Caesar's campaigns in Gaul 58–50

In 58 Caesar took command of Cisalpine Gaul and Illyricum with three legions for a period of five years. To this command was later added Transalpine Gaul (Gallia Narbonensis) with an additional legion. This command imparted several advantages.

In Cisalpine Gaul:
- The Po valley was a good recruiting ground for troops.
- It would be a future source of strength, since Caesar had won clients in 65 there by proposing full Roman citizenship.

- Its proximity to Rome would allow Caesar keep an eye on what was going on in the capital.

In Transalpine Gaul (Narbonese Gaul):
- Disturbances among the Gauls outside the Roman province would give Caesar opportunities to win military glory for himself and to extend Rome's influence.
- There was the possibility of acquiring great wealth, which Caesar needed for his future career.
- The length of the command (five years, later extended for a further five) assured him of immunity for a long time from attempts to prosecute him for the unconstitutional acts committed during his consulship.

The map at left illustrates the course of Caesar's campaigns in Gaul.

58–56

The defeat of the Helvetii and Suebi

The Helvetii from northern Switzerland were seeking new homes in Gaul; 400,000 intended migrating westwards by passing through the northern corner of the Roman province. When Caesar prevented this they entered at the Jura Mountains, plundering the countryside of the Aedui and Sequani. The Aedui were allies of Rome, even though their territory was outside the Roman province. Caesar provoked a war, followed and defeated the Helvetii at Bibrae, and forced them to return to their homeland.

The Suebi, Germans from across the Rhine, had been used by the Sequani in a conflict with the Aedui but had refused to leave, and in 59 the Romans had recognised the Suebi chieftain, Arioistus, as a Friend of the Roman People. However, he had begun to expand at the expense of the Aedui and the Sequani. When negotiations between Caesar and Arioistus broke down, Caesar saw another opportunity for a spectacular campaign. He drove the Germans beyond the Rhine.

Caesar returned to Cisalpine Gaul for the winter in order to administer his province, but left troops stationed in the area of the Sequani as he believed they could be a future problem. He was also concerned that if he withdrew his troops to Narbonese Gaul, the Germans might cross the Rhine again.

Sujegation of the Belgae

The Belgian Gauls comprised a large group of tribes north of the Seine and the Marne rivers. An armed force was preparing an attempt to expel the Romans. Caesar took the offensive on the pretext of protecting the southernmost Belgian tribe, the Remi, who had submitted to the Romans earlier. Most of the tribes gave way as he approached, and after defeating
the strongest tribe, the Nervii, the peoples of Normandy and Brittany yielded to Caesar's legates.

Caesar needed more time to complete his work in Gaul, but events in Rome were causing a rift between Pompey and Crassus, and the optimates were attempting to cause a break between Caesar and Pompey. In 56 the three triumvirs met just inside Cisalpine Gaul at Luca (see p. 345) to renew their coalition, and in the following year Caesar's command in Gaul was extended for a further five years.

Revolt of the Veneti
In the winter of 56 the Veneti revolted and attacked the Roman garrisons. Caesar built a fleet at the mouth of the Loire River and defeated the rebellious Veneti. In 56 the Aquitani were defeated by Publius Crassus (the son of Caesar's political partner).

Results and importance of the period 58–56
- Caesar's reputation was enhanced.
- The Romans were now practically the masters of all Gaul and Caesar had become the champion and protector of the Gallic people.

In the winter of 55 two German tribes crossed the Rhine into Gaul. Caesar arrested the German peace envoys and exterminated the two tribes, including the women and children. He then carried out a spectacular bridging of the Rhine River. His engineers built a bridge 280 metres long by 12 metres wide, crossed the river in order to indicate the strength and power of Rome, then returned and destroyed the bridge.

The lively trade between Britain and Gaul may have given Caesar an exaggerated idea of Britain's potentialities—prospects for booty or tribute. In 55 he only carried out reconnaissance, but in 54 he crossed the channel again, defeated King Cassivellaunus (the commander-in-chief of the Britons) and crossed the Thames River, taking the capital of the king. Caesar received the submission of the tribes in the southeast and may have been given hostages and promises of tribute; he then returned to Gaul.

