

The Conquest of Gaul Study Guide

The Conquest of Gaul by Julius Caesar

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Plot Summary

The Conquest of Gaul by Julius Caesar is the account, in eight books, of the campaigns conducted by Julius Caesar, Roman Consul, and governor of Transalpine Gaul, in the period from 58 BC to 51 BC. These campaigns were carried out by the Roman legions under his leadership to suppress the rebellions that arose among the Gallic tribes in the area of what is now France and Belgium. He also carried out two invasions of Britain, and the Roman army crossed the Rhine twice in an effort to blunt the pressure from German tribes, who constantly tried to invade Gaul to conquer the weaker Gallic tribes.

The eight years of warfare and battles are described in detail. They give a complete picture of how the Roman legions operate and how their different adversaries wage war against them. The reader, following the accounts of the different campaigns, journeys through the territories of the different peoples and tribes, which occupy greater Gaul in the century before Christ. The personalities of the different leaders and their public utterances, given when they challenge the invading Romans and when they sue for peace, are revealed in compelling portraits of the individual rulers of that time.

Campaigns range from the territories of the Helvetii next to the Jura mountains, to the Sequani in central Gaul, to the coastal tribes of the North Sea, to southern Britain, and to the unique coastal peoples, the Venetii, in what is now Brittany, who resist the Romans with their unique form of coastal warfare.

Caesar recounts how the legions, with their superior technology of siege works and entrenchments, are able to overcome even the best-defended strongholds of the Gauls. But even so, his accounts detail several major reversals of fortune for his armies when, for example, the 14th Legion under Sabinus is completely annihilated by the Eburones, and how it is only by forced marches and quick intervention by Caesar in person on the battlefield that the legions are saved from a similar fate when the Nervii mount their deadly attacks.

The imaginative duplicity of the Gauls is well described in their efforts to trick the Romans at various junctures, and the equally sophisticated ruses employed by the Roman generals to outwit the far more numerous enemy are all described in fascinating detail. In the end, the climax of all the rebellions comes at the siege and capture of Vercingetorix's stronghold of Alesia, when the besieging Roman army is, itself, surrounded by the forces of Commius. The graphic detailed accounts of the ensuing struggle and final victory of Caesar and his troops must remain one of the great classics of history of warfare.

Though there are elements of propaganda and self-justification in Caesar's accounts, which are intended to be read by the Senate and citizens of Rome, these books occupy a unique and irreplaceable place in the history of the Western world.



Characters

Julius Caesar

Julius Caesar was the Roman Governor of Transalpine Gaul, and it is his commentaries or accounts of his campaigns in Gaul from 58 BC to 51 BC that comprise the eight books of his "Conquest of Gaul". Starting in 58 BC, he proceeds to engage in a series of military interventions in the lands of the Gauls, always under the pretext of protecting the Province of Rome and always expanding the scope of his actions, until he has invaded Britain twice and crossed the Rhine twice. At the end of the campaigns, he has eleven legions in the field and has, for all intents and purposes, secured the conquest of Gaul.

His personal courage as a leader is demonstrated many times, from when he addresses troops before and after battles, and on the occasions when he literally joins in the fighting to rally and encourage his men. Always careful to reward his men with booty and pay, he manages get his legions to perform feats of forced marches, often at night, and sometimes over snowed-in mountains. The speed with which he always moves his legions is a constant surprise to his enemies and gives him great advantages.

Often magnanimous to his defeated enemies, he does not hesitate to enforce brutal punishments on rebels of whom he wishes to make an example. Although not mentioned in detail in these accounts until the last section, Julius Caesar spends a lot of his winters in North Italy, raising fresh legions and attempting to secure his political base in the often unstable arena of Roman politics.

In politics, as in his military career, he is always sympathetic to the needs and feelings of the common man, and his popularity among his troops and the Roman citizens eventually leads to him being elevated to the position of "perpetual dictator".

Commius

Commius is the King of the Atrebates. Caesar has elevated him to this position after subduing the Atrebates because he thought highly of his courage and loyalty. When Caesar returns the hostages that the Britons have sent him before his first invasion, they are accompanied by Commius, who is instructed to find out as much as possible about the British tribes. On other occasions, Caesar uses him as an intermediary or even to keep tribes like the Menapi under surveillance. As a reward for his services, Caesar exempts the Atrebate from taxes and makes Commius ruler of the Morini.

