entered a district where there was deep sand underfoot, a level plain with no trees and no water, going on, so far as the eye could see, for ever.\textsuperscript{45}

On a tributary of the Euphrates near Carchae, now Harran in Turkey, scouts sighted a detachment of Parthian cavalry. They were not numerous, and carried away by the eagerness of his son, Crassus formed the legions into a hollow square, and marched rapidly forward. Suddenly, the whole plain was filled with a deep and terrifying roaring sound. For the Parthians, instead of having horns or trumpets to sound the attack, made use of hollow drums of stretched hide to which bronze bells are attached ... the sound produced is most eerie and terrifying ...\textsuperscript{46}

Then the main force appeared, ‘their helmets and breastplates blazing like fire, their Margianian steel glittering keen and bright, their horses armoured with plates of bronze and steel’.\textsuperscript{47} They surrounded the Romans and from all directions loosed upon them a hail of arrows unendingly supplied from a camel baggage train. Publius charged with infantry, archers and his 300 mounted Gauls. The Parthians wheeled and galloped away. Publius and his men followed, sure of victory, but having drawn the Romans away from the main army, the Parthians turned, now heavily re-enforced, and attacked. While the cataphracts stood by, the horse archers raised choking clouds of sand and rain their arrows upon the Romans, with terrible accuracy pinning hands to shields and feet to the ground. Most of the Romans were killed. The Parthians fixed Publius’ head on a spear and rode back to display it to Crassus and his men.

The Parthians withdrew during the night, and Crassus, abandoning his wounded, managed to reach the walled, Roman-held town of Carchae. At dawn the Parthians slaughtered those left behind. Attempting to reach the mountains, Crassus led his men out of Carchae by night, but betrayed by their guides, was again surrounded. Forced by his despairing men to negotiate, Crassus walked into a trap he fully expected. He was cut down, his head and hand later presented amid great applause to King Orodes at a banquet celebrating peace with King Artavasdes of Armenia.

In the campaign 20,000 had died and 10,000 were taken prisoner, many transported to the bleak lands near the distant Oxus River. A few thousand eventually reached Syria. Among them was Crassus’ quaestor, Gaius Longinus Cassius, who had deserted with 500 cavalry.

**QUESTIONS**

1. How was the relationship between Caesar and Pompey weakened?
2. Why was Crassus so eager to fight the Parthians?
3. What was the Parthians’ main strength, militarily?

**WHAT TO DO**

1. List the mistakes made by Crassus in his expedition against the Parthians. Discuss whether any were unavoidable.

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**Pompey and Caesar**

The personal tie between Pompey and Caesar had snapped when Julia died. Now the news of Crassus’ death threw the alliance off balance. Each man felt that he deserved to be the principal partner, and the deterrent of a third party was gone.

Portrait busts and coins of Pompey at about this time show a middle-aged man with a creased, worried-looking forehead, full cheeks and heavy neck, and a nose with a pronounced bulge at the tip. Characteristically, his hair is thick, rising in a wind-blown crest in front. The expression is aloof, somewhat disdainful and in some portrayals, vaguely bewildered. Plutarch says: ‘His military power gave him a great enough name; but he was equally respected for his natural good qualities and for his merciful disposition.’\textsuperscript{48}

From the Romans, particularly from his own senatorial class, Pompey wanted approval and admiration. His treatment of the Senate was courteous, his actions, although reflecting his ambition, were never extreme.

Portraits of Caesar are many, but among the most authentic is a face carved in profile on a fragment of amethyst, and a marble head probably copied from an original bronze made in his later years. In both the face is lean, the cheeks hollow and grooved, the eyes deep set, the hair combed forward. The historian Suetonius said that he was tall, with keen black eyes. Plutarch says:

> he was a slightly built man, had a soft and white skin, suffered from headaches and was subject to epileptic fits ... By long hard journeys, simple diet, sleeping night after night in the open, and rough living he fought off his illness and made his body strong ...\textsuperscript{49}

According to Suetonius, his epilepsy did not appear until later in life. ‘He was attacked twice by the falling sickness during his campaigns’,\textsuperscript{50} Suetonius adds.

The hair combed forward and his appreciation of the laurel wreath he was entitled to wear stemmed from worry over growing baldness. Caesar showed far less regard for the Senate than did Pompey and as he aged and his power grew, his impatience with the senators increased. He worked most skilfully through his popular appeal in the Assembly and with the people generally.

