The *Bellum Hispaniense* as a Face of Battle Narrative

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"Battle, for (the soldier), takes place in a wildly unstable physical and mental environment".[1]

After describing a successful attack against the Pompeian forces, the anonymous author of the Spanish War sums up the significance of the day's work: "And so the death of the two centurions the day before was avenged by this punishment of the enemy".[2] Far from analyzing the strategic effect of this victory on the course of the civil war, the author's mind was fixed instead on the immediate result: retribution for the death of two of his comrades.

The anonymous *Bellum Hispaniense* from the Caesarian corpus is the closest thing we have to the soldier's eye view from a military campaign in Antiquity.[3] The author was a junior officer, perhaps a cavalry commander (*praefectus equitum*),[4] who gives us

[1] John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), 47.
[2] *Bell. Hisp.* 24.6: *Ita pridie duorum centurionum interitio hac adversariorum poena est litata.*
[3] Ammianus Marcellinus, while an important eye-witness to war, was a *protector domesticus* and thus not directly involved in field operations. Xenophon's *Anabasis* is the most complete account of an ancient army in day-to-day operation (cf. John W.I. Lee, *A Greek Army on the March: Soldiers and Survival in Xenophon's Anabasis* (Cambridge, 2008).]), but is told of course from a commander's prospective. The anonymous *Bellum Africanum* is of similar value to the present work, as the author was an officer outside Caesar's central command, and shall be consulted to complement the vantage point of the *Bellum Hispaniense*. Philip Sabin, 'The Face of Roman Battle', *JRS*, 90 (2000), 1-17. oddly mentions the *B.H.* (and *B.Afr.* for that matter) very little.
[4] Rudolph H. Storch, 'The Author of the De Bello Hispaniensi: A Cavalry Officer?', *The Classical Journal*, 68/4 (1973), 381-83.

his account of the last action of Caesar's civil war, not from the 'eye of command', but from the perspective of a more common participant. The narrative, therefore, is not an over-arching analysis of Caesar's entire campaign, but rather an account based on the author's own experience of the war.

Yet, despite the influence of John Keegan's *The Face of Battle* in Roman military studies and the diffusion of socio-cultural approaches to the Roman army, the author is still criticized for failing to provide a broad strategic analysis of Caesar's campaign: "As a military commentator he lacks a sense of proportion", focusing instead on minor engagements, war atrocities, and desertions.[5] In other words: "trivialities displace the solid information the reader would like on strategy, or even on tactics".[6] It is proposed here instead to consider the author as war-participant, not a "war commentator", and to explore his "trivialities" for insights into a low-level Roman officer's experience of war and the workings of the late Republican army.

First, however, we will take a brief look at the current state of ancient military historiography in order to better contextualize this approach to the *Bellum Hispaniense*.

[5] A.G. Way, *Caesar: Alexandrian, African and Spanish Wars. With an English Translation* (Loeb Classical Library: Harvard, 1955), 305.
[6] John Carter, *Julius Caesar: The Civil War with the Anonymous Alexandrian, African, and Spanish Wars* (Oxford, 1997), xxxv.

Keegan, Kagan, and Ancient Military Historiography

Though Keegan's earliest case study is the 15th-century battle of Agincourt, *The Face of Battle* has significantly altered the way ancient historians study warfare. Keegan shifted the focus of military history away from the decisions of the commander to the actions of the common soldier. There is an inherent disjunction, he argues, in the goals and outlook of these two on the battlefield: the soldier's primary focus "will centre on the issue of personal survival, to which the commander's 'win/lose' system of values may be, indeed often proves, irrelevant or directly hostile."[7] It is this "issue of personal survival" in small-group dynamics that Keegan sees as the crucial factor governing the course of battle. An account from the soldier's prospective, therefore, as opposed to the command-centered narrative, is in a much better position to truly understand any particular battle and the nature of warfare in general.