Thus, it is a sign of the depth of the rebellion of the Gauls against the Roman occupation of their lands that Commius joins Vercingetorix in the rebellion of 52 BC. Commius is in charge of the Gallic forces that attempt to relieve the besieged Vercingetorix at Alesia. No mention is made of him in the general surrender, but Vercingetorix is delivered up to the Romans.



Later, Commius joins the Bellovaci and goes into Germany to get help for their rebellion. When this rebellion is suppressed, he continues to plot rebellion with various tribes, and Labienus tries to have him assassinated by Volusenus. This assassination attempt fails, though Commius is wounded, and any hopes of reconciliation are permanently dashed.

According to Caesar, Commius finally resorted to attacking Roman convoys in the territory of the Atrebates during the winter of 51 BC while the rest of the tribe remains quiet and Volusenus tries to ambush him again. This time, it is Volusenus who is wounded by Commius, who escapes again. Finally, weary of the quarrels with the Romans, he sends hostages to Anthony, who is in charge of the wintering legion, and offers to surrender and live wherever the Romans command him if he is spared and allowed to avoid being in the presence of any Roman. Anthony judges his fears to be justified and accepts his hostages and his surrender.

Vercingetorix

Vercingetorix is a powerful Avernian prince whose father had ruled over much of Gaul. In 52 BC, despite the opposition of the leaders of the Avernians, he usurps their authority and quickly raises an army to attack the Romans. After a string of defeats at the hands of the Romans, Vercingetorix initiates a scorched earth policy, which severely hampers the Romans. At the siege of Avaricum, he displays his leadership and ability to rally his forces by persuading them to overcome their difficulties and press on with ingenious attacks on the Roman legions besieging the town. When Avaricum falls to Caesar, Vercingetorix inflicts very heavy losses on the Romans besieging the town of Gergovia. He avoids engaging with Caesar, but goes instead to the stronghold of Alesia.

The climax of the rebellion led by Vercingetorix takes place at Alesia. The final victory by the Romans is achieved only after much fighting, and the final outcome was never certain until right at the end. It was in defeat that Vercingetorix displayed his finest qualities, accepting full responsibility for leading the rebellion. For the defeat of his forces and their allies, he consigns his fate to his army and is given up to Caesar at the gates of the Roman camp. Subsequently, he is taken as a prisoner to Roman as part of Caesar's triumph and is executed there six years after his capture.

Labienus

Titus Atius Labienus is Caesar's most able general, and invariably given the most responsible tasks. Typically, Caesar gives him command of the wintering legions when he returns to Italy at the end of a campaign. Labienus is sufficiently confident of Caesar's trust and respect that he declines to come to Caesar's aid when he finds himself threatened by the Treveri when Caesar marched to save the besieged Cicero. In the final section, there is a reference by Caesar to attempts by his enemies to alienate Labienus from Caesar's support, but he does not give any credence to these reports. History shows, however, that Labienus did fight against Caesar in the civil war that followed and died in that conflict.



Sabinus

Quintus Titurius Sabinus is Caesar's general, who will go down in history for losing his own life and the whole of the 14 Legion in a massacre by the Euborenes. The Euborones were successful in tricking the Romans to leave their camp after being promised safe passage. Cotta, who shared the command with Sabinus, was overruled in a council of war at the camp and died bravely fighting with his men. Cicero, the general in the next camp, was subjected to the same tactics, but showed great courage and resourcefulness in staying in his camp until he was relieved by Caesar.

Ariovistus

Ariovistus is the king of the Suebi tribe of Germany. It is his encroachment into the lands of the Sequani, after being invited there to aid them in their war against other Gallic tribes, that leads Caesar to march against him at Besançon.

Ambiorix

Ambiorix is a leader of the Euborenes. He is the instigator of the massacre of Sabinus and his army. After the massacre of Sabinus's legion, Caesar marches on the Euborenes, but Ambiorix does not offer any armed resistance and his territories are laid to waste by the Romans.

Cassivellaunus

Cassivellaunus is chief, by common consent, of the British forces resisting Caesar's second invasion of Britain. His territory is separated from the maritime British tribes by the River Thames. Cassivellaunus uses charioteers to conduct a campaign of harassment against the Roman column as it moves through his territory. This tactic is successful in so far as the legions are confined in their activities and, in Caesar's own words, become "tired of marching". When Caesar successfully attacks his stronghold and the attack on the naval camp fails, Caesar accepts Cassivellaunus's surrender and returns to Gaul.