The break between the two men occurred gradually. In 53 and 52 B.C. Pompey lent Caesar one of his legions and was still looking after his interests in terms of legislation. Nevertheless, tension was increasing for Pompey. Corruption and disorder plunged the city into political chaos. In 53 B.C. no consuls were elected for the following year, which began without them. In 52 B.C. also Clodius was killed in the gang wars between himself and Milo. In the Forum
the corpse of Clodius was displayed on the rostra. Some of the tribunes and the friends of Clodius and a great crowd with them seized it and carried it to the senate-house ... There the more reckless ones collected the benches and chairs of the senators and made a funeral pyre for him, which they lit and from which the senate-house and many buildings in the neighbourhood caught fire and were consumed along with the corpse of Clodius.73

Milo then precipitated another riot, which ended in indiscriminate killing and pillaging.

In the emergency, the Senate appointed Pompey sole consul virtually with the powers of a dictator. Pompey brought in soldiers to give force to his requests, passed laws and obtained prosecutions, and with typical efficiency restored order. He took as co-consul his new father-in-law, Metellus Scipio, and secured an extension of his command in Spain for five years. He had the full appreciation of the Senate. Not only that: the hard core of extreme Optimates, never before his supporters, now saw in Pompey the means of getting rid of Caesar. When in 51 B.C. Caesar, having survived the revolt of Vercingetorix, asked that his command be continued to the end of 49, the consul M. Marcellus not only managed a rejection but suggested that a successor to Caesar be considered soon, since the Gallic war was over. Pompey remained silent. Privately, he must have felt keenly the enormous prestige won by Caesar through the conquest of Gaul. Caesar paid an indebted young noble, C. Scribonius Curio to veto the move to replace him, but shortly after, on news of a Parthian threat to Syria, the Senate voted that Pompey and Caesar should each send one legion. Pompey contributed one of those he had lent to Caesar, and Caesar, adding one of his own, was thus weaker by two legions. On arriving in Italy the troops were placed under Pompey, and with different reports from Syria, were kept in Italy.

The political jockeying continued. When the term of Caesar's command again came up, his agent Curio insisted that Pompey should surrender his legions at the same time and both men disarm. To senators dreading another civil war this seemed a most sensible solution, and on 1 December the measure was carried 370 to 22. Divesting Pompey of his army was not, however, part of the plan of the extreme Optimates, the 22 men who had voted against disarmament. That army was needed to crush Julius Caesar. They therefore asked Pompey to save the republic by taking command of all forces in Italy.

Pompey hesitated, then agreed. Caesar in Ravenna sent for his legions in Gaul, but at the same time began several attempts to reach a compromise through Marcus Antonius, that is, Mark Antony, the tribune now acting on his behalf. Repeatedly he was repulsed by the Optimates. Cicero, just back from a term as governor of Cilicia, tried unsuccessfully to negotiate. The danger continued to mount. On 7 January the Senate warned Antony and his fellow tribune to leave and declared a state of emergency, which officially put the safety of the republic in the hands of the consuls and Pompey.

To Caesar this meant a choice: to end all his political hopes and face likely prosecution or to try to reverse the situation by using force. Ancient historians say he debated the matter with himself, but perhaps for a man like Caesar there was actually only one choice. He sent a small detachment across the frontier of his province of Cisalpine Gaul with Italy to take the nearby town of Ariminum, and then went himself to the border, marked by the little stream of the Rubicon. Saying that the die was cast, he crossed. This act was in effect a declaration of war against the republic. The Civil War had begun.

Who was to blame for the Civil War? Caesar's act officially opened hostilities. Yet there is evidence that neither Pompey nor Caesar really wanted the war. Pompey had hesitated almost to the end. Caesar had repeatedly sought compromise. The 22 hard-line Optimates had forced upon him a choice between political suicide — and perhaps worse — and defending himself. These Optimates, claiming to represent constitutional government in the face of treachery, were in fact darkly stained by their own corruption and violations of the law. There was greed, and overwhelming desire for personal prestige and power on all sides. There were no ideals, no nobility in the contest.

