

Perish 546

Chapter 546: Confrontation Across the Sea

Caesar also took a special fund that had been preserved for centuries to prevent a repeat of the tragedy when the Gauls sacked Rome in 390 BC.

He eloquently declared that Rome no longer needed this special fund because he had permanently solved the threat of the Gauls.

After resolving the funding issue, Caesar hurriedly led his army to Spain, leaving Mark Antony in charge of Italy.

Although he knew that Mark Antony was not an ideal choice for controlling Rome, there was no politically capable person he trusted by his side. However, since the whole of Italy was under his control, those nobles and financial oligarchs dissatisfied with him dared not act rashly for the time being. Therefore, having the People's Guardian Antony, his loyal dog, keep watch over Rome was enough.

Vercingetorix, upon learning that Caesar was leading a large army northward heading straight for Gaul, became suddenly tense, thinking his secrets had been exposed.

But soon he got the news: Caesar was heading to deal with Pompey's army in Spain this time.

The messenger delivering this news to Vercingetorix was a subordinate of Onomabatis, the Commerce Officer of the Nix Kingdom. In recent years, Onomabatis hadn't just been spending money in Italy buying Gaul slaves but had also planted spies in many significant towns in Italy, and even extended his secret bases as close to Rome as the Port of Ostia, thereby obtaining intelligence for the kingdom.

Vercingetorix eased his mind, but soon he got nervous again.

Caesar had left the Western Fa Province and reached Massilia.

Massilia was a Greek colonial city and had been an ally of Rome for a long time. During his tenure as Governor of Gaul, Caesar showed considerable respect and kindness to this city-state.

But Massilia had close ties with Pompey, shutting its gates tightly and denying Caesar entry.

The people of Massilia also declared to Caesar that they did not understand the complexities of Roman politics and thus decided to remain neutral.

Yet, in reality, they allowed Domitius's army to enter the port of Massilia by ship.

Alright then, the recently released Amityus brazenly stood against Caesar, and the people of Massilia immediately invited him to command the city defense, preparing themselves for defense.

Caesar was furious at the deceit of the people of Massilia, and considering Massilia as an important port, capturing it could provide strong logistical support to the army fighting in Spain.

However, the walls of Massinia were tall and thick, and it was well-manned, making it difficult to capture in a short time, and time was crucial for Caesar.

Thus, Caesar left a small force under the command of Legion Commander Trebonius to besiege Massilia while he led the main force around the city, heading straight for Spain.

At the same time, he ordered that all tribes in Southern Gaul must dispatch troops to participate in the siege of Massilia and follow the unified command of Trebonius. In the order, he particularly emphasized that the leader of the Aveli Tribe, Vercingetorix, must personally lead the team.

Clearly, Caesar was not entirely assured of Vercingetorix and wanted to test his loyalty.

Having endured so long, Vercingetorix did not wish to let everything fail as dawn was about to break. He not only led his troops to Massilia as quickly as possible but also followed Trebonius's commands to the letter, causing this Commander to speak highly of Vercingetorix in letters to Caesar.

Caesar arrived in Spain, meeting up with the vanguard troops controlling the Pyrenees Pass. By this time, he had six legions and some auxiliary troops under his command, totaling less than 50,000 men.

Even though Pompey's army had the numerical advantage, they were locals.

However, the army of Pompey in Spain was commanded by three legion commanders separately. One named Marcus Trentius Varro, a widely respected scholar with many writings (Note: He authored "On Agriculture," published domestically) but not skilled in warfare. The army was mainly commanded jointly by Petreius and Alfrenius. Alfrenius excelled in dance, his military performance mediocre, while Petreius was an experienced veteran, yet due to his low background, he had never independently commanded a large force.

How could these three underlings of Pompey be a match for Caesar? He defeated them completely in just two months, and the remnant troops surrendered to him, bringing the whole of Spain under Caesar's control.

Upon hearing this news, Massilia also abandoned resistance. Domitius, unwilling to surrender to Caesar, fled by ship.

Meanwhile, Petreius and Avolanus were released thanks to Caesar's clemency, but their hatred for Caesar did not diminish.

Although Caesar won the war in Spain, he did not feel relieved because his formidable adversary, Pompey, was recruiting heavily in Greece, with his military strength growing day by day.

Therefore, Caesar left Quintus Cassius Longinus in Spain to help him control this newly conquered province.

Like Antony, Longinus was a People's Guardian, having pledged allegiance to Caesar early on. When serving as Financial Officer, he had served in Spain and was relatively familiar with the situation in Spain.