Dumnorix

Despite the loyalty of the Aedui people, Dumnorix, the brother of their leader Diviciacus, is hostile to the Romans. Caesar determines that he should take him with him to Britain to obviate any trouble he might cause while he is away from Gaul. When Dumnorix attempts to escape from Caesar's army during the embarkation for Britain, Caesar halts the embarkation and dispatches the Aeduan cavalry to arrest him. When Dumnorix resists arrest, the Aeduan cavalry obey their orders and kill him.



Gallic Tribes

Among the many Gallic and Belgic tribes mentioned in Caesar's writings are the following:

Helvetii: It is their migration into greater Gaul that starts the Roman Campaigns;

Aedui: A very powerful tribe in central Gaul who remain loyal to Rome until the final rebellion in 52 BC;

Remi: One of the few tribes who remain loyal to Rome even during the final rebellion;

Arverni: A large powerful tribe in the region of the Auvergne. After the defeat of Vercingetorix, Caesar gives them special treatment, along with the Aedui, in the hopes of using them as a base for loyalty to Rome;

Euberonas: A Belgic tribe occupying both sides of the Rhine. Under their leader they are responsible for the annihilation of the 14th Legion;

Morini and Menapii: Tribes on the coast closest to Britain;

Venetii: A tribe living on the coast of what is now Brittany. They wage a successful sea-borne campaign against the Roman armies and fleet until they are defeated in a large naval battle in 56 BC;

Bituriges: A tribe living in southwest France. Their capital city Avaricum is captured by Caesar in his suppression of the Vercingetorix rebellion; and,

Bellovaci: A Belgic tribe inhabiting northern France. They have the reputation of being the fiercest fighters in Gaul.

German Tribes

The German tribes mentioned by Caesar in his writings include the following:

Suebi: The Suebi tribe is responsible for forcing the migration of the Helvetii. They are a fierce and warlike tribe with pastoral habits. Caesar never succeeds in engaging them in a pitched battle and declines to advance too far into their territory;

Usipetes and Tenctheri: These two tribes invade Gaul in 55 BC but are massacred by the Roman legions;

Ubii: A tribe living on the East bank of the Rhine where Caesar crosses over; and,

Sugambri: A tribe living on the east side of the Rhine. Their cavalry crosses into Gaul and joins in the Roman devastation of the land of the Euberonas, eventually returning back across the Rhine with their booty after they have threatened a Roman camp.



British Tribes

British tribes that submit to Caesar during the second invasion of Britain are the Trinovantes, Cenimagni, Segontiaci, Ancalites, Bibroci, and Cassi.

10th Legion

Caesar's favorite legion is undoubtedly the 10th. In his address to the council of centurions during the campaign against Ariovistus at Besançon, he says he will use them as his bodyguard if the rest of the army does not follow him. At the landings in Britain during the first invasion, it is the 10th Legion which is first ashore.



Objects/Places

Gaul

Gaul is the land bounded by the Rhine in the north and east, by the Rhone River and the Alps to the east, the Province of Rome to the south, and the Atlantic and North Sea Coasts to the west.

Rhone

The river Rhone rises in Switzerland and flows south to the Mediterranean through the Province of Rome. It is the boundary between the Helvetii and Allobroges tribes.

Rhine

The river Rhine flows westwards from the Alps, through Germany to the North Sea. It is the major boundary between the German and Belgic tribes, which Caesar crosses twice during the Gaul campaign.

Lake Geneva

Lake Geneva is a large, elongated lake on the Rhone River, which is the site of the town of Geneva. It is part of the boundary between the Helvetii and the Allobroges.

Loire

The Loire is a large river in central Gaul, rising in the Auvergne Mountains. It flows through the territories of the Aedui, Bituriges, and the Andes to the Bay of Biscay.

Seine

The Seine is a river running west through northern France to the North Sea. Labienus advances to islands in the Seine in his campaign of 52 BC against the Parisi.

Thames

The main river in Britain is the Thames. It is the boundary between the territories controlled by Cassivellaunus and the maritime tribes.



Meuse

The Meuse is a river in North East France, which flows from the territories of the Lingones and Eburones to emerge in the North Sea near to the Rhine delta in the lands of the Menapii.