Kimberly Kagan's recent *The Eye of Command* is a direct response to the now-popular face of battle approach. She argues that Keegan does not "successfully link the participants' individual experiences to a battle's course and outcome":[8] it instead employs explanations based on the "general character of combat", what she terms "*generic causality*",[9] and it uses these to build a cumulative model of the battle, on the assumption that "battle is the sum of the experiences of the individuals on the

[7] Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, 47.
[8] Kimberly Kagan, *The Eye of Command* (Michigan, 2006), 21.
[9] Ibid., 19.

battlefield".[10] Ultimately this model "does not explain what happened on the battlefield in terms of causal *events*".[11] To investigate the key causal events of battle, Kagan promotes the "eye of command" approach, best exemplified in the ancient world by Caesar's commentaries.[12]

Kagan's work is especially valuable in arguing for balance between the general and soldiers in critical studies of ancient militaries and battles. The older command-centered, strategic-based approach, on the other hand, often ignored the role of soldiers, except as recipients of the commander's orders and enablers of his grand strategies. This focus on the commander and his strategies I believe lies behind the fundamental misreading of the *Bellum Hispaniense* as a war commentary in the vein of Caesar's writings.[13]

The author was simply not well-placed enough to provide a critical commentary of the Spanish campaign. He was not part of Caesar's war cabinet and was thus not privy to strategic planning sessions nor did he have access to top-level military correspondence. His position as a junior officer in Caesar's army put him in direction of small-scale operations, which in fact made up the bulk of the Spanish campaign. The author's experience of these operations, then, forms the basis of the *Bellum Hispaniense*.

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[10] Ibid., 100.
[11] Ibid., 22.
[12] The complicated support for his approach need not concern us here: see Ibid., 99-108.
[13] Anton J.L. Van Hooff, 'The Caesar of The "Bellum Hispaniense"', *Mnemosyne,* 27 (1974), 123-38. is an example, valuable though it may be, of this approach.

Instead of approaching the work as a war commentary, which has lead to frequent scholarly disappointment,[14] it is proposed to here to consider the *Bellum Hispaniense* as a sort of ancient war-diary and its author as a soldier, who truly saw the face of battle.

Small-Scale Operations in the Bellum Hispaniense

A particularly valuable aspect of the *Bellum Hispaniense* is the detail the author gives to small-scale, mixed-unit operations, such as out-posting, foraging-protection, scouting, and skirmishing, especially those involving cavalry. Ancient writers usually overlook such operations in favor of the set-piece battle between infantry and modern historians have often followed suit: both under normative considerations of what war "ought" to be. Recently, however, there has been increased emphasis on the importance of light-armed troops and the deployment of mixed-unit battalions in Hellenistic and Roman armies.[15] I suggest here that it was the author's proximity or personal involvement in such operations, and not a naïve lack of narrative balance,[16]

[14] And even scholarly inertia: on the *Bellum Hispaniense*, John Carter admits that "it is difficult to find anything constructive to say." (Carter, *Julius Caesar: The Civil War with the Anonymous Alexandrian, African, and Spanish Wars*, xxxv.)
[15] See, e.g., Nicholas Sekunda, 'Military Forces: A. Land Forces', in Philip Sabin, Hans Van Wees, and Michael Whitby (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare* (Cambridge, 2007), 325-56.
[16] Way, *Caesar: Alexandrian, African and Spanish Wars. With an English Translation*, 305.

that led him to include these descriptions. To this author, understandably, these operations were not “low-intensity warfare”.[17]

The attention that the author gives to cavalry operations led Rudolph Storch to convincingly suggest that he was connected to the cavalry, most likely as a *praefectus equitum*.[18] In addition to describing numerous mounted skirmishes, the author often singles out cavalry casualties and prisoners,[19] and notably accounts for the 1,000 Caesarian dead at Munda with the “novel phrase” *partim equitum partim peditum*.[20] He twice highlights a maneuver whereby soldiers mount up with the cavalry for a stealthy approach to enemy positions.[21] The most dramatic display of the cavalrymen’s *virtus*, however, is when they dismount and destroy an attacking band of Pompeian light-armed troops.[22] The cavalrymen are the heroes of this history and the author appropriately relates that Caesar gave 3,000 denarii to the Cassian *turma* and five gold collars to their commander after a particularly successful operation.[23]

In such a position connected to the cavalry, the author would have been overseeing a component of the Roman army that had been undergoing drastic changes

