

CHAPTER
6

Section 2

PRIMARY SOURCE *from The Gallic War*
by Julius Caesar

Julius Caesar's account of his military campaigns is a valuable historical record left by a great Roman general. As you read Caesar's account of the second Roman invasion of Britain during his campaign to conquer what is now France, notice that he refers to himself in the third person.

14. Of all the Britons the most civilized are those in Kent, all of which is along the coast. Their habits do not differ much from the Gauls'. The inland people do not sow grain but live on milk and meat and wear skins. All Britons stain themselves with woad, which makes them blue and more terrifying to confront in battle. Their hair they wear long, but they shave all the rest of their bodies except the head and upper lip. . . .

15. The enemy horse and chariots engaged our cavalry briskly on the march, but our men everywhere had the upper hand and drove them into the forests and hills. But when they had killed a number they pursued too eagerly and lost some of their own. But after an interval they suddenly dashed from the forest to fall upon our unsuspecting men, who were busy entrenching their camp, and delivered a sharp attack upon the pickets posted in front of the camp. Caesar supported them with two cohorts, each the chief of its legion. These took position with only a small space between them, but while our men were confounded by their novel mode of fighting, they boldly broke through their midst and then retired without loss. . . .

16. This engagement, fought in front of the camp in full view of everyone, made it plain that our men were not a fit match for such adversaries. They could not pursue an advantage because of their heavy armor; . . . nor could our cavalry engage except at great peril, for the Britons would purposely retreat, and when they had drawn our cavalry a little distance from the legionaries, leap down from their chariots and exploit the advantage of fighting on foot. In a cavalry engagement this tactic involved equal danger whether we pursued or retreated. Another disadvantage was that they never fought in a mass but widely scattered. . . .

17. On the next day the enemy took position at a distance in the hills; they showed themselves only in small groups, and attacked our cavalry with less

energy than the day before. At noon, when Caesar had sent three legions and all the cavalry under command of Gaius Trebonius to forage, they suddenly swooped down on the foragers from all directions, even up to the legions and standards. Our men counterattacked vigorously, beat them back, and pressed their pursuit, seeing the legions close behind to support them. They drove the enemy headlong and killed a large number, giving them no chance to rally and make a stand. . . .

18. Apprised now of their plan, Caesar marched his army to the territory of Cassivellaunus towards the Thames, a river which can be forded on foot at only one point, and that with difficulty. Upon his arrival there he observed a large enemy force drawn up on the far bank. The bank was protected by sharp stakes fixed in the ground, and there were similar stakes in the river bed, covered by the water. This Caesar had learned from prisoners and deserters. He sent his cavalry forward and ordered the legions to follow at their heels. Though only their heads were above water, they moved with such speed and dash that the enemy could not sustain the assault of legions and cavalry, abandoned the bank, and took to flight.

from Julius Caesar, The Gallic War and Other Writings, Moses Hadas trans. (New York: The Modern Library, 1957), 102–104.

Discussion Questions

Determining Main Ideas

1. According to Caesar, what military advantages and disadvantages did the Britons have?
2. What military advantages and disadvantages did the Romans have?
3. **Forming and Supporting Opinions** Do you think this excerpt supports the notion that Caesar was a genius at military strategy? Explain your answer.