Jura

The Jura are a mountain range along the north side of the Rhone, which form a natural barrier between France and Switzerland. This is the mountain range that controls the route of the exodus of the Helvetii in 58 BC.

Cevennes

The Cevennes are a mountain range in central France lying to the west of the Rhone. They form the boundary between the Helvii and the Avernii. Caesar crosses these mountains, which are considered impassable because of winter snow, to march on the Avernii in 52 BC.

Ardennes

The Ardennes are a densely forested mountain range in southeast Belgium. Caesar crosses these mountains to attack the Eburones in 53 BC. The Ardennes are a place of refuge for both the Eburones and the Treverii.

Bibracte

Bibracte is the chief town of the Aedui. It is from this town that Litaviccus sends envoys to Vercingetorix at the beginning of the rebellion of 52 BC, and where Caesar spends the winter of 52 BC after suppressing the Vercingetorix rebellion.

Geneva

Geneva is the chief town of the Allobroges on the Lake of Geneva formed by the Rhone. The Helvetii hope to use the bridge at this town on their way into Gaul in 58 BC.

Narbonne

Narbonne is a key city in the Roman Province on the Mediterranean coast. It is the threats to this city in 52 BC that lead Caesar to march to it in reinforcement as first priority.



Besançon

Besançon lies on the Doubs River. It is the chief town of the Sequani and it is here that Caesar, in 58 BC, overcomes the trepidation of his troops and drives the German Ariovistus back across the Rhine.

Avaricum

Avaricum (now called Bourges) is a large and well-fortified town in the lands of the Bituriges. It is this town that is saved from Vercingetorix's scorched earth tactics and which is besieged and taken by Caesar in the suppression of the rebellion of 52 BC.

Alesia

Alesia is a stronghold of the Mandubii in central Gaul near to the source of the Seine. It is here that Vercingetorix retreats after his defeat at Avaricum and where Caesar finally overcomes the rebellion in 52 BC.

Gergovia

Gergovia is a stronghold of the Averni. It is where the Gauls inflict heavy losses on the Roman legions that are besieging the town when they fail to stop an advance on two unoccupied enemy camps.

Portus Itius

Portus Itius is the port on the French coast where Caesar mounts his invasions of Britain in 55 and 54 BC. Today, the French port of Boulogne occupies this site.

Uxellodunum

Uxellodunum is a stronghold of the Cadurci and a town of great natural strength. It is occupied by the rebel Lucterius and besieged by the Romans under Caninius and Fabius, who only overcome the enemy resistance by cutting off the natural water supplies to the town. When Caesar himself arrives, the captured enemy are made an example of to suppress further rebellions.

Agedincum

Agedincum is a large town in the territory of the Senones in central Gaul. It is the site of the winter quarters of six legions in 53 BC, and it is also where Labienus retains the heavy baggage during the suppression of the Vercingetorix rebellion.

Atuatuca

Atuatuca is a fortress city in the land of the Eburones where Caesar stores his baggage during his campaign against the Eburones.



Themes

The Germans

Throughout his accounts of the campaigns in Gaul in the years 58-51 BC, there is a constant expression of the threats presented by the German tribes east of the Rhine. In the first campaign, Caesar conquers the encroaching Germans and their king Ariovistus. To do so, he has to deal with the widespread fear of the Germans in the minds of the Gauls and of his own troops. The Germans are regarded as being of enormous stature, having incredible courage, and possessing splendid military training. They have overcome parts of Gaul and have caused the Helvetii and other tribes to move westwards. In his speech to the centurions at Besançon, Caesar acknowledges the domination of the Germans over the Gauls and refers to the rebellion of Spartacus, where several Roman armies were overcome with the help of German troops. In driving Ariovistus back across the Rhine, Caesar scores an important victory.

Caesar avoids pursuing the dreaded Suebi when he crosses the Rhine in 55 and 53 BC. Given the inordinate effort it must have taken to build bridges across the Rhine, it is perhaps an acknowledgment of Caesar's own reservations of his ability to conquer the Suebi. He subsequently withdraws back into Gaul without engaging his most important foe.