However, Caesar was rather helpless in suddenly promoting a middle-ranking Roman official to an important position like Provincial Governor because he had no better candidate.

On the way back to Italy, he received terrible news: Little Curio was killed in battle!

This noble youth, who had been a fervent advocate for Caesar in Rome, was ordered to lead troops to Sicily. He easily defeated the unmotivated Cato, gaining control over the whole of Sicily. Then he led his army to North Africa loyal to Pompey, defeating Pompey's army first and then, due to underestimation, was ambushed by the King of Nubia, leading to the near-total annihilation of his forces, and he himself died in battle.

Additionally, the army stationed in Illyria Province under the command of Antony's brother Lucius, which Caesar had appointed, was attacked by Pompey's forces and forced to surrender due to being vastly outnumbered.

These revelations made Caesar determined to engage in a decisive battle with Pompey as quickly as possible. Only by securing victory could he stabilize the entire situation.

Thus, he hurriedly met with the commanders of the Gaul tribes participating in the siege of Massilia, thanked them for their assistance, generously rewarded them with substantial gifts, and allowed them to return home.

Vercingetorix finally breathed a sigh of relief but outwardly appeared full of gratitude.

Upon arriving in Greece, Pompey mobilized human and material resources in the eastern Mediterranean using his connections in the region, providing his soldiers with pay, provisions, and equipment, and recruited allies and auxiliary troops to strengthen his military. In just over half a year, he had nine legions and some newly recruited forces from Greece and Asia, even acquiring a massive cavalry.

His father-in-law, Metellus, who had already arrived in the Syria Province, was even preparing to bring over two legions stationed in the province to aid him.

Pushed by failure to persuade by letters, Pompey had to engage in a series of diplomatic efforts to ensure the Parthians would not threaten the Syria Province with military action.

Pompey invested a lot of time in training this newly assembled army, even personally drilling with the soldiers. Although he hadn't fought in a battle for thirteen years, everyone admired his boundless energy, and the army gradually took shape under his strict guidance.

During Caesar's expedition to Spain, some Senators left in Rome decided to end their neutrality and joined Pompey's forces.

This included Cicero, who was unwilling to remain idle any longer, and yet did not want to participate in the Senate activities controlled by Caesar. Coupled with his deep-seated affection for Pompey, he eventually decided to flee to Greece.

Upon returning to Italy, Caesar first went to Rome to participate in the election for the next year's Governor.

According to Roman political tradition, the current Governor was responsible for presiding over the elections. However, both Governors had gone to Greece, so Caesar had Legal Officer Libidus appoint him as Dictator to preside over the election, as there was precedent for this.

Caesar naturally succeeded in being elected as the Governor for the next year.

Simultaneously, he utilized his powers as Dictator to enact a series of laws, such as recalling those exiled by Pompey's special court two years prior, except for Milo. He also restored full political rights to the descendants of Sulla's persecuted enemies. Furthermore, he reduced the high debts of indebted citizens.

This series of measures won him some popular favor.

However, Caesar soon resigned as Dictator and rushed to Brindisi.

His army had already gathered there, totaling twelve legions, and most of them were fully manned, giving him a force of sixty or seventy thousand men, twice as many as before, thanks to Vercingetorix not launching a massive Gallic rebellion which meant his forces suffered no major losses.

Yet, he still faced the same difficulties as before, lacking enough transports to ferry the gigantic army across the sea to Greece in one go.

Moreover, Pompey had assembled a powerful fleet of about five hundred warships, along with numerous smaller ships for reconnaissance, stationed on the East Adriatic Coast, ready to intercept Caesar's transports at sea.

This fleet was commanded by Bibulus, who had previously served as Municipal Officer and Governor alongside Caesar, and had excrement thrown on him by Caesar's supporters at a public rally, causing him to refrain from appearing in public in Rome. Bibulus harbored numerous grudges against Caesar and strictly oversaw the fleet, patrolling the Adriatic Sea day and night, vowing to give Caesar a harsh lesson.

And Caesar's side only had a dozen or so warships, completely incapable of battling Pompey's fleet at sea.

In the face of such a dire situation, Caesar seemed to have no solution.

For several months in a row, he remained in Brindisi, taking no action.

As time progressed into the new year (48 BC, the twenty-fourth year of the establishment of the Nix Tribe), January being winter, the weather was quite cold, in accordance with Roman military tradition, winter usually meant resting troops, and because there had been no movement at Brindisi for months, Bibulus's fleet also became less vigilant.

