for honour's sake, in the name of his dead father and brother, but for now Caesar was satisfied. He returned to Rome in mid-September of 45, in title and in deed more the master of the city, and the empire, than any man before him. To add to his achievements in Gaul, in less than five years of civil war spread across three continents he had ground down or overwhelmed every opponent who dared cross swords with him; he had conquered foes ranging from the cream of the republic's leading families to the most exotic of barbarians, on battlefields as variable as the snows of the Balkan wilderness to the plains of Africa and the streets of the greatest metropolis of the Mediterranean world.

As Caesar returned to Rome to celebrate fresh triumphs and plan new campaigns, one thought may have nagged at him; since all power was now centralized in his person, so he became the focus for all dissent. His *fortuna* had always repaid the faith he placed in her to keep his enemies at bay in time of war; could he continue to trust her in this strange new world of peace?

The apotheosis of Julius Caesar. Having already appointed himself consul for life, in February 44 BC the Senate appointed him dictator in perpetuity, an honour commemorated in this coin, the last minted in his lifetime. Many feared that Caesar would accept a crown if it were offered and restore the monarchy overthrown centuries ago. (© Andreas Pangerl, www.romancoins.info)



THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

Perhaps the best way to appreciate the broad sweep of the Pharsalus campaign is to start in Athens and work backwards. Once you've had your fill of the city, rent a car early in the morning and head east along the E962 from Athens to Delfi, ancient Delphi, the famed Navel of the World. You should arrive with plenty of time to tour the ruins. The next morning, check out of your hotel and head north on the E65, remembering to take a short detour east along the E75 where the two highways intersect to pay your respects at the memorial to Leonidas and his Spartans at Thermopylae. That done, return to the E65 and follow it north before branching off to the northeast at N. Monastiri towards Farsala. Shortly after passing through Farsala you will arrive at the modern bridge over the Enipeus. Once on the north bank of the river the battlefield will immediately open up before you. It's all farmland now. There are no ruins and no memorials – if Caesar did build a tomb to his dedicated Crastinus it disappeared centuries ago. But orienting yourself is easily accomplished as Mt. Dogantzies looms over the far end of the plain to the west on your left. Working your way along the hills bordering the plain along its northern edge you can easily make out the heights of Kaloyiros, the hill above the modern village of Avra where Pompey established his camp, and hill 325, at the base of which is the modern village of Krini, the descendant of ancient Palaepharsalus. From the top of hill 325 you can look along a line running south-west and recreate in your mind the ranks of tens of thousands of men stretching back towards the river.

Afterwards, return to N. Monastiri and head north-west up the E92 via Trikala to Kalampaka, ancient Aeginium, where Caesar emerged onto the plain of Thessaly after his retreat from Dyrrachium. If you've timed the drive correctly, you should arrive at your hotel in time to cool off in the pool with a long drink and gaze up at the awesome spires of the Meteora as the sun sets.

If you want to retrace Caesar's route all the way back into Epirus, you can take the E92 from Kalampaka to Ioannina and from there the E90 and then the E853 to the border with Albania. The highway continues north from there all the way to Durrës, though farther inland from the path Caesar took, so you might want to consider following the coastal roads, keeping the Adriatic on your left as you pass through the port towns that were such bones of contention between Caesar and Pompey. You should finish your tour in Durrës; the long bay stretching away to the south is the riviera of Albania. Where once Pompey's entire army was walled in behind Caesar's palisades now stand resorts, hotels, and beach chairs.

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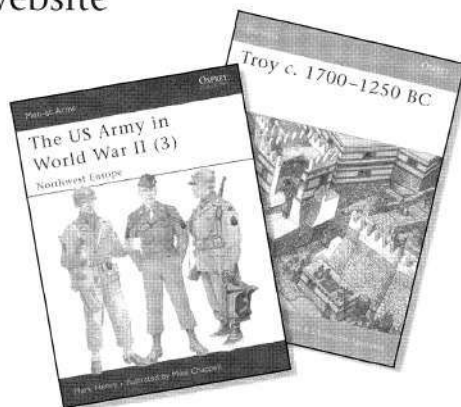
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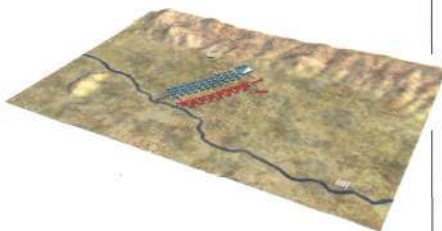
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