

## CAESAR – THE REVOLUTIONARY OF ROMAN MILITARY AFFAIRS

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**Abstract:** *In Romans' view, Caius Julius Caesar was not only a writer, a politician, a triumvir, but also a visionary, a general, a founder and a revolutionary of military art and politics.*

*Through his wars, Caesar brought a new perspective as the creator of a true reform of political and military affairs. A brilliant mind, Caesar made of the military art a political platform, his political consecration being actually his military glory, the war with the Gauls. By inspired military manoeuvres and a well planned strategy, Caesar conquered the entire Gaul, a very large and resourceful territory. The conquest of Gaul gave Caesar the opportunity to conquer Rome, as the sole leader, with a new redoubtable political actor on his side, the army. *Alea iacta est* and the Rubicon was crossed by the founder of a new political and military power, the empire. The commander of the army, imperator, also becomes the political commander of the Republic, transformed by Caesar into an empire. By the civil war, Caesar accomplished the revolution of military and political affairs, changing the army from an institution of power into a political institution, a government partner of the supreme military leader who became Rome's too, a fact carried out by his heir, Augustus. Caesar turned the war into a political affair, dominating his political and military opponents through ambition, consistency, intelligence, acumen, charisma, the qualities worthy of a world military leader.*

**Keywords:** wars, strategy, politics, Rome, Caesar.

### 1. Introduction

Caius Julius Caesar, the founder of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, was also the revolutionary of Roman military affairs, first he turned the war into a business, and the army into a business partner. He was the one who made “the Roman revolution” [1] irreversible and international.

First of all, Caesar was a politician, reaching the highest dignities of the Roman Republic, and in that capacity he also became a general. As a general, he was unique for his original way of commanding the army, for his innovations in military battles and for the devotion of his troops.

Through his war memoirs: *De bello Gallico* and *De bello civili*, Caesar remained in history as a perfect military leader, worthy

of being mentioned in course books on military art, as he was truly a “visionary” [2] of the evolution of belligerence.

### 2. Caesar, the original politician

Family name was important to Caesar in Roman politics, but his intelligence and talent made him shine in Roman politics in which he actively took part. He was on the side of the law, and sometimes he avoided compliance with it, if we think that, according to the sources of his time, he was involved in the famous conspiracies of Catiline or the triumvirate, “*potentiae societas*” (association for power – our transl.).

Caesar was “the political brain” of this pact for power “with another financial and military share”. [3] To access finance, that

could offer him the possibility of making politics at a high level, Caesar associated with the most powerful Romans of that time: Crassus, considered the richest Roman, Pompey, the most famous general, the commander of a great military force and himself, Caesar, possessing an unmatched intelligence and an ambition worthy of a world leader. In fact, Caesar thought of forming a *quattuorvirat*, and associate with the artist of Roman eloquence, Cicero [4], the most respected politician in the eyes of the Roman public.

By the triumvirate, Caesar becomes the commander of an army and is sent to Gaul, as it is thought that, being away from Rome, he will be absent in the politics of the city. A miscalculation, in fact it was from Gaul, after its conquest, that Caesar conquers Rome. *De facto*, by the military command in Gaul he becomes the only commander of an army [5], building an unrivaled military glory for ten years, slowly but surely.

### **3. Caesar and his military campaigns**

#### **3.1. Theatres of operations**

The theatre of operations which consecrated Caesar was Gaul, an extensive area across the Alps, made up of numerous divided tribes, and also a region rich in metal resources, forests and people. In addition, Gaul offered Rome the opportunity to advance deeper into the West, both into the Germans' territories and the British Isles.

Suetonius reveals the ambitious military plans of Caesar who did not want to stop in Gaul, but "to conquer the Dacians who had extended to Pontus and Thrace, then to attack the Parthians via Armenia Minor, after having tried them in battle." [6] He also "was the first of the Romans who threw a bridge over the Rhine and crushed the Germans in great battles, also attacking the Britons, hitherto an unknown people ..." [7]

For 10 years, until he conquered Gaul, Caesar led numerous battles, including "the biggest, the most stunning victory of his career" [8], that of Alesia, by which he fulfilled his military mission: "for nine years,

during which he received military command, he achieved the following: he changed the entire Gaul into a province." [9]

After the Gallic theater of operations, which brought him military and political glory, Caesar went into the theater of operations of civil war with the point of departure from Rome, but expanded into Spain, the Balkans and North Africa. If the Gallic theater of operations was dedicated to Rome, through the theater of operations of civil war Caesar dedicated Rome to "his personal power." [10] The most important stages of this theater of operations of internal war were: Munda, Dyrrachium and Pharsalus. As in Gaul, Caesar had an effective force which was inferior to that of his opponents, but his intelligence was definitely superior to that of his opponents, therefore "in all civil wars he has not suffered a defeat, except through his subordinates." [11]

The theaters of operations where Caesar fulfilled his missions were like his wars, unconventional, unique, in which only a skillful and clever general like Caesar could be victorious.

