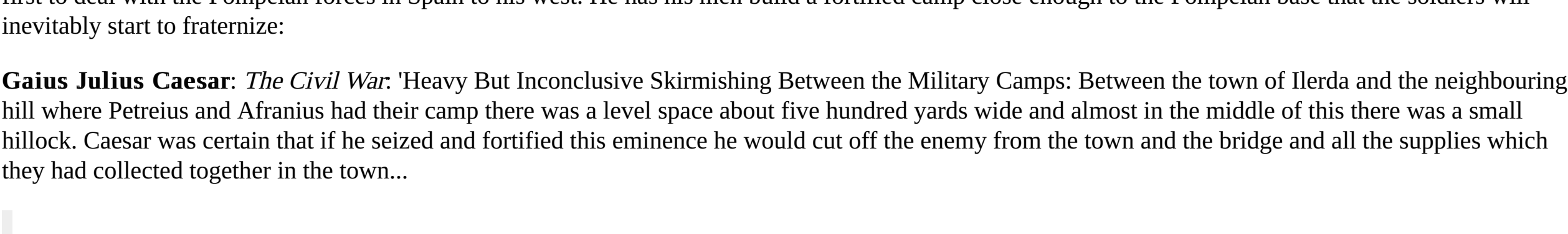


Grasping Reality with Both Hands

The weblog
of Brad DeLong. Since 1999.
Comments (mostly) welcome.
Or email me at delong@hey.com with "delong-weblog" as the subject.
RSS feed.
Also on twitter [@delong](https://twitter.com/delong).

Heavy But Inconclusive Skirmishing Between the Military Camps at Ilerda: Liveblogging the Fall of the Roman Republic



A strongly unconventional high politician knows that his adversaries will try and convict him of crimes after he lays down his military command, so he lets the dice fly. His first probing military moves demonstrate his position is very strong. From a central position in control of the heart of the empire, he moves first to deal with the Pompeian forces in Spain to his west. He has his men build a fortified camp close enough to the Pompeian base that the soldiers will inevitably start to fraternize:

Gaius Julius Caesar: *The Civil War:* 'Heavy But Inconclusive Skirmishing Between the Military Camps: Between the town of Ilerda and the neighbouring hill where Petreius and Afranius had their camp there was a level space about five hundred yards wide and almost in the middle of this there was a small hillock. Caesar was certain that if he seized and fortified this eminence he would cut off the enemy from the town and the bridge and all the supplies which they had collected together in the town...

...With this intention, he led three legions out of camp and drew them up for battle in a suitable position; then he ordered the front line of one of the legions to advance at the double and seize the hillock. Observing this, Afranius hastily sent the cohorts guarding the front of his camp round by a shorter route to capture the position. There was fighting, but since Afranius's men had reached the hillock first our men were beaten off and, as enemy reinforcements came up, they were forced to turn and go back to the legionary standards.

The method of fighting employed by the Pompeian troops was simply to charge violently at the outset and seize a position; they had no particular concern about keeping their ranks but fought dispersedly; if they were being worsted, they did not think shame to retreat and give ground. They had grown accustomed to this sort of fighting with the Lusitanians and other barbarian tribes—naturally, since it usually happens that troops are influenced by the habits of the natives of any region in which they have spent a long period of service.

This upset our troops, who were not at all accustomed to this sort of fighting; when they saw individuals running forward, they thought that they were going to be surrounded on the flanks, where they were exposed; and they believed that they ought to keep in their lines and should never leave the standards nor allow themselves to be dislodged from a position they had taken up, except for some very serious reason. The result was that the advance-guard were thrown into confusion and the legion posted on that wing did not stand its ground but retreated to higher ground near-by. Panic spread through almost the whole force.

Seeing this unexpected and unusual occurrence, Caesar began urging his men on, and led up the Ninth legion to support the others; he beat back the enemy, who were boldly rushing in hot pursuit of our men, and forced them in their turn to retreat and withdraw to Ilerda, under whose walls they halted. However, the men of the Ninth were carried away by their eagerness to repair the setback and, rashly pursuing the enemy's flight too far, they found themselves in a dangerous position at the foot of the hill on which Ilerda stands.

When they tried to withdraw from this position, the enemy once again began pressing on them from above. They were on a slope, falling away steeply on both sides; the ground was just broad enough to admit three cohorts drawn up abreast; and no reinforcements could be sent up on the flanks, nor could the cavalry bring any help if they got into difficulties. Towards the town, the ground descended in a slight slope for about seven hundred yards. In this place our men attempted to rally since, carried on by their zeal, they had thoughtlessly advanced thus far; they had to fight in a position that was disadvantageous both because of its narrow confines and because it was right up against the base of the hill, so that no missile could fail to find a mark. None the less, they fought with courage and endurance, sustaining innumerable wounds.

