

Caesar's Bid for Power

Out of this chaos emerged Julius Caesar, an able commander who combined soaring ambition with a determination to make drastic reforms. For a time, Caesar dominated Roman politics with Pompey, one of Rome's most bril-

liant generals. Then, in 59 B.C., Caesar set out with his army to make new conquests. After nine years of almost constant fighting, he succeeded in bringing all of Gaul—the area that is now France—under Roman control.

Crossing the Rubicon. Back home, Pompey grew jealous of Caesar's successes and fearful of his rising fame. He had the senate order Caesar to disband his army and return to Rome.

Caesar decided to defy the order. Acting swiftly and secretly, he led his army across the Rubicon River into northern Italy and then headed toward Rome. With this act, which was considered treason, he committed himself to a life-and-death struggle from which there was no turning back.

Once again, civil war erupted across the empire. Caesar crushed Pompey and his supporters. He then swept around the Mediterranean, suppressing rebellious provinces and strengthening Roman power. "*Veni, vidi, vici*"—"I came, I saw, I conquered"—he announced briefly after one victory. Later, returning to Rome, he forced the senate to make him dictator. Although he kept the senate and other features of the republic, he was in fact the absolute ruler of Rome.

Caesar's reforms. Between 48 B.C. and 44 B.C., Caesar pushed through a number of reforms intended to deal with Rome's many problems. He launched a program of public works to employ the jobless and gave public land to the poor. He also reorganized the government of the provinces and granted Roman citizenship to more people. To enact these reforms, however, he packed the senate with his own followers.

Caesar's most lasting reform was the introduction of a new calendar based on Egyptian knowledge. The Julian calendar, as it was later called, was used in western Europe for nearly 1,600 years, and with minor changes is still our calendar today.