#### **3.2. Caesar, *Imperator* (the general)**

Why was Caesar a revolutionary of Roman military affairs? Because he revolutionized not only the army, its command, strategy, involvement, but also the Roman politics. Caesar changes the army into a springboard for politics, as well as an institution of force. Even though Augustus transformed the army into a leading partner of the emperor, Caesar was the one who drew the lines of this partnership. He was truly a "visionary" by the fact that he turned the Roman army from a regional army into a world army.

The secret of his military success was "his full communion with his soldiers" [12] because "the unification of Caesar's soul with that of his army sparkled in a new order." [13] It is this act of rewarding the loyalty of his military that turns Caesar into a highly capable general who knew how to build an invincible morale to his army. Through the relationship with his soldiers,

the *imperator* fulfilled the cohesion and unity of his troops, not only among themselves, but especially between them and their commander. On battlefields the army and its leader became a whole, paraphrasing a famous expression, they were *all for Caesar and Caesar for all*.

A fine psychologist and manipulator of the masses in uniform, Caesar treated his soldiers as his equals, i.e. as Roman citizens. And “when the soldiers are also citizens, words mean more than entire regiments.” [14]

So Caesar knew how to conquer first the souls of his military and thus he had an army, which was not necessarily subordinated to him, but a partner in arms, as Roman historians tell us: “In the speeches before the army, he did not use the term soldiers, but the most pleasing one, that of comrades in arms.” [15]

Caesar, the *imperator*, built this military brotherhood over time through the fights he led, but also due to his attitude towards the military. In Caesar’s fictionalized biography, written by Rex Warner, the general is the main character who confides in his readers and reveals himself as follows: “I feel as the friend and comrade of every soldier who is about to face death or wounds ... in that action we were all together and we could only save our lives in victory.” [16]

However, Caesar was not a lenient commander, but a competent and fair one: “One should not judge a soldier by his morals or fortune, but only by his military qualities”. [17] He used to take part, together with his soldiers, shoulder to shoulder, in the military training, in the military marches, he equally observed military regulations: “... he was extremely careful with regard to discipline ... he kept the soldiers ready and alert so as to lead them wherever he wished, all of a sudden ... he did not sanction all military offences, neither did he punish soldiers in proportion to the gravity of their actions, yet he paid much attention and was merciless when it

came about punishing deserters and rebels”. [18]

Military command became Caesar’s policy, and “military masses were the social partner of Caesar’s policy”. [19]

Caesar consolidated this partnership with his troops by empathy and measures favoring the armies (not only his): “He granted, with the title of prey, eighty thousand sesterces to each soldier of his former legions... He also assigned plots to them... He doubled for good the pay of the legions. Whenever there was wheat in abundance, he distributed it without limit and without measure ...” [20]

Patriotism and the pride to be Roman were the most important psychological motives that Caesar used to motivate his troops; therefore his legionaries followed him wherever he asked them to, even against those of the same blood. He is one of the few Western military leaders who rewarded the loyalty of his soldiers in such a personal manner, rather like the Oriental despots.

#### 4. Strategy and military doctrine

Any military commander has a masterpiece of strategy, Caesar has more than that: Alesia and Pharsalus, both worthy of study in any course book on military art. Alesia was the battle which consecrated the conquest of Gaul, and Pharsalus brought him the victory in the civil war.

In Gaul, the strategy of Caesar was particularly complex and followed several directions: the division of the Gallic tribes, attacks by surprise, delay of the fight, improvisations, storming, siege, synchronized attack, resilient attack, as well as night attack, the collaborationism of the Gauls [21]. Caesar revolutionized the armed struggle by speed, being a parent of “Blitzkrieg”, the lightning war. [22] Speed was his trump card in his both masterpieces of military art mentioned above, an unprecedented fact, he “covered long distances with incredible speed, with no special equipment ...” [23]

Besides speed, Caesar best calculated the unexpected, making it an ally, and an enemy to his opponents: “He fought not so much at the planned time, but when the occasion was favorable, often immediately after a march, sometimes in heavy weather conditions, when the opponent least expected, nothing made him hesitant in battle.” [24]

Caesar also used the combined attack, infantry and cavalry, improvising on the battlefield in order to catch the opportunity that would lead him to victory, because he knew that every fight had its specificity (*genus pugnae*) and “*Fortuna mutatur*” [25] (fortune changes – our transl.). He was able to turn a defensive into a destructive offensive, relying on the “personal energy” [26] of each soldier in the heat of battle, but mostly on himself, as he was capable of extraordinary endurance in battle and he had the capacity to adapt to the harsh conditions of any armed conflict.