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[17] A phrase often used for smaller-scale operations, in contrast to the pitched battled. E.g. Adrian Goldsworthy, 'Battle', in Philip Sabin, Hans Van Wees, and Michael Whitby (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare* (Cambridge, 2007), 141.
[18] Storch, 'The Author of the De Bello Hispaniensi: A Cavalry Officer?', (383.
[19] *B.H.* 13.1; 15.5; 21.2.
[20] *B.H.* 32.10.
[21] *B.H.* 3; 4.
[22] *B.H.* 15.
[23] *B.H.* 26.1. Oddly Storch does not mention this donative. 2,000 denarii went also to the light-armed infantry: for the author’s interest in the *levis armatura*, see below.

in the previous century.[24] The Romans originally employed citizen cavalry as part of the legionary force. While reforms were made to improve arms and equipment[25] and standardize animal-maintenance,[26] elite Romans began to seek other opportunities for social prestige and over the course of the second-century foreign horsemen replaced the citizen squadron. At the outset of his Gallic campaign, Caesar raised 4,000 cavalry "from the whole province, the Aedui, and their allies".[27] Being in charge of a foreign (or local Spanish) cavalry force then, the author would have been somewhat removed from the day-to-day life of the Roman legionary and more attuned to the operations of the auxiliaries.

As general, Caesar himself was naturally attuned to small-scale operations and mentions them in his commentaries when they have some important bearing on the overall course of a battle. More often, however, he (presumably) passes them over or simply reports their occurrence. One example of this narrative strategy should suffice. Upon coming to relieve Cicero from the siege of the Nervii, Caesar built a camp and tried to lure the Gauls into the open field with skirmishes: *Eo die parvulis equestribus proelis ad aquam factis utrique se suo loco continent*.[28] The important fact was that both

[24] See generally Jeremy Mccall, *The Cavalry of the Roman Republic: Cavalry Combat and Elite Reputations in the Middle and Late Republic* (Routledge, 2001).
[25] *Polyb.* 6.25.
[26] *Polyb.* 6.39.
[27] *B.G.* 1.15.
[28] *B.G.* 5.50.1. Storch, 'The Author of the De Bello Hispaniensi: A Cavalry Officer?', (381.

armies maintained their positions; the cavalry skirmishes could be dealt with an ablative absolute. If there were any casualties, Caesar does not report them.

For the officer composing the *Bellum Hispaniense*, on the other hand, these small-scale operations had greater immediacy and he consequently reports them with more detail. Thus, when the two armies were camped near the River Salsum, he describes a Pompeian attack that he witnessed against one of Caesar's outposts (*statio*), manned by mixed unit of cavalry and light-armed troops:

> *Aliquot turmae cum levi armatura impetu facto loco sunt deiecti et propter paucitatem nostrorum equitum simul cum levi armatura inter turmas adversariorum protriti.* [29]
>
> When the attack was made, several cavalry squadrons along with the light-armed troops were driven out from their position and, since we were short on cavalry, they along with the light-armed troops were trampled amid the squadrons of the enemy.

The author does not explain how the detachment was forced out into the open field, but once there the light-armed troops were no match for the enemy squadrons, while the Caesarian cavalry were outnumbered. Even if they were not literally trampled (though some probably were),[30] it must have been a brutal and one-sided attack. The author's vantage point of the rout also might have made it seem like the Caesarian forces were simply being trampled: for, the author says the attack took place within view of both

[29] *B.H.* 14.2.

[30] Horses generally try to avoid contact with obstacles. See Kagan, *The Eye of Command*, 95-6. for his reconstruction of the behavior of men and horses at Agincourt (1415) and Mccall, *The Cavalry of the Roman Republic: Cavalry Combat and Elite Reputations in the Middle and Late Republic*, 20-23. for the debate about cavalry versus infantry encounters in the ancient world.

camps, presumably a fair distance from each. "He may spend much of his time in combat as a mildly apprehensive spectator", Keegan observes, "granted, by some freak of events, a comparatively danger-free grandstand view of others fighting".[31]

The author was well-aware of the dangers of outpost duty: a similar attack had occurred on the previous day and killed three cavalrymen.[32] Earlier the Pompeians had slaughtered nearly every man of a fortified cavalry outpost, all caught unaware in a "very thick morning mist".[33] Caesar used cavalry and light-armed outposts for intelligence and advanced defense. The author explains that Caesar had placed this squadron along with others on guard duty in outposts "where they could protect his camp."[34] In Africa, the general Curio heard of King Juba's advance from his "outpost cavalry" (*equites ex statione*).[35] Caesar probably employed outposts for ambushes as well, as Xenophon recommends,[36] but this type of warfare is usually attributed to the enemy in the Caesarian corpus.[37] Nevertheless, in his previous Spanish campaign, Caesar's cavalry outposts around Ilerda were a sufficient threat to keep the Afranian soldiers from action and force them to forage at night.[38]

