

## Chapter 10

# Conquering Gaul

Leaving a trail of destruction behind him, Caesar wins a reputation as a war hero.

After hearing about the fate of the Helvetii tribe in the summer of 58 B.C., many of Gaul's tribal leaders came to Caesar and pledged their allegiance. Those who remained independent became targets for Caesar's mighty legions.

Over the next five years, Caesar swept north and west through Gaul. He seized supplies and drafted troops from local communities. Tribes that chose to resist fell one by one under Caesar's onslaught.

Caesar fought with decisiveness, ingenuity, and ruthlessness. In 56 B.C., he built a fleet of oar-powered galleys to send against the rebellious seafaring Veneti tribe of northwest Gaul. He had no luck ramming the thick-hulled Gallic ships, so he used long poles tipped with sharp hooks to cut the ropes of the Veneti sails.

During the same year, he marched on the Germanic tribes of the northeast. To cross the Rhine River into Germanic territory, his men built what was then the world's longest bridge – and they did it in just ten days.

Both the Germans and the Veneti suffered mightily for their resistance. In the German lands, Caesar had his men burn all the farmland they could find, leaving thousands homeless and desperate for food. He reserved the harshest punishment for the Veneti. He ordered several hundred of their leaders beheaded and had thousands of people sold into slavery.

While Caesar went to great lengths to instill fear in his enemies, he inspired only loyalty in his men. He often led troops into battle himself. He sent his horse to the rear to ensure that he could not flee faster than his men. Caesar was strict and demanding but seemed to care deeply for his soldiers. He spoke with them as equals. He doubled their pay and made sure they had the best weapons and armor. According to the ancient historian Plutarch, soldiers with merely average skills “became invincible and ready to confront any danger once it was a question of fighting for Caesar's honor and glory.”

(Insert Photo)

Caption: Caesar's Legions in Battle

For his part, Caesar made sure that the glory he earned on the battlefield brought him power in Rome. In the spring of 56 B.C., he met with Crassus and Pompey in the northern Italian town of Luca to renew their alliance. Crassus and Pompey agreed to get themselves elected co-consuls and use their positions to extend Caesar's command in Gaul for another five years.

Pompey and Crassus returned to Rome with a band of thuggish soldiers who made their presence known on election day. The two men won their consulships amidst street battles brutal enough to leave Pompey spattered with another man's blood.

Assured of five more years in Gaul, Caesar gave his legions plenty to do. He campaigned once more against rebellious Germans. He led an invasion force across the English Channel to Britain. Though he was driven off by a force of tribesmen with horses and chariots, reports of the invasion thrilled the public back in Rome.

(Insert Photo)

Caption: In regards to the Battle of Bourges, the historian Plutarch claimed Caesar killed one million enemy warriors during his rampage through Gaul.

From *Julius Caesar: Dictator for Life*, by Denise Rinaldo. New York: Scholastic, 2010, pp. 79-83.