**Questions**

1. What sort of 'political chaos' was taking place in Rome?
2. What did the Senate ask of Pompey?
3. What evidence is there for assuming that neither Caesar nor Pompey really wanted war?
4. Caesar had to make a choice. What choice was this?
ROME 3 The Breakdown of the Roman Republic

WHAT TO DO

1 Explain the meaning of ‘the die is cast’. This expression is often used today. Under what circumstances would you use it?
2 Consider what you know of Pompey and Caesar. Decide whom you think was the better man and be prepared to explain and support your choice. Consider whether being the ‘better man’ meant also being best for Rome at this time.

Civil War on Three Continents

The military balance between Caesar and Pompey was, on the face of it, much in Pompey’s favour. Caesar’s legions were still in Gaul. He had about 5,000 men under immediate command as well as his north Italian province of Cisalpine Gaul and the rest of Gaul far away. Pompey was backed by the Senate, had all the rest of Italy, Spain, provinces in the East, and the fleet. He had several legions in his provinces and two in Italy. These two, however, had fought in Gaul with Caesar, and their loyalty was suspect. New legions had to be raised and trained. Nor were the senators always helpful:

no one would allow Pompey to use his own judgement and everyone rushed to him with whatever idea, proceeding from fear, distress, or perplexity, happened to be at the moment ...

Yet even in this terrible situation Pompey himself was a man to be envied, so great was the general affection in which he was held. Many found fault with his generalship, but no one hated the general.73

As so often before, Caesar depended on surprise and rapid movement. Although it was winter, he led his little army swiftly down the east coast. This threw Rome into wild confusion, refugees from the countryside pouring in, city residents streaming out. The consuls, Senate and Pompey departed. Pompey to collect forces in the south. Caesar entered Rome and behaving with care, calmed the population and marched south. L. Domitius Ahenobarbus, who had been appointed by the Senate to replace Caesar in Cisalpine Gaul, attempted to intercept Caesar at Corinium in central Italy. He found himself surrounded and had to surrender with three legions, a loss which forced Pompey to abandon Italy. He made for Brundisium and had the townspeople dig trenches and plant sharpened stakes outside the city, while in a calm and orderly manner he embarked his men for Dyrrhachium in Greece across the Adriatic Sea. Caesar arrived too late and was unable to follow for lack of ships. Nevertheless, he had possession of Italy, taken in 69 days without bloodshed. He had also made three more attempts to negotiate with Pompey, but without result. Now he secured Sicily and Sardinia and returned to Rome. There were no revenge killings and the soldiers maintained discipline. Caesar took what control was possible of the remnants of government and broke into the state treasury to help himself to needed money.

Then he marched for Spain, Pompey’s provinces, where two very competent deputy governors were entrenched with five legions. In a brilliant campaign lasting three months, Caesar mastered Spain. His treatment of the defeated foe was generous. He pardoned the commanders, demobilised the troops and gave Roman citizenship to the city of Gades. On the way back to Italy, he received the submission of the Greek city of Massilia, which earlier had declared for Pompey.

In his absence from Rome Caesar had been appointed dictator. However, on arrival he held elections, secured for himself a consulship and resigned as dictator.

Pompey consolidated his forces in Greece with headquarters at Thessaloniki in Macedonia. The Parthians promising to stay neutral, he ordered his eastern units to Greece, so he had a total of 11 legions, a strong force of cavalry and a substantial fleet. Dyrrhachium was garrisoned as a base for retaking Italy.

Caesar again acted with speed. Early in 48 B.C., despite winter storms, he transported his army across to Greece in such few ships that the move had to be made in two dangerous crossings. Pompey joined his troops at Dyrrhachium and the opposing armies settled down behind fortified lines, Pompey with his back to the sea, which gave him access to ship-born supplies, Caesar encircling him. His provisions running low, Caesar had to break away and head for the grain fields of Thessaly. Pompey followed, his decisions frequently hampered by the contradictory views of his followers, who as men of authority had to be heard.

The armies came together at Pharsalus, Pompey’s senatorial army greatly outnumbering Caesar’s. Later Roman historians commented on the tragedy of countrymen preparing to fight each other: ‘opposed armies of the same kin, ranks of brothers, identical standards ...’74 as Plutarch said; ‘men of the same city, of the same tribe, blood relations ...’75 wrote Appian. The two commanders seemed to hesitate. Then Pompey, seeing his non-Italian allies getting restless, gave the signal for attack, which was echoed from Caesar’s side.