Chapter 547: Pompey's Victory

On January 2nd, which coincided with a similar time in history, Caesar's transport fleet, fully loaded with soldiers, departed from Brindisi. They successfully crossed the Adriatic Sea and landed on the Epirus Coast.

The transport fleet was only discovered by patrol boats when returning at night. Bibulus hastily led his fleet out, but managed to intercept only a small portion of the ships.

Enraged, Bibulus burned all the captured sailors and ships and warned his subordinates not to make the same oversight again.

As a result, Pompey's fleet tightened their defense, preventing Caesar's transport fleet from ferrying more troops across the sea.

Caesar, already landed, had his reinforcements and supply lines cut off in the short term. Fortunately, the fleet had managed to transport nearly twenty thousand soldiers and several hundred cavalry ashore in one go. Although the fleet didn't have enough space to carry ample grain, the presence of this force allowed him to devise solutions.

Caesar gathered the landed troops, took a short rest, and launched an attack on the neighboring towns the next day, quickly conquering most of Epirus.

Next, Caesar prepared to seize one of Pompey's army's main supply depots—an important coastal trading port, Dyrrachium.

By this time, Pompey had already gathered his army and rushed to the rescue, reaching there before Caesar.

Because Pompey's army consisted of nine legions, more than twice Caesar's force, Caesar had no choice but to retreat.

Pompey also chose not to pursue further attacks. Though Caesar's army was smaller, their morale was extraordinarily high, leaving a deep impression on him, making him realize his own troops needed more training.

The two sides were locked in a stalemate, resorting more to negotiations and private exchanges, trying to undermine each other.

During this period, Labienus stood out the most. After the civil war erupted, this most capable legion commander under Caesar left Gaul and defected to Pompey.

He did so partly because Pompey was his patron, and according to Roman tradition, when a patron required it, a client had to provide assistance; partly because he believed he had made significant contributions in helping Caesar conquer Gaul, but the majority of the glory belonged to Caesar. He had

stayed in Gaul for seven or eight years, yet received no governorship, and his true value in Caesar's team was not recognized.

Because of these grievances, he acted exceptionally tough when facing his former comrades, even continually clamoring for the end of any negotiations unless they delivered Caesar's head.

During this time, the ever-driven-for-revenge Bibulus fell ill due to overwork and soon passed away. For various reasons, no one was appointed to take over his fleet commander's role, but the fleet's maritime blockade continued.

This ensured that Caesar's transport fleet could never deliver further troops to the East Adriatic Coast, and as time wore on, even Caesar himself began to feel despair.

He started to doubt the belief and loyalty of his subordinates left in Italy, thinking that only by personally taking charge could he spur reinforcements into action. Thus, he disguised himself, boarded a small merchant vessel, intending to head to Brindisi, but encountered strong winds at sea and was forced to return.

Upon learning of this incident, some soldiers were furious, thinking their commander lacked confidence in them to win the war with just their efforts, and they went to sense of unity between Caesar and his soldiers.

The stalemate continued until April, when Mark Antony led four legions and several hundred cavalry from Brindisi and successfully landed on the East Adriatic Coast. If Bibulus had been alive, this might not have happened, but lacking a commander, Pompey's fleet ultimately slackened.

Now Caesar had nearly 50,000 infantry and over a thousand cavalry at his disposal. Though still outnumbered by the enemy, he unhesitatingly sought battle with Pompey.

Pompey, understanding his troops' quality was inferior, refused direct confrontation, choosing instead to hold firm on land and blockade at sea. He believed that by cutting off Caesar's army's food supply, Caesar's formidable force would eventually be worn down.

Caesar, aware of his army's weakness in this regard, decided once again to seize Pompey's main supply base—Dyrrachium.

Although his forces reached Dyrrachium first this time, Pompey's army followed quickly, preventing him from taking the city.

Caesar then changed his strategy and started laying siege to Pompey's camp.

Caesar employed one of his most adept tactics—the construction of long walls to encircle Pompey's camp, thus completely cutting off the opponent's land support.

Pompey, unwilling to be outdone, built his own long walls around his camp for protection.

Thus, an unusual spectacle in the history of warfare appeared: the soldiers were not engaged in slaughter but competing in wall-building, with two long lines of fortifications extending around Pompey's camp.

During the wall-building process, small skirmishes occasionally broke out, usually with Caesar's troops gaining the upper hand, as his soldiers were seasoned and more fiercely resilient.