At Alesia, “Caesar understood very well that, in order not to allow Vercingetorix to get out of the city, he would have to fight on two fronts ... The scarcity of soldiers had to be compensated by technical superiority ...” [27]. The Gauls considered that a victory of Caesar was incredible as the Gallic tribes wanted to make a junction at Alesia so as to crush him. But the illustrious politician and military man of ancient Rome devised a plan, how to defend himself and his men with a small number of people: *Caesar putavit quo minore numero militum munitiones defendi possent*. [28]

This plan meant a new challenge for his troops: engineering works, the solution that the conqueror of the Gauls found to the equation of the confrontation. Caesar was one of the generals who carried out the most complex engineering works at Alesia, equipping soldiers with a new weapon, the shovel. Even if engineering as a weapon was first used by the Assyrians, Caesar is the one that made it famous, turning his soldiers into genuine engineers. It is from

Caesar that this new engineering weapon made a career in the Roman army.

He himself explains in *De Bello Gallico* how he built these redoubts and for what purpose: “The actual city of Alesia was located high, on top of a hill, so everyone could see that it could only be conquered through a siege. The surrounding lines built by the Romans had a perimeter of 10,000 steps. The camps were placed in a favorable position, where other 23 redoubts had been built. During the day there were detachments in these redoubts to prevent the outbreak of an unexpected attack; at night the same redoubts were occupied by strong guards and garrisons.” [29]

The construction of these redoubts was made concentrically to prevent the junction of the Gallic troops, but also to lay siege to Alesia, even if the Romans were themselves besieged. The land between Alesia and the Roman redoubts was what today we would call minefield, full of traps and spiked pits, ditches or land with nails to prevent the attack of the Gallic cavalry.

Besides technical ingenuity, at Alesia Caesar showed perseverance and a consistent battle pace, resisting for days the Gallic assault on two fronts, both from the city and on the part of the Gauls who came to help Alesia. Not once did he show presence of mind, he was directly involved in combat, thus motivating his soldiers, subjected not only to a hellish pace of combat, but also to needs of all kinds, especially the lack of food. Led by Caesar, the Romans resisted heroically and when nobody expected it they sent the cavalry that caught the Gauls like a pair of pliers, sealing their fate. This is how all Gaul was conquered and Caesar’s soldiers were rewarded for their blood, given for their supreme commander, but especially for their brother in arms. Caesar had enough losses in human lives, but on the occasion of the Alesia battle, he perfected his army with which he would conquer the world, represented by Rome and its possessions.

The victory of Alesia brought Caesar

the victory over the whole Gaul, for he “destroyed the armed forces, the country and the will of the enemy.” [30] In Gaul, Caesar *venit, vidit, vicit* (came, saw, conquered – our transl.) in such an extraordinary manner that his glory became unbearable for his political enemies.

The civil war followed the crossing of the Rubicon, when *Alea iacta est* (the dice were cast – our transl.) This fratricidal war was actually a “continuation of politics by other means” [31], military.

If in Gaul Caesar won by his engineering genius, at Pharsalus he won over his political adversaries through military maneuvers after striking lucky in Rome, after making use of assaults, blockades, siege and surprise strikes in Spain and the Balkans. Thus, as he himself told in his memoirs, at Pharsalus he deceived his opponent by making him believe that he had more troops than he really had, “Faithful to the plan, Caesar placed the tenth legion on the right wing, the ninth, although much reduced after the battles of Dyrrachium, on the left wing, adding the eighth legion and thus making a legion out of two, and then he ordered them to support each other. He had 80 cohorts placed in line of battle, summing up 22,000 people, in the camp he left seven cohorts on guard. He himself stood in front of Pompey. Then, noting the arrangement of troops, fearing that the right wing might be surrounded by the horsemen, he quickly removed from the third line one cohort from each legion and made the fourth out of them ...” [32] So he arranged the troops in

line and not in depth, giving the illusion of a large effective force.

Caesar also won the civil war, after having won the Gallic war, proving to be not only a military hero, but also a perfect tactician.

He even calculated the unexpected in war, assumed risks after long assessing them, and instructed the army in an original way, giving his soldiers new weapons, like engineering, he founded a new war, the lightning war, he created diversions and “also proved cunning in the manipulation of patricians” [33] to secure peace, he perfected the Roman army and transformed the Gauls into recruits for Rome. All these are true revolutions of military art and military affairs.

## 5. Conclusions

Caius Julius Caesar was one of the most impressive generals in history, who made political war and war policy to impose the revolution of military art and of Rome.

It is not accidentally that the Roman imperial function was named after his cognomen, *Caesar*, and those dying in battle, the gladiators, honoured him (by the politico-military function of *Caesar*) with the phrase: *AVE CAESAR IMPERATOR, MORITURI TE SALUTANT!* (Hail, general Caesar/ Emperor Caesar, those who are going to die salute you!–our transl.) For he was the master of survival, when many thought he would die, and the artist of risk. He was the one who turned the unexpected into an opportunity, thus forcing *Fortuna* to be steadfast.

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