Pompey’s army was routed — some 6,000 died and 24,000 were captured. Pompey walked off the field and sat stunned and speechless in his tent. As victorious troops began to enter the camp, he made his escape. Caesar, seeing the Optimate corpses, is reported to have said, ‘They made this happen ...’76

Pompey was joined at Mytilene by his wife Cornelia, and on the advice of his friends sought refuge in Egypt, where a boy, Ptolemy XIII, was king although a small court clique were the effective rulers. Pompey’s fate was decided at a meeting of these men. A small boat was sent to meet his ship, waiting at anchor, and Pompey was invited to land. He was rowed ashore in silence, and as he rose to step out of the boat, he was stabbed. An ex-slave and an old soldier are said to have rescued and burned the body in a pyre on the beach. When Caesar, following, arrived in Egypt, he was presented with Pompey’s head:

he turned away with loathing, as from an assassin, and when he received Pompey’s signet ring ... he burst into tears.76

He put to death two of the couriers responsible. A third escaped, but years later was caught and tortured to death.

Pompey, the gifted soldier and administrator, had in a sense
been the victim of a political world in which he was never quite at home. Innately moderate, seeking respect, appreciation and glory above power, he had to deal with men of lesser quality and was put at their service by his own sense of right. As a general and leader of men, he probably lacked Caesar’s spark of genius and charisma. Not a revolutionary, he sought moderate and gradual solutions, which, unfortunately, were not enough for the desperate problems of the disintegrating republic.

In Egypt Caesar stepped into political turmoil. Eleven years before, King Ptolemy XII Auletes had promised 6,000 talents for Roman recognition of his kingship, contested in a family feud. He died eight years later, never having paid the bribe, which Caesar now intended to collect. Ptolemy’s death had also left growing rivalry between his son Ptolemy XIII and his daughter Cleopatra. Cleopatra had been expelled from Egypt, and Ptolemy’s ministers had murdered Pompey in a bid for Caesar’s favour. Arriving three days later with just 4,000 men, Caesar antagonised the courtiers and in the northern winter of 48–47 B.C. was besieged in the palace at Alexandria, where he was joined by Cleopatra, supposedly smuggled in, rolled up in a carpet. A clever, ambitious, energetic girl of 21, she wanted to present her claims to the powerful Roman. A Ptolemy, she was Macedonian, not Egyptian, lively and charming rather than beautiful, to judge by her coin portraits. Caesar was captivated, and she became his mistress. Fighting, however, continued in the streets and harbour area of Alexandria. At one point Caesar, escaping from Pharos, where the lighthouse stood, had to swim for his life.

In the spring, a relieving army arrived from Syria. Caesar marched against young Ptolemy in the Delta, and the young king died, possibly drowning as he fled. Already a prisoner was Arsinoe, the king’s youngest sister, who had participated in the fight against Caesar. The Roman then established Cleopatra and her youngest brother, Ptolemy XIV, about 12 years old, as co-rulers. Cleopatra later gave birth to a son, whom she claimed to be Caesar’s, named Caesarion. In March 44 B.C. she would be visiting Caesar in Rome, installed in his villa across the Tiber, a gold statue of herself set up in the Temple of Venus, the ancestress of the Julians.

Caesar now left for Asia Minor to fight Pharmaces, a son of Mithridates and king in Crimea in southern Ukraine, who had overrun a large part of what is now Turkey and defeated a Roman army. Caesar vanquished Pharmaces in a lightning
campaign culminating in a battle at Zela in Pontus. In a letter to a friend in Rome, Caesar summarised the campaign in three words, *Veni, vidi, vici* — ‘I came, I saw, I conquered.’

Caesar could now return to Italy, where Rome was in a state of turbulent disorder — riots, political feuding, killings, even a march on the city by dissatisfied veterans of Caesar’s army.

Caesar had much to do. First he spoke to his veterans and shamed them into going home. Consuls were then elected, one of them Caesar, for 46 B.C. Steps were taken to ease the economy, supporters were rewarded, many Pompeians pardoned. Among the latter was Cicero, who had followed Pompey to Greece. Caesar embraced and spoke privately to him, and Cicero retired from public life to write and discuss philosophy.

In Africa, however, hostile Pompeians were gathering an army. Together with King Juba I of Numidia, they had assembled 14 legions and some 15,000 cavalry. The situation was critical, and Caesar risked taking his army across the Mediterranean in winter.