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[31] Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, 47.
[32] *B.H.* 13.1.
[33] *B.H.* 6.3: *matutino tempore nebula esset crassissima.*
[34] *Ibid.: ubi…in statione, in excubitu castris praesidio essent.*
[35] *B.C.* 2.26.2.
[36] *Hipparchos* 4.10-12.
[37] So the Nervii *intra eas silvas hostes in occulto sese continebant; in aperto loco secundum flumen paucae stationes equitum videbantur.* (*B.G.* II.18) At *B.Afr.* 7 the author claims that this is the Moorish style of fighting. Romans, of course, were not adverse to this type of action: *B.C.* 37-38 describes the ambush and counter-ambush of Scipio and Domitius in Macedonia.
[38] *B.C.* 1.59.

Along with the cavalry, the author also pays particular attention to light-armed troops. After reviewing Gn. Pompeius' legionary strength, he says simply of the Caesarian forces: "As for light-armed infantry and cavalry, ours were far superior both in valor and quantity".[39] After recording the cavalry's honors mentioned above, he notes a 2,000 denarii reward to the light-armed troops as well.[40] These two unit-types are often seen stationed or operating together, such as at the disastrous outpost attack, and it is probable that a certain camaraderie developed through their joint and dependent operations.

The specifics of joint infantry and cavalry actions are not particularly well known. The author of the *Bellum Hispaniense*, however gives two examples of a joint maneuver, used for different effects. When Caesar learned that the town of Ulia was under pressure from Gn. Pompeius, he dispatched six cohorts "with an equal number of cavalry" (*pari equites numero*),[41] under the command of L. Vibius Paciaecus,[42] to aid the town. "When they had reached this spot, Paciaecus ordered two men to mount each horse, and they raced straight through the outposts of the enemy to the town."[43] After

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[39] *B.H.* 7.5: *nam de levi armatura et equitatu longe et virtute et numero nostri erant superiores.* Nicole Diouron, *Pseudo-César: Guerre D'espagne* (Les Belles Lettres; Paris 2002), 71. notes that while Caesar always uses *levis armatura* in the genitive, denoting quality or as a partitive, the authors of the *B.Afr.* and *B.H.* use the expression substantively, as a technical term. Coupled with his interest in light-armed operations, our author seems comfortable using the common soldier's term for these troops.

[40] *B.H.* 26.1.

[41] *B.H.* 3.5. Alfred Klotz, *Kommentar Zum Bellum Hispaniense* (Leipzig, 1927), 45. notes the importance of a balanced force, referring to slaughter of the cavalry outpost in 6.4.

[42] A well-known (Cicero, *Att.* 12.2.1) Spanish equestrian: see Diouron (2002), 56-7.

[43] *B.H.* 3.6: *Ita cum ad eum <locum> venerunt, iubet binos equites conscendere, et recta per adversariorum praesidia ad oppidum contendunt.*

this daring mission, the infantry cohorts spread out to garrison the town and the cavalry returned through the outposts to distract the Pompeian forces.[44]

While this action took place before Ulia, Caesar approached Corduba and "sent forth the heavy infantry (*loricatos*)[45], brave men, accompanied by cavalry. As soon as they got in sight of the town, they mounted up, a maneuver which the Cordubians were not at all able to notice".[46] It is not entirely clear how the enemy did not notice this maneuver; perhaps the Caesarian forces were under partial cover or at a distance their double-mounting went unrecognized. Regardless, the ruse was successful: Sextus Pompeius' forces stormed from the town to attack the cavalry, whereupon the heavily-armed troops dismounted and routed the attackers.

Strabo claims that the Spanish specialized in this double-mounting stratagem[47] and the Spaniard[48] Paciaecus' employment of this maneuver supports this generalization. It seems, however, that Caesar himself has planned this second operation: perhaps we can see some local influence on Roman cavalry tactics, especially since Caesar probably was employing some Spanish auxiliaries.[49] Livy, however,

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[44] Diouron's note here (3.9, p. 58) makes little sense, given the success of the maneuver in 4.2 as well: "Devant la réussite de ce stratagème, César y recourut encore devant Cordoue, mais avec moins de succès".

