



The Ancient World: Extraordinary People in Extraordinary Societies

Alesia, Battle of

Date: July-October, 52 BCE

Locale: Northeast Celtic Gaul (later *Alise-Sainte-Reines, France*)

Related civilizations: Republican Rome, Gauls

Significance: Caesar's victory gave Rome control over the province of Gaul.

Background: Between 58 and 53 BCE, Julius Caesar fought in Gaul to enhance his wealth and political standing. In 53 BCE, and finally rallied around a single leader, Vercingetorix. The Gauls attacked Roman-held cities in southern France, provoking Caesar to action.

Action: Caesar spent the early part of 52 BCE recapturing lost cities, then marched to attack the Gauls, who had retreated to the fortified hill-city of Alesia (uh-LEE-zhuh). The Romans built two concentric walls around Alesia, one to keep Vercingetorix in and the outer wall to defend against relief attacks. In October, a Gallic relief force arrived and attacked Caesar's army, while Vercingetorix launched coordinated sallies from Alesia. The Romans beat back both assaults, aided by German cavalry hitting the relief force from the rear. After almost four months in Alesia, the Gauls ran out of food and surrendered. Vercingetorix was captured and transported to Rome.

Consequences: After Alesia, there were no more serious uprisings in Gaul, which meant that Rome could tap into the wealth and resources of Western Europe for another four centuries. Caesar's success prompted a political power struggle with his former ally Pompey the Great. The popularity Caesar had gained as a military leader, due in part to the publication of his account of the war, contributed to his eventual victory over Pompey. Caesar's consolidation of power marked the beginning of the end of the Roman Republic and laid the groundwork for the Roman Empire.

See also: Caesar, Julius (10.3331/CWEP_0541); Celts; Gauls (10.3331/CWEP_1053); Pompey the Great (10.3331/CWEP_0718); Rome, Republican (10.3331/CWEP_0738); Vercingetorix (10.3331/CWEP_1099).

—Paul K. Davis

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