When Ambiorix persuades Sabinus to leave his camp in the territory of the Eburones in 54 BC, it is significant that Ambiorix uses the threat of a large force of German mercenaries crossing the Rhine to finally persuade Sabinus to capitulate. In a similar fashion, the attack by the German Sugambri cavalry on the Roman camp at Atuatuca causes the loss of two cohorts of Cicero's legion and the garrison is paralyzed by fear of the Germans.

In his description of the customs and institutions of the Germans, Caesar states that the Gauls do not even pretend to compete with the Germans in bravery. Thus, it is no surprise to learn that Caesar recruits German cavalry and on several occasions uses them to augment the Roman cavalry, which is made up of Gallic horsemen. In the critical battle at Alesia, it is Caesar's German cavalry that saves the day when the Roman cavalry have been driven back by the archer reinforced cavalry of the Gallic relief column.

Bravery in Battle

Throughout the many battles and sieges described in the campaigns in Gaul, Caesar constantly praises his own men, and on occasion the enemy also, for their bravery in battle. In the account of Labienus and the 7th Legion's battle for Lutetia in the lands of the Parisi, he notes that not a single Gaul left the field of battle, and victory is only assured when all of them, including their leader Camulogenus, have been killed.



Likewise, the accounts of battles are studded with anecdotes illustrating and praising the bravery and courage of the Roman soldiers. These tales include the account of the centurion of the 10th Legion, who leaps ashore in Britain to lead his men against the British defenders; the standard bearer Lucius Petrosidius, who, surrounded by a large crowd of the enemy, throws his standard inside the rampart to die heroically outside the wall, Publius Sextus Baculus, the chief centurion of the 12th Legion, who is so badly wounded he can no longer stand but who still fights on when the Romans are attacked by the Nervii in 57 BC, and this same centurion's courage in rallying the soldiers when they are suddenly attacked by the Germans at Atuatuca in 53 BC.

As an illustration of bravery shown by the enemy, Caesar feels he cannot leave unrecorded the bravery of the Gallic soldiers who, one after the other, die under the arrows of the Roman catapults, while they throw lumps of tallow into the flames of the burning siege towers at the siege and capture of Avaricum in 52 BC.

Technical Innovation in Warfare

Throughout the conquest of Gaul, the development of specific technical solutions to complement the already highly developed Roman siege techniques are meticulously described. The description of the building of the bridge for the first crossing of the Rhine is an example of this. The fact that it is accomplished in ten days merely emphasizes the proficiency of the Roman legionaries' building skills.

Another example of accelerated development of siege techniques is the use of felled timber to form a protective avenue for the Roman legions in the campaign against the Morini in 56 BC, and the use of mines to cut off the water supply to the besieged town in the capture of Uxellodunum.

Probably the best example of technical innovation is the redesign of the Roman ships for the second invasion of Britain in 54 BC. From the moment when they first encounter the sailing craft of the Veneti to their recognition of the necessity for shallow draft and wide beamed vessels for the transportation and landings on British shores, the Romans continuously learn to adapt their techniques to match each new situation.

The Gauls are also learning from the Romans, as illustrated by their almost successful attack on the Roman column when they take advantage of the make up of legions and baggage to inflict heavy losses on the Roman army. Again, after Caesar has come to the aid of Cicero, whose winter camp has been besieged by the Nervii, he expresses astonishment at the towers, sapper's huts, and earthworks, which have been raised by the Gauls, emulating Roman siege techniques.



Style

Perspective

The author of the Conquest of Gaul is Julius Caesar, who in his capacity of Governor of Transalpine Gaul, conducted campaigns in Gaul from 58 BC to 51 BC. It is written in the third person from the point of view of Caesar himself, and the accounts furnish a record of the seven years of campaigns, which were carried out in the name of Rome to suppress rebellions in Gaul and to protect the Roman Province, which had been established along the Mediterranean coast.

The intended audiences are the Senate and citizens of Rome, who are informed not just about the exploits of the Roman legions, but also provided with accounts of the customs and constitutions of the inhabitants of the territories and also of the geography of the area.

Caesar spends a lot of effort to justify his military adventures as being necessary to ensure the safety of the Province of Rome as in the first book, which gives accounts of the expulsion of the Helvetii and the Germans from lands in close proximity to the borders of the Province. Thereafter, successive campaigns are justified by armed rebellions, which spring up, year after year, as the Gauls find the Roman legions wintering over in their territories.

The two invasions of Britain and the two crossings of the Rhine are not so easily justified, but these campaigns are apparently greeted by the Senate and citizens of Rome as being huge successes.