[45] Klotz (1927), 48 notes that this is used to describe infantry only in the *B.H.* and sees it as another instance of camp slang (cf. n. 29 on *levis armatura*).

[46] *B.H.* 4.1-2: *loricatos viros fortis cum equitatu ante praemist. Qui simul in conspectum oppidi se dederunt, cum equis recipiuntur, hoc a Cordubensibus neqauquam poterat animadverti.*

[47] Strabo 3.4.18.

[48] see above, n. 32.

[49] As he was in the African War: 39.2. J.M.

describes this maneuver in detail in connection with Roman operations in Campania during the Second Punic War.[50] Regardless, the author's (presumed) role as cavalry commander over mostly non-citizen horsemen would have put him in a good position to learn about different cavalry tactics and he was clearly interested in promoting the double-mount.

This maneuver can be compared with other joint operations that Caesar directs in the African and Civil Wars. When Labienus' cavalry were harassing his baggage train near Aggar, "Caesar ordered three-hundred soldiers from each legion to be in light order. And so he sent these in support of his own squadrons against Labienus' cavalry."[51] Here Caesar diversifies his forces and makes them more mobile as a defensive measure against the roaming cavalry. As Bouvet notes,[52] these troops resemble the *antesignani* that Caesar mentions in the *Civil War,* who operate independently on dangerous front-line missions,[53] but twice are seen working in conjunction with cavalry in a very similar manner.[54]

Another cavalry maneuver that the author proudly reports is when a group of cavalrymen successfully dismount in the face of light-armed ambushers and repel the attack.[55] Diodoros reports that this too is a Spanish custom,[56] but Blázquez is too quick

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[50] Livy, 26.4.5.
[51] *B.Afr.* 75.5.
[52] A. Bouvet, *Pseudo-César: Guerre D'afrique* (Les Belles Lettres; Paris 2002).
[53] *B.C.* 1.43.3.
[54] *B.C.* 3.75.5; 84.3.
[55] *B.H.* 15.

to deduce that these are Spanish cavalry on that basis.[57] The terrain in this case must have been unsuitable for mounted operations: so Frontinus explains why Domitian ordered his cavalry to dismount to fight the Chatti.[58] I would tend to suppose that it was quick-thinking on the cavalrymen's part, perhaps influenced by local practice, rather than tradition that led to this *eques pedestre, pedes equestre*[59] encounter.

The author's descriptions of these joint operations and cavalry maneuvers, based on his personal experience, provide a particularly lively view of small-scale operations and give a good sense of the flexibility of the late Republican army.

Critics have complained that the author of the *Bellum Hispaniense* gives too much weight such "unimportant" operations. One must remember, however, that there was only one set battle; Caesar's maneuvering and incremental gains before Munda put him in a much better position to win the decisive battle. The battle at Munda, moreover, did not end the war: "clean-up operations" (only known as such in retrospect) included a lengthy siege of Munda itself, operations around Hispalis and Ursao, and the tracking down of Gn. Pompeius.

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[56] 5.33.5, along, of course, with using urine to bathe and wash their teeth.
[57] Blázquez, "Causas de la Romanización de Hispania", *Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes* (http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/FichaObra.html?Ref=18221), 50: "caballería hispana luchaba al lado de César (*BH* 15), como se deduce de la táctica de descabalgar y luchar a pie de los jinetes, costumbre típicamente ibera según Diodoro (V 33, 5)".
[58] *Strategems* 2.3.23.
[59] *B.H.* 15.3. This curious collocation appears in all the manuscripts and was unjustly deleted by Nipperdey (followed by Way [1955]; retained by Diouron [2002]). Klotz (1927), 70 explains it well enough: "der Reiter kämpft als Fuaßsoldat, der Fußsoldat mit dem Reiter".

More important, however, was the perspective of the author. As a low-level officer in the Spanish campaign, he directed and personally participated in some of the deadly engagements known by military historians as “low-intensity conflict”. To this officer, however, these operations *were* the Spanish campaign. Munda was where Caesar gained another triumph, but it was in the outposts and trenches in unnamed tracts of Further Spain where the anonymous author and his comrades earned their *gloria.*

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