The enemy's numbers were increasing, and fresh cohorts were constantly being sent up from the camp through the town, so that their men could be replaced as they grew tired. Caesar was forced to do the same and send up fresh cohorts so that he could draw the weary men out. After five hours of continuous fighting, our men had used up all their missiles, and their inferiority in numbers was beginning to tell on them. They drew their swords and, charging up hill against the enemy cohorts, they cut down, a few and forced the rest to give ground.

The enemy retreated right up to the walls, and some in their panic were driven right into the town, so that the way was left open for our men to withdraw. In addition, our cavalry, although they had been posted low down on the slopes, struggled up valiantly at either side to the top, and rode up and down between the two armies giving cover for our men to retire. And so the day's fighting was a blend of successes and reverses.

About seventy of our men fell in the first encounter, and among them was Quintus Fulginius, leading centurion of the Fourteenth legion, who had risen to this position from the ranks because of his outstanding valour; more than six hundred were wounded. Among Afranius's troops, over two hundred ordinary soldiers were stands. When they tried to withdraw from this position, the enemy once again began pressing on them from above. They were on a slope, falling away steeply on both sides; the ground was just broad enough to admit three cohorts drawn up abreast; and no reinforcements could be sent up on the flanks, nor could the cavalry bring any help if they got into difficulties. Towards the town, the ground descended in a slight slope for about seven hundred yards. In this place our men attempted to rally since, carried on by their zeal, they had thoughtlessly advanced thus far; they had to fight in a position that was disadvantageous both because of its narrow confines and because it was right up against the base of the hill, so that no missile could fail to find a mark. None the less, they fought with courage and endurance, sustaining innumerable wounds. The enemy's numbers were increasing, and fresh cohorts were constantly being sent up from the camp through the town, so that their men could be replaced as they grew tired. Caesar was forced to do the same and send up fresh cohorts so that he could draw the weary men out. 46. After five hours of continuous fighting, our men had used up all their missiles, and their inferiority in numbers was beginning to tell on them. They drew their swords and, charging up hill against the enemy cohorts, they cut down, a few and forced the rest to give ground. The enemy retreated right up to the walls, and some in their panic were driven right into the town, so that the way was left open for our men to withdraw. In addition, our cavalry, although they had been posted low down on the slopes, struggled up valiantly at either side to the top, and rode up and down between the two armies giving cover for our men to retire. And so the day's fighting was a blend of successes and reverses. About seventy of our men fell in the first encounter, and among them was Quintus Fulginius, leading centurion 19 of the Fourteenth legion, who had risen to this position from the ranks because of his outstanding valour; more than six hundred were wounded. Among Afranius's troops, over two hundred ordinary soldiers were killed and five centurions, including Titus Caecilius, a senior centurion.

However, each side was of the general opinion that it had come off better in that day's fighting.

Afranius's men claimed the victory because, although they were generally acknowledged to be inferior, they had none the less kept fighting at close quarters for so long and withstood the onslaught of our men, and they had initially captured the hillock which had been the object of contention and had forced our men to give way at the first encounter.

Our men thought they themselves had won because, although they were on unfavourable ground and at a disadvantage in numbers, they had sustained the battle for five hours; because they had charged up-hill with drawn swords; and because they had forced their adversaries, who were actually on higher ground, to withdraw and had compelled them to take refuge in the town...

Caesar, Julius. *The Civil War* (Classics) (p. 57). Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition.

.#history #livebloggingthefalloftheromanrepublic #politics #2020-08-03

html <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/08/heavy-but-inconclusive-skirmishing-between-the-military-camps-at-ilerda-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>

edit html <https://www.typepad.com/site/blogs/6a00e551f08003883400e551f080068834/post/6a00e551f0800388340263e95a0469200b/edit>

Foreshadowing from Gaius Sallustius Crispus <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/foreshadowing-from-gaius-sallustius-crispus-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: A strongly unconventional high politician facing the expiration of his term of office. He knows that there is a very high probability that, because of his actions in office, his adversaries will try and convict him of crimes after he lays down his power. Let us start with some foreshadowing from Gaius Sallustius Crispus...

Pompey's Strategy and Domitius' Stand <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/turns-pompeys-strategy-and-domitius-standnoted.html>: In his *The Civil War* Gaius Julius Caesar presented "just the facts" in a way that made Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus look like a cowardly and incompetent idiot. The attractive interpretation is that Ahenobarbus was just trying to do the job of defeating Caesar, but had failed to recognize that Pompey was not his ally. Pompey, rather, was somebody whose first goal was to gain the submission of Ahenobarbus and the other Optimates, and only after that submission was gained would he even think about fighting Caesar. Still an idiot, but not an incompetent or a cowardly one: **Alfred Burns** <https://github.com/braddelong/public-files/blob/master/readings/article-burns-pompey.pdf>: 'In early 49, the alliance confronting Caesar consisted of the old republican senate families who under the leadership of [Lucius] Domitius [Ahenobarbus] tried to maintain the traditional institutions and of Pompey who clung to his own extra-legal position of semi-dictatorial power. Both parties to the alliance were as mutually distrustful as they were dependent on each other...