In the absence of an independent point of view, the reader has to be critically aware of possible omissions and self-justifications when Caesar is dealing with setbacks and defeats. The presence of many generals and staff, however, would prevent any overt fabrication or falsification on his part.

The last book is written by Caesar's friend Aulus Hirtius, who was on his staff in Gaul, as a bridge to complete the accounts between the Conquest of Gaul and Caesar's subsequent account of the civil war. The style of the eighth book is so similar to that of the others that the reader might surmise that the busy commander-in-chief employed his own staff for much of the work in producing this book.

Tone

The tone of the writing is in the manner of a general describing his actions in an objective, almost formal way. The various brutal executions and reprisals are recounted in an abbreviated and dispassionate manner. Only in the speeches attributed to the main characters does any emotional content creep in to the accounts.



As the intended audience is the Roman Senate and citizen, all the names of the tribes and their leaders are "romanized". That is to say, one would not expect different Gallic tribes and leaders to have Roman sounding names; for example, the leader of the Suebi would not be known as "Ariovistus" to his own people. Likewise, place names and towns are given Roman names, as are the various types of rulers and leaders of different tribes who are often referred to as magistrates, which is the nearest equivalent rank in Roman society.

In this edition, all dates are given in the western manner with the years designated as being so many years before Christ. This is presumably part of the translation by S. A. Hanford from the Latin text where years are designated by the names of the appointed consuls.

Structure

The Conquest of Gaul is divided into eight books, each with its own descriptive title and with titled sections. A unique feature of the book is the use of numbered paragraphs. This makes the references in the Glossary and elsewhere entirely independent of the page numbers and probably originated in the original Latin text, written long before the invention of the printing press. The Penguin edition uses page numbers in its table of contents.

The eighth and final book is authored by Hirtius to complete the work left unfinished by Julius Caesar, as is explained in the preface to Book VIII.

Explanatory notes are referenced by consecutive numbers in the text and carry the book and paragraph numbers in their implementation. This makes referral a simple and straightforward process, and is a valuable feature of the second edition by Jane F. Gardner. The maps added in the second edition provide an invaluable aid in understanding the text. They are clear, informative and, unfortunately, without any attribution whatsoever.



Quotes

"When the gods intend to make a man pay for his crimes, they generally allow him to enjoy moments of success and a long period of impunity, so that he may feel his reverse of fortune, when it eventually comes, all the more keenly. However, if you will give hostages as a guarantee that you mean to carry out your undertakings, and will recompense the Aedui and the Allobroges for the injury you have done to them and their allies, I am willing to make peace with you." Book I, p. 34

"Our country faced this enemy in our fathers' time, when Gaius Marius won a victory over the Cimbri and Teutoni by which, as all agreed, the whole army earned as much glory as its commander. They faced them again more recently in Italy, when they defeated the rebellious slaves, aided though they were to some extent by the military training and discipline that they had acquired from their Roman masters. This shows what a great advantage resolute courage is." Book I, pp. 48-49

"This part of the country is my province, just as the other part is yours. I do not expect you to let me make raids into your territory with impunity, and it is a gross injustice for you to interfere with me in the exercise of my lawful rights." Book I, p. 42

"To the prayers of the Bellovaci, we Aeduans add our own, begging you to treat them with your usual clemency and humanity. By doing so you will enhance our prestige with all the Belgic tribes." Book II, p. 64

"We Germans are not taking aggressive action against the Roman people, but we are ready to fight if provoked; for it is our custom to resist any attacker and to ask no quarter." Book IV, p. 90

"Jump down, comrades, unless you want to surrender our eagle to the enemy; I, at any rate, mean to do my duty to my country and my general." Book IV, p. 100

"But having now discharged the duty which patriotism required of me, I remember what I owe to Caesar for his favors, and I urge and implore Sabinus, as my friend and host, to consider his own and his soldiers' safety." Book V, p. 117

"As far as we are concerned, you can leave the camp without being molested, and go where you please without fear." Book V, p. 122

"Why hesitate, Vorenus? What better opportunity do you want to prove your courage? Today shall decide between us." Book V, p. 124

"Here is your chance. You have got the enemy where you wanted them - in a bad position, where they are not free to maneuver. Fight as bravely under me as you often have under the commander-in-chief; imagine that he is here, watching the battle in person." Book VI, pp. 136-37