Results and importance of the period 55–54
- Caesar's harsh treatment of the Germans compared with his leniency towards the Gauls was denounced in the senate by Cato, but nothing came of this as Caesar could argue that it was necessary to make an example of the invaders. In fact, the Germans did not disturb Gaul again.
- His spectacular excursion into unexplored territory excited the Romans and enhanced his reputation.
- His crossing to Britain was only an exploit and had no permanent results, but it created great interest in Rome and opened the way for future trade. It was a hundred years before Britain became Roman.

Caesar suffered a major setback when an independent Belgic tribe, the Eburones, organised a surprise attack on the Roman garrison at Aduatuca, annihilating one and a half legions. Caesar's rapid action crushed this revolt, but discontent among the Gauls spread.

Caesar was also concerned with events in Rome, since it appeared that Pompey was being placed in a situation where he had to make a choice between the optimates and Caesar.
Events in Rome may have encouraged the discontented Gauls to get rid of the Romans, since it was obvious that the Romans were intent on permanent annexation of Gaul.

A serious uprising occurred in 52 under the leadership of a young noble of the Arvernii tribe, Vercingetorix. He had fought with Caesar as a cavalry officer, but now used his organizing talents to unite the Gauls. The revolt spread and Caesar was forced to divide his forces. The situation became extremely critical for Caesar, who used a cavalry of Germans from across the Rhine. Even the Aedui (long-time allies of Rome) joined the revolt, and at one point the capital of the Narbonese province was threatened.

After a series of Roman victories, Vercingetorix and his troops were besieged in a fortress on the plateau of Alesia and were eventually starved into submission.

The Gauls were by no means pacified, and Caesar spent 51–50 subduing remnants of the rebels and organizing the government of the province.

In his Gallic commentaries, Caesar describes Vercingetorix thus:

`Vercingetorix, a very powerful young Arvernian, whose father, Celtillus, had held sway over all Gaul, ... had no difficulty in excluding their (his father’s retainers) passions, and the news of what was afoot soon brought others out in arms ... He was proclaimed king by his adherents, and sent embassies in every direction adjuring the tribes to keep faiths ... Himself a man of boundless energy, he terrorised waiverers with the rigours of an iron discipline. Serious cases of disaffection were punished by torture and death at the stake; or, even for a minor fault he would cut off a man’s ears or gouge out one of his eyes and send him home to serve as a warning to others of the severe chastisement meted out to offenders.` (Conquest of Gaul, VII: 4)

A description of the siege works at Alesia, where Vercingetorix was blockaded:

`He dug a trench twenty feet wide, which, having perpendicular sides, was as broad at the bottom as at the top. The other works were kept some six hundred and fifty yards behind this trench, to protect them from surprise attacks ... At this distance, therefore, Caesar dug two branches of equal depth, each fifteen feet wide, and filled the inner one with water diverted from the streams. Behind the trench a parapeted rampart twelve feet high was erected, strengthened by a battlemented breastwork, with large forked branches projecting where it joined the rampart ... Towers were placed at intervals of a hundred and thirty yards along the entire circuit of fortifications ... The trunks or very stout boughs were cut and their tops stripped of bark and sharpened; they were then fixed in long trenches dug five feet deep, with their lower ends made fast to one another so as to prevent their being pulled up and the branches projecting. There were five rows in each trench, touching one another and interlaced and anyone who went among them was likely to impale himself on the sharp points ... In front of them, arranged in diagonal rows, forming quincunxes, were pits three feet deep, tapering gradually towards the bottom, in which were embedded smooth logs as thick as a man’s thigh ... With the ends sharpened and charred, and projecting only three inches above the ground. To keep the legs firmly in position, earth was thrown into the pits and trodden down to a depth of one foot, the rest of the cavity being filled with twigs and brushwood to hide the trap. These were planted in groups, each containing eight rows three feet apart ... In front of these again were blocks of wood a foot long with iron hooks fixed in them ... these were raised slyly into the ground and strewn thickly everywhere. When these defences were completed, Caesar constructed a similar line of fortifications facing outwards instead of inwards.` (Conquest of Gaul, VII: 72–4)