Marcus Tullius Cicero's Take on the First Three Months of -49 <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/marcus-tullius-ciceros-take-on-the-first-three-months-of-49-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: "We have a primary source for the start of the Roman Civil War in addition to Gaius Julius Caesar's deceptively powerful plain-spoken "just the facts" narrative in his Commentaries on the Civil War—a narrative that is also a clever and sophisticated lawyer's brief. Our one other primary source: Marcus Tullius Cicero's letters to his BFF Titus Pomponius Atticus. Caesar, in his *The Civil War*, makes himself out to be reasonable, rational, decisive, and clever. Cicero, in his Letters to Atticus is a contrast. He lets his hair down. He is writing to someone he trusts to love him without reservation. He is completely unconcerned with making himself appear to be less flawed than he appears. And the impression he leaves is absolutely dreadful: he makes himself out to be erratic, emotional, dithering, and idiotic...

Reflecting on the First Three Months of -49 <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/reflecting-on-the-first-three-months-of-49-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: "The key question for the first three months of the year -49 is: what did the factions anticipate would happen in that year? The Optimates seemed to think that they had Caesar cornered: Either he surrendered... and then submitted to trial... or he... was quickly crushed.... Cicero appears to have believed that either the Senate surrendered to Caesar and let him... put Cataline's conspiracy into action but legally... and then ruled With the support of his electoral coalition of mountebank ex-debtors and ex-veterans to whom he had given land; or... Pompey... crushed Cesar militarily... follow[ed] up with proscriptions and executions after which he would rule as a second Sulla. What is not at all clear to me is what Pompey thought would happen.... My guess, reading between the lines of Plutarch, is that Pompey found himself allied with the Senate in January-February of -49, but not in command of anything—as shown by Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus's behavior at Corfinium, attempting to trap Pompey into fighting alongside him in central Italy. And so he retreated to Greece, where he was in undisputed command...

Caesar Offers a Compromise Solution (or So Caesar Says) <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/caesar-offers-a-compromise-solution-or-so-caesar-says-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: The Beginning of Caesar's *Commentaries on the Civil War*, in which Caesar says that he had proposed a compromise solution to the political crisis.... The dispatch from Gaius Caesar was delivered to the consuls; but it was only after strong representations from the tribunes that they gave their grudging permission for it to be read in the Senate. Even then, they would not consent to a debate on its contents, but initiated instead a general debate on 'matters of State'.... Scipio spoke... Pompey, he said, intended to stand by his duty to the State, if the Senate would support him; but if they hesitated and showed weakness, then, should they want his help later, they would ask for it in vain...

The Optimate Faction Rejects Caesar's Compromise <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/the-optimates-faction-rejects-caesars-compromise-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: Caesar narrates the reasons that the leaders of the Optimate faction—Cato, Lentulus, Scipio, and Pompey—worked hard to set the stage for war, and how the majority of Senators in the timorous middle were robbed of the power to decide freely, and driven reluctantly to vote for Scipio's motion to rob Caesar of his protections against arrest and trial...

The Optimate Faction Arms for War, & Illegally Usurps Provincial Imperium <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/the-optimates-faction-arms-for-war-illegally-usurps-provincial-imperium-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: Caesar narrates: Whatever norms he may or may not have broken during his consulate—in order to wrest land from the hands of corrupt plutocrats and grant it to the deserving—he says, the Optimate faction does much worse. In the first seven days of the year of the consulate of Lucius Cornelius Lentulus Crus and Gaius Claudius Marcellus Maior, the Optimate faction goes beyond norm-breaking into outright illegality. And to that they add impiety. They illegally seize power, as they grant themselves proconsular and propraetorial imperium over the provinces, without the constitutionally-required popular confirmation of imperium. They impiously violate the separation of church and state by seizing temple funds for their own use. They thus incur the wrath of the gods. And they incur the enmity of all who believe in constitutional balance, as opposed to armed plutocratic dictatorship...

Caesar Presents His Case to the 13th Legion, & Negotiates Unsuccessfully with Pompey <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/caesar-presents-his-case-to-the-13th-legion-negotiates-unsuccessfully-with-pompey-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-rep.html>: Caesar presents his case to the 13th Legion, and wins its enthusiastic support. Caesar and Pompey negotiate, but Pompey refuses to give up his dominant position. He holds imperium over Spain and commanding the ten Spanish garrison legions, while also residing in the suburbs of Rome and thus dominating the discussions of the Senate. Pompey refuses to commit to setting a date for his departure for Spain...