"Why go after this paltry miserable loot, when you have the chance of making your fortunes right away? In three hours you can reach Atuatuca where the Romans have stored all their property. The garrison is so small they can't even man the wall, and not a man dare set foot outside the entrenchments." Book VI, p. 150

"You may think these measures harsh and cruel, but you must admit that it would be a still harsher fate to have your wives and children carried off into slavery and be killed yourselves - which is what will inevitably befall you if you are conquered." Book VII, p. 162

"I have no need to obtain from Caesar by treachery the power I can secure by victory - a victory already in my grasp, and to be shared by the whole Gallic people. You may take back the command you entrusted me with, if you imagine you are conferring a favor on me when in reality you owe your lives to me." Book VII, p. 164

"Much as I admire the heroism that you showed in refusing to be daunted by a fortified camp, a high mountain and a walled fortress, I cannot too strongly condemn your bad discipline and your presumption in thinking you know better than your commander-in-chief how to win a victory or to foresee the results of an action. I want obedience and self-restraint from my soldiers, just as much as courage in the face of danger." Book VII, p. 180

"All you have to do is to destroy your corn crops without hesitation and burn your granaries, knowing that this sacrifice will make you free men forever and rulers over others." Book VII, p. 187

"What? Do you suppose the Romans are working day after day on those outer fortifications to amuse themselves? Since our countrymen cannot get messengers through the cordon that is drawn round us, to assure you that they are coming soon, believe what the enemy are telling you by their actions: for it is the fear of their coming that keeps the Romans hard at work night and day." Book VII, p. 194

"I did not undertake the war for private ends, but in the cause of national liberty. And since I must now accept my fate, I place myself at your disposal. Make amends to the Romans by killing me or surrendering me alive as you think best." Book VII, p. 200



Topics for Discussion

In 58 BC, Caesar starts his campaigns in Gaul by preventing the Helvetii from completing their migration into Gaul. He also attacks the German forces of Ariovistus and forces them back across the Rhine. His justification for these actions is that each of these intrusions is a threat to the border of the Roman Province. In contrast, what is his justification for the invasion of Britain in 55 BC? Discuss the legality of the invasion of Britain.

In the conquest of the Belgic Coalition, the Nervii tribe takes advantage of the hindrance caused by the baggage being transported by the legions and attacks before the Romans have established their camp. The legions are almost overcome, but after much trouble succeed in almost annihilating the Nervii. Is this vulnerability to attack when they are marching with full baggage and before reinforcing a camp position exploited by any other tribes, and if so, with what results?

What does Caesar achieve, either politically or strategically, with his two crossings of the Rhine? Why does he not attack the Suebi tribe, as apparently was his intention? Discuss.

When Caesar embarks to invade Britain for the second time in 54 BC, he takes with him all the leaders and hostages of the tribes whom he does not trust. Given the shortage of the transports in the landings, is this a mistake? Or does it indicate that he intends to stay longer than the short summer campaign and perhaps winter over in Britain? Discuss the second invasion of Britain and what Caesar achieves during this campaign.

In the second rebellion, Sabinus is tricked into leaving his winter camp and his legion is lost to the forces of Ambiorix. The next camp, occupied by Cicero, is also subjected to a nearly successful siege by the Nervii. Caesar is at pains to explain why and how he disperses his legions in their winter quarters in 54 BC. In retrospect, is it an error on his part that leads to the loss of the 14th Legion, or is it, as he implies, the fault of his generals? Discuss.

In the siege and capture of Alesia, it is only by the hard work of the legions and the foresight of the Roman generals in constructing the double fortification entrenchments that saves Caesar and his army from complete annihilation. Even so, the fiercely fought battle wherein Labienus has to counterattack because he cannot defend his position is a very close result. Discuss what might have happened if the relief army under the Atrebatian Commius had succeeded in overcoming the Roman forces. Would Gaul have been liberated from Roman occupation and become united under Vercingetorix, or would they have succumbed to internal civil war?

In Vercingetorix's rebellion, Caesar loses the loyalty of his trusted ally Commius and the loyalty of the Aedui. Later, in the ensuing Roman civil war, Labienus and Brutus turn against him. Is there a defect in Caesar's character that the reader can ascertain in the accounts that could lead to these betrayals? Discuss.