

forces were stationed he left ten cohorts and 300 cavalry on the shore to guard the fleet, and during the third watch set out against the enemy. He was the less concerned for the fleet because he was leaving it anchored along a sandy, low-lying coast. He put Quintus Atrius in charge of this garrison. During the night he advanced about eleven miles before catching sight of the enemy forces. They brought their cavalry and chariots forward from higher ground to a river* and began to block the way of our men and to engage in fighting. They were forced back by our cavalry and hid in the forest, where they occupied a place which was strong in both natural and man-made defences. It was apparent that they had previously made this ready to serve in their domestic warfare, for every one of the entrances was blocked off by the felling of a large number of trees. They came out from the forest to fight in small detachments, and prevented our men from coming within the fortifications. But the men of the Seventh legion formed up into a 'tortoise',* piled up a ramp against the fortifications, seized control of the stronghold, and drove the enemy from the forest. They themselves suffered few casualties. Caesar, however, forbade them to pursue the fugitives very far, both because he was not familiar with the terrain and because the day was already far spent; and he wanted there to be enough time left for fortifying the camp.

(10) The following morning he sent the soldiers and cavalry out in three divisions on a foray to pursue fugitives. After they had marched a considerable distance they caught sight of the enemy rearguard. Just then riders came to Caesar from Quintus Atrius and reported that a terrible storm had blown up the night before, and almost all the ships were damaged and cast up on the shore—for the anchors and ropes had failed, and so the sailors and helmsmen could not withstand the force of the storm. As a result, the ships had been dashed one against the other, and serious damage had resulted.

(11) On learning this, Caesar ordered the legions and cavalry to be recalled and to maintain their resistance on the march. He himself returned to the ships. Then he saw everything for himself, almost exactly as he had heard it described by the messengers and dispatch. Yet although about forty ships were

Caes. Be - Bk. 5 - Hammond trans. Oxford 1996.

lost, it was apparent that with considerable labour the rest could be rebuilt. So he selected workmen from the legions and ordered more to be summoned from mainland Gaul. He wrote to Labienus to have as many ships as possible built by those legions presently under his command. Then, despite the considerable difficulty and effort involved, Caesar decided the most convenient solution was to beach all the ships and join them with the camp by a single line of fortification. The work lasted for ten days: the soldiers had no break from their efforts even at night. Once the ships were beached and the camp strongly fortified, he left the same forces as before to guard the fleet and returned to the place he had left earlier.

By the time of his arrival even larger British forces had mustered there. By common agreement they had entrusted the supreme command of their campaign to Cassivellaunus, whose lands were separated from the coastal states by a river called the Thames, which is about seventy-three miles from the sea.* Between Cassivellaunus and the other states there had previously been continual warfare, but our arrival frightened the Britons into putting him in charge of the entire war effort.

(12) The inland regions of Britain are inhabited by people whom the Britons themselves claim, according to oral tradition, are indigenous. The coastal areas belong to people who once crossed from Belgium in search of booty and war: almost all of these inhabitants are called by the same national names as those of the states they originally came from. After waging war they remained in Britain and began to farm the land. Population density is high, and their dwellings are extremely numerous and very like those of the Gauls. They have large herds of cattle. They use either bronze or gold coinage or, instead of currency, iron rods of a fixed weight. Tin is found in the midland regions, iron along the coast but only in small quantities. Their bronze is imported. Timber of all kinds is found as in Gaul, except for beech and silver fir. They consider it wrong to eat hare, chicken, or goose, but still they look after them for pleasure and amusement. The climate is more temperate than in Gaul, and the winters milder.*

(13) The island is triangular in shape. One side faces Gaul, and one corner of this side, in Kent, is where almost all ships from Gaul put in to harbour. This corner looks east, the other south: the side stretches for about 460 miles. The second side looks towards Spain and the west: in this direction lies Ireland, which is thought to be half the size of Britain. The crossing from Britain to Ireland is the same as that from Gaul to Britain. Midway lies an island called Mona. There are thought to be several smaller islands besides lying nearby, and several writers have recorded that over the winter solstice there is continual darkness there for thirty days. We were unable to find out the truth of this by inquiries, except that by accurate measurements with a water-clock we observed that the nights were shorter than in mainland Gaul. According to the belief of the Britons, this side is some 640 miles long. The third side looks north, and faces no other land: but it is mainly angled towards Germany. It is thought to be about 730 miles long. Thus the whole island is nearly 2,000 miles in circumference.*

(14) Of all the island's inhabitants, by far the most civilized are those who live in Kent, a region which is entirely coastal. Their way of life is much the same as that of the Gauls. Inland, the people for the most part do not plant corn-crops, but live on milk and meat and clothe themselves in animal skins. All the Britons paint themselves with woad, which produces a dark blue colour: by this means they appear more frightening in battle. They have long hair and shave their bodies, all except for the head and upper lip. Groups of ten or twelve men share their wives in common, particularly between brothers or father and son. Any offspring they have are held to be the children of him to whom the maiden was brought first.*

(15) The enemy cavalry and charioteers clashed fiercely in combat with our cavalry on the march, though the outcome showed that our men were superior in every respect and drove them into the woods and hills. Despite killing a number of the enemy, they pursued too eagerly and lost a number of their own side. After a short time, when our men were off guard and busy fortifying the camp, the Britons suddenly

rushed out of the woods and attacked the guards stationed in front of the camp. A fierce fight ensued. Caesar sent two cohorts to their assistance—the primary cohorts of their respective legions—and they positioned themselves with only a very small gap to separate them. Because our men were frightened by the unfamiliar tactics, the enemy boldly broke through their midst and retreated without casualties. On that day the military tribune Quintus Laberius Durus was killed. The Britons were driven back after more cohorts were sent in support.

(16) Throughout this unusual combat, when the fighting took place in sight of all and in front of the camp, it was evident that because of their heavy weaponry our men were ill equipped for such an enemy. For they could not pursue when the enemy ran, and dared not abandon their close formation. The cavalry fought at great risk too, because the enemy frequently drove away from the fighting on purpose, so when our horsemen had gone some little distance from the legions they could jump down from their chariots and fight on foot with an unfair advantage. In fact, their strategy for cavalry battle brought us into equal danger whether in retreat or pursuit. There was also the fact that they never fought in close formation, but rather in small groups with large spaces between: they had squadrons posted at intervals and each group took over from another in turn, so that fresh troops could take the place of those who were tired out.

(17) The following day the enemy took up a position on high ground far from camp. They began to appear in small detachments and attack our cavalry, though less eagerly than the day before. At midday, though, when Caesar had sent three legions and all the cavalry with his legate Gaius Trebonius to forage for food, the enemy suddenly swept down upon the foragers from all directions with such force that they did not stop before coming up with the standards and the legions. Our legionaries attacked fiercely and drove them back; they did not halt the pursuit until the cavalry saw the legions behind them and had the confidence in their support to drive the enemy headlong. They cut down a large number, and allowed them no opportunity to rally or make a stand.