The Optimate Faction Panics and Abandons Rome <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/the-optimates-faction-panics-and-abandons-rome-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: Caesar narrates: The Optimate faction panics at a rumor of Caesar's approach, and flees from Rome with the looted Treasury reserve. The towns of Italy support Caesar. Even the town of Cingulum rallied to Caesar, even though its founder Titus Labienus, Caesar's second-in-command in the Gallic War, had deserted Caesar for his earlier allegiance to Pompey. And Pompey's attempts to reinforce his army by recruiting veterans who had obtained their farms through Caesar's legislative initiatives did not go well...

Caesar Besieges Domitius in Corfinium <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/caesar-besieges-domitius-in-corfinium-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus began raising troops, and by the start of February -49 had 13000 soldiers in the town of Corfinium. On 09 Feb -49 Domitius decided to stand at Corfinium rather than retreat to the south of Italy. So he wrote to Pompey... urged that the Optimate faction join its military forces together at Corfinium to outnumber and fight Caesar. Pompey disagreed. Why did he decide that he, Pompey, "cannot risk the whole war in a single battle, especially under the circumstances"?...

Caesar Captures Corfinium <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/caesar-captures-corfinium-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus's deception that Pompey is coming to the Optimates' aid in Corfinium falls apart, Ahenobarbus tries to flee, Lentulus Spinther begs for his life, Caesar grants clemency to all, and adds the third and Pompeian legions to his army. Before Corfinium Caesar had had two legions in Italy to the Optimate and Pompeian six. After Corfinium (with the arrival of Legio VIII plus new recruits) Caesar has seven legions in Italy to the Pompeian three. It is now 21 Feb -49: **Gaius Julius Caesar:** *The Civil War:* 'Domitius's looks, however, belied his words; indeed, his whole demeanour was much more anxious and fearful than usual. When to this was added the fact that, contrary to his usual custom, he spent a lot of time talking to his friends in private, making plans, while avoiding a meeting of the officers or an assembly of the troops, then the truth could not be concealed or misrepresented for long...

Pompey Refuses to Negotiate & Flees to Greece <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/pompey-refuses-to-negotiate-flees-to-greece-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: Pompey flees to the southern Adriatic port of Brundisium. Caesar catches up to him and begs him to negotiate. Pompey refuses and flees to Greece. Caesar decides not to follow, but to turn and first defeat the Pompeian armies in Spain. It is now 18 Mar -49...

Cementing Caesarian Control of the Center of the Empire: Late March -49 <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/cementing-caesarian-control-of-the-center-of-the-empire-late-march-49-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: Caesar, now that the Pompeians and the High Optimates have fled, offers to share power with the dysfunctional Senate but, filibustered and vetoed by Optimate tribunes, he consolidates his hold on the center of the empire and heads for Spain...

Treachery at Massilia: April-May -49 <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/treachery-at-massilia-april-may-49-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: The Massiliotes profess neutrality—until Pompeian reinforcements arrive, and then they go back on their word. Pompeians to whom Caesar had shown clemency at Corfinium have again taken up weapons against him: Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus at Massilia, and Vibullius Rufus to command the Pompeian legions in Spain...

Rendezvous in Spain, at Ilerda <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/08/rendezvous-in-spain-at-ilerda-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republyic.html>: Caesar's first probing military moves demonstrate his position is very strong. From a central position in control of the heart of the empire, he moves first to deal with the Pompeian forces in Spain to his west: 'The First Spanish Campaign: Fabius's orders were to make haste to seize the passes over the Pyrenees, which at that time were being held by the troops of Pompey's lieutenant, Lucius Afranius. He ordered the remaining legions, which were wintering farther away, to follow on. Fabius, obeying orders, lost no time in dislodging the guards from the pass and proceeded by forced marches to encounter Afranius's army...

Caesar Begins His First Spanish Campaign <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/08/caesar-begins-his-first-spanish-campaign-liveblogging-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html>: A strongly unconventional high politician knows that his adversaries will try and convict him of crimes after he lays down his military command, so he lets the dice fly. His first probing military moves demonstrate his position is very strong. From a central position in control of the heart of the empire, he moves first to deal with the Pompeian forces in Spain to his west. He has his men build a fortified camp close enough to the Pompeian base that the soldiers will inevitably start to fraternize...

Posted on August 03, 2020 at 11:37 in [politics](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

Comments

Comment below or sign in with TypePad Facebook Twitter and more...

(You can use HTML tags like <i> and to style your text. URLs automatically linked.)

Email address is not displayed with comment.

Name

Email Address

Web Site URL

POWERED BY TypePad

Donate

>About Brad DeLong

Brad DeLong's Short Biography

DeLong's Grasping Reality © J. Bradford DeLong 1995-2019

Print PDF Email