

Caesar Besieges Domitius in Corfinum: Liveblogging the Fall of the Roman Republic



A strongly unconventional high politician faces the expiration of his term of office. He knows that, because of his actions in office, he has enemies. He knows that his adversaries will try and convict him of crimes after he lays down his power...

Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, *cos.* -54, had been named by the Senate to succeed Caesar as Governor of Gaul. When he learned of Caesar's crossing the Rubicon, he began raising troops, and by the start of February -49 had 13000 soldiers in the town of Corfinum. On 09 Feb -49 Domitius decided to stand at Corfinum rather than retreat to the south of Italy. So he wrote to Pompey, who was in the south of Italy with two legions plus others he was mobilizing—10000 men. Domitius urged that the Optimate faction join its military forces together at Corfinum to outnumber and fight Caesar. Pompey disagreed. He wrote back that he would not come north to join forces. On 15 Feb -49 Caesar appeared in front of Corfinum with 8000 soldiers consisting of his vanguard, Legio XIII, reinforced by Legio XII, and began to besiege it.

Did Pompey not trust his two legions? They had been part of Caesar's army in Gaul, but had been transferred to Pompey's command to be sent to Syria, but Pompey had directed them to hold in the south of Italy instead. Caesar's initial crossing of the Rubicon had been with only 2000 soldiers, half of Legio XIII. Did the fact that Caesar had met no resistance make Pompey decide on his strategy of (a) holding Spain with ten legions, (b) retreating himself to Greece and gathering the eastern army, and then (c) returning to Italy with overwhelming force? Pompey's letter to Domitius argues that the Optimate faction's soldiers are "neither trustworthy nor battle-trained", of low morale, likley to be outnumbered given the speed with which Caesear is summoning his Gallic War army, and that he, Pompey, "cannot risk the whole war in a single battle, especially under the circumstances".

Caesar narrates:

Gaius Julius Caesar: *The Civil War:* 'Caesar accepted the surrender of Firmum; he also gave orders that a search be made for the men who had deserted Lentulus after the latter's expulsion, and that fresh troops be levied. He himself stayed where he was for one day to collect supplies of corn, and then hurried to Corfinium...

...On arrival there, he found that five cohorts sent out by Domitius from the town were breaking down the bridge over the river*, about three miles from the town. Domitius's men engaged Caesar's advance-guard, but were soon beaten back from the bridge and retreated into the town. Caesar then led his forces over the river and, halting near the town walls, set up camp.

On learning this, Domitius by dint of offering a large reward succeeded in finding men with a knowledge of Apulia, and sent them to Pompey with dispatches begging him to come and help; he reported that two armies, aided by the confined nature of the country, could easily hem in Caesar and prevent his getting supplies. He warned Pompey that, if he failed to help, he himself, and more than thirty cohorts, as well as a good many Roman knights and senators, would be put in danger. While awaiting a reply, he delivered encouraging speeches to his men, set up ballistic machines at various points on the walls, and assigned each of his men to specific duties for the defence of the town. In an address to the troops, he promised grants of land from his own possessions, at the rate of twenty-five acres per man, and proportionately larger grants to centurions and re-enlisted veterans.

Caesar in the meantime heard that the people of Sulmo, a town seven miles from Corfinium, were eager to support him, but were being restrained by the senator Quintus Lucretius and by Attius, a Paelignian, who were holding the town with a garrison of seven cohorts. Caesar sent Mark Antony there with five cohorts of the Thirteenth Legion, and as soon as the people of Sulmo saw our standards they opened the gates and, one and all, troops and citizens, came out joyfully to meet Antony. Lucretius and Attius threw themselves from the walls, but Attius was brought to Antony and asked to be sent to Caesar. Antony returned on the same day as he had set out, with the cohorts and Attius, and Caesar incorporated the cohorts into his own army and released Attius unharmed.

During the next few days, Caesar began to construct large defence-works about his camp and to gather in provisions from the neighbouring towns, while waiting for the rest of his forces. Within three days the Eighth Legion arrived, together with twenty-two cohorts from the latest levies in Gaul and about three hundred cavalry from the king of Noricum. On their arrival, he set up a second camp on the other side of the town, and put Curio in charge of it. During the following days he began surrounding the town with earth-works and redoubts.

When the major part of this work was finished, the messengers sent to Pompey arrived back. Domitius read the dispatch they brought; and then, in his council of officers, he concealed its contents, and announced that Pompey would shortly arrive with help; he urged them to keep up their spirits and make all necessary arrangements for the defence of the town. He himself then held a secret conclave with a few friends and decided to attempt an escape.

.#history #livebloggingthefalloftheromanrepublic #politics #2020-07-24

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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...

Caesar Offers a Compromise Solution (or So Caesar Says): Liveblogging the Fall of the Roman Republic <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-optimite-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-optimite-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: Liveblogging the Fall of the Roman Republic <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2020/07/the-optimite-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

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