Results and importance of the period 54–51

- The Gallic War, which had lasted for more than eight years, was over:
  - in thirty pitched battles Caesar is believed to have captured a million men, killed more than a million (1,192,000) and captured more than 800 towns. The enormous amount of plunder taken during eight years left the Gauls financially exhausted.
  - Caesar now adopted a conciliatory policy, after years of what he considered necessary brutality. He realised that he might need a supportive Gaul in any future conflict with the optimates.
  - The conquered territory was called Gallia Comata (Long-Haired Gaul) and was organised with the minimum of supervision from the Roman governor of Narbonese Gaul. The tribes retained their own organisation and collected the moderate tribute imposed.
The importance of the conquest of Gaul

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For Caesar</th>
<th>For the Romans</th>
<th>For the Gauls</th>
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<td>He built up a great military reputation to equal that of Pompey and had the support of a devoted army.</td>
<td>It increased Rome's strength by adding to it an area twice the size of Italy, with a greater population than Spain and offering vast resources.</td>
<td>It promised future peace and protection from the Germans.</td>
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<td>It provided him with the wealth needed to buy political supporters in Rome.</td>
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<td>It opened the land of the Gauls to Roman civilisation.</td>
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<td>He had the support of Gaul during the subsequent civil war.</td>
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The Roman successes in Gaul were partly due to
1 the lack of unity, discipline and determination among the Gauls;
2 the German cavalry employed by Caesar during the great revolt led by Vercingetorix;
3 Caesar's genius in military tactics and strategy, swift action and superb leadership; and
4 the leniency shown by Caesar in his organisation of Gaul.

Events leading to civil war between Pompey and Caesar, 52–49

Anarchy in Rome: Clodius and Milo

The lawlessness of 53 (bribery and violence), which had again prevented the election of consuls, intensified in the following year and it was obvious to Pompey that he could exploit the situation for his own benefit.

Annius Milo, who had been useful to Pompey in the past, was one of the candidates for the consulship; Clodius was standing for the praetorship. The long-standing enmity between these two men erupted in a clash between them (and their supporters) on the Appian Way in January 52. Clodius was wounded and carried to a tavern where, on the orders of Milo, he was killed. His body was taken to Rome and placed in the Curia (Senate House) to be cremated, but the blaze of the funeral pyre burnt out of control and the Senate House was destroyed. Clodius' wife stirred up the mob, and the houses of Milo and the interex, Lepidus, were raided. In this critical situation the senate issued the senatus consultum ultimum, giving Pompey the authority to raise troops and restore order since he was the only one with imperium, there being no consuls.

For another month a series of interreges failed to hold any elections, and demands increased for Pompey to be appointed as dictator to restore order. To prevent this happening, the optimates Calpurnius Bibulus and Cato proposed a compromise whereby Pompey was to be appointed as consul without a colleague. The example of Sulla was too fresh in their memories even to contemplate a dictatorship, whereas a sole consul would still be subject to certain restrictions, such as the tribunician veto. It was also expected that once Pompey had dealt with the emergency he would arrange for the election of a colleague, making the return to normal government easier.

Pompey's sole-consulship, 52

This sole-consulship was another in the series of extraordinary positions held by Pompey during his career. Despite the fact that a ten-year interval was normally required between consulships, it was only three years since his previous one. The most exceptional feature of this appointment, however, was that it was proposed by the conservatives and yet was a most unconstitutional position.

Once installed in this irregular office, Pompey proceeded to pass three pieces of legislation, two of which were important for his future relations with Caesar:

- a law against public violence
- a law stipulating a five-year interval between urban magistracies and provincial commands
- a law demanding that candidates must appear in person at elections

It was under the first of these, designed to control public violence, that Milo was prosecuted. Milo's trial caused considerable disturbances in Rome, and Pompey was forced to bring troops into the Forum to maintain order. It has also been suggested that Pompey may now have seen Milo as a potential rival and wanted his conviction, and that the troops in the Forum were to make sure of this. Despite Cicero's defence, Milo was condemned for Clodius' death and sent into exile.

The other two laws were to have an effect on Caesar's position although they were not deliberately devised by Pompey to undermine him.

Caesar hoped to extend his command in Gaul until 49, when he could stand in absentia for the consulship of the following year. In this way he

| Optimates propose Pompey as sole consul |
| Exceptional nature of command |
| Pompey's legislation in 52 |
| Caesar's plans for the future |