The Pompeians were established near the city of Thapsus, on the coast of present Tunisia, where Caesar swooped upon them and in less than a day, according to Plutarch, killed some 30,000 soldiers and captured three camps with only small loss to himself. One account says that Caesar himself did not participate in the battle. Taken by an attack of his illness, he was carried to a nearby tower where he rested during the fight.

Marcus Porcius Cato the Younger — unrelenting Optimatur—honest man in a corrupt age, champion of the republic his leadership had largely destroyed — committed suicide.

Caesar returned to Rome, and was appointed dictator for the third time, now for 10 years. He celebrated his conquests over Gaul, Egypt, Pontus and Africa in a triumph of unequalled splendour. Cleopatra’s sister Arsinoe walked in that triumph, as did the Gaul, Vercingetorix.

The Pompeians were not finished. In Spain, the sons of Pompey had raised a formidable force of 15 legions, refugees from Africa as well as Spanish recruits, and Caesar confronted them next. The decisive battle took place at Munda in the south between Malaga and Sevilla. It was a hard struggle, with Caesar at considerable risk before achieving the final victory. Pompeian commanders and soldiers were massacred. Of the leaders, only young Sextus Pompey escaped. Caesar occupied cities, punished Pompeian districts severely and returned to Rome. He was elected consul for the fifth time in 44 B.C. and probably in February of that year was made Dictator for Life.

**WHAT TO DO**

1. Under the headings ‘Caesar’ and ‘Pompey’, list the military advantages each man had at the outbreak of the Civil War.
2. Roman historians regarded the Battle of Pharsalus as a very sad event. Explain why. Add any similar information you have about other civil wars, past or present.
3. Explain Caesar’s comment, ‘They made this happen …’ You may wish to reread the last paragraph of ‘Pompey and Caesar’.
4. On reaching Egypt, Pompey’s wife Cornelia watched from their ship as her husband was taken ashore. Describe what she saw.
5. Explain the circumstances of Caesar’s ‘Veni, vidi, vici’.
6. Explain where and how the Civil War was finally ended.

**Caesar’s Army**

The army with which Caesar had won his battles had basically the same organisation and equipment brought in by Marius a little over 50 years before. A legion consisted of 10 cohorts, which in Marius’ time totalled about 5,000 men. Caesar’s legions, however, usually numbered no more than 3,500 men.

Normally the army fought in three unbroken lines. Each legion usually had four cohorts in its part of the front line and three cohorts each in the second and third lines. On some occasions the army formed up in just two lines, probably depending on the topography of the battlefield. In dangerous country the legion sometimes marched in four parallel lines, which, if attacked, could promptly turn to face either side and thus be immediately in battleline formation.

Some evidence exists for Roman arms and armour of Caesar’s time. French excavators unearthed assorted weapons at the site of the great siege of Alesia. As well, sculpture on the Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus depicts four legionaries in mail shirts and helmets with long horsehair crests, carrying large, oval shields. An officer wears a similar helmet and a short, muscled cuirass and holds a spear and a round shield. Caesar’s own writings contain only minor references. A legionary’s equipment would have been too familiar to Roman readers to be worth describing. In general, the men’s weapons were much the same as those of Marius’ troops. The chief weapon was the *pilum* or javelin, weighted for maximum penetration. Caesar mentions such javelins pinning together what were apparently overlapping Celtic shields, sturdily made of wood and leather with a combined thickness of 13 mm—25 mm. The javelin was also made to bend on impact, the shank of the javelin being soft, untempered iron. Thus it could not be thrown back. In addition, the soldier carried a short sword and perhaps a dagger. The troops were apparently less burdened than before, as much of their equipment was carried by mules spaced between the units of marching men.

The Roman legionary was a foot soldier. Cavalry was customarily drawn from foreign allies. Caesar used cavalry, mainly Spanish and Gallic, extensively, both to protect the flanks of his often outnumbered infantry against encirclement, and to pursue and crush a fleeing foe. He also employed Balearic island slingers and Cretan and Numidian archers.

Caesar frequently used tactical fortifications, that is, fortifications built rapidly as part of a battle plan. Such battlefield defences were a notable part of first century B.C. Roman fighting. For Caesar they were another means of protecting his flanks against a more numerous foe, which he often faced in his Gallic campaigns. For instance, in a battle against a Belgic confederation of tribes he constructed earthworks at either end of his lines. He could manage this very efficiently due to the amazing skill and speed of his engineers.