However, as time passed, the issue of lack of supplies in Caesar's army became increasingly apparent. He had no choice but to send many soldiers into the surrounding areas to forage for food, forcing them to eat barley (usually livestock feed), and eventually, sometimes even barley was unavailable. They had to mix roots of a certain plant with milk to bake into an unpalatable bread.

Pompey's army faced difficulties as well, though they had no shortage of grain thanks to continuous support from the sea. However, being besieged by the coast, they struggled with a lack of fresh water, leading to the death of many livestock and an outbreak of sickness in the camp.

Both armies bore considerable suffering, yet neither commander was willing to concede, so this massive siege continued unabated.

But soon, Pompey encountered another issue. Besieged as they were, obtaining enough fresh forage to feed their numerous warhorses became challenging. This made him realize that if this continued, his army's situation would become even worse than the enemy's, leading him to decide against passive defense any longer.

At this moment, several Gaul tribal leaders fighting alongside Caesar, fearing punishment from him for mistakes they'd made, defected to Pompey's camp.

Through them, Pompey learned about the troop deployment and defensive situation along Caesar's lines. Since Caesar's walls extended further and further, his forces became thinner, especially as some had been sent out to forage, leaving certain parts of the defense severely undermanned.

Pompey made a snap decision to concentrate his forces and launched a fierce attack on the weakest point in Caesar's defenses.

Unprepared, Caesar's forces were swiftly defeated. Pompey's troops successfully captured the segment of the wall closest to the sea and began building a new camp there, ensuring their troops could freely exit and enter Caesar's encirclement to gather needed supplies.

Caesar, naturally unwilling for this to happen, immediately gathered his forces and launched a counterattack.

Pompey did not expect Caesar's assault to come so swiftly and was at first taken by surprise.

But as Caesar's reinforcements, unfamiliar with the terrain, went in the wrong direction and failed to launch a timely attack to aid in flanking the enemy,

Pompey's reinforcements quickly arrived, joining their besieged comrades in a counteroffensive. Simultaneously, many of Pompey's cavalry began striking the flanks of Caesar's cavalry fiercely.

The weaker Caesar cavalry retreated first, affecting the collapse of Caesar's right wing, eventually leading all attacking units to start fleeing. Regardless of how Caesar tried to stop them, it had no effect.

This attack resulted in considerable losses for Caesar, with more than a thousand soldiers killed or wounded and several dozen senior officers lost.

Nevertheless, the cautious Pompey did not press on to attack Caesar's camp after the victory.

The following day, Caesar gathered his troops, criticizing their poor performance the previous day, but also praising their ability to besiege an enemy with much larger numbers for so long. Lastly, he encouraged the soldiers to fight bravely next time to make up for the previous day's failure.

Inspired by him, the soldiers' morale soared once more, with not a few officers urging Caesar to dare to engage the enemy again.

But Caesar recognized that the strategy of enclosing Pompey's army had failed. The naval advantage of Pompey's army was too significant, making it too disadvantageous to continue combating them near the coast.

So, at night, he led his troops to withdraw from the coast.

It wasn't until the following afternoon that Pompey discovered the enemy had left, not returning to Italy, but heading east into the heart of Greece.

At this point, he hesitated.

The victory at Dyrrachium greatly inspired Pompey's senior officers and the Senate. The Senate urged Pompey to use his navy to transport his troops back to Italy to recapture Rome, dispelling Caesar's pretense of representing the true Senate. Meanwhile, his subordinates believed they should take decisive action, pursue Caesar's army, and end the war.

Pompey was cautious, full of respect for the combat capabilities of Caesar's army. In his heart, he wanted to return to Italy and first destroy Caesar's base, but he worried that the Senate would say he was once again forced to retreat by sea. More importantly, he couldn't leave his father-in-law Metellus, who was marching with troops from the east, isolated and vulnerable to being overwhelmed by Caesar's much larger forces.

So, Pompey decided to track the enemy with his army, but not to engage them in direct combat. Instead, he aimed to cut off their supplies until he wore them down.

As Pompey's forces packed their camp and left the Dyrrachium area, a small merchant ship also left the city's harbor, sailing quickly north.

The ship's captain was under the Commerce Officer of the Kingdom of Nix, Onomabatis, tasked with quickly conveying the news to the kingdom that both Roman armies had departed the Epirus coast, as specially instructed by King Maximus.

At the eastern end of the Northern Italy Province, on the east side of the road connecting to the Illyria Province, the rolling mountains, verdant and lush, with green and flourishing forests, provided excellent cover for a Yabode army of over four hundred men.