

GERGOVIA



C3i Analysis and Optional Rules

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Introduction

Over the last few years I have been one of the playtesters working on the upcoming games in the Great Battle of History Series (GBoH). One of the GBoH playtesting projects I enjoyed the most was for the **Gergovia** Module. I had already done a fair amount of research on the historical battle because I thought it might be possible to recreate this engagement (with some new counters and an extra mapsheet) for the GBoH boxed game **Alesia**. After our initial playtests the decision was made to publish **Gergovia** as a separate GBoH Module for **Caesar – Conquest of Gaul**. In my opinion, this was the correct decision for properly presenting the battle.

In simulating this battle on a fortified hilltop town it becomes clear this was less a siege, and more a series of attacks, push-backs, and miscues. The terrain is obviously unsuitable for the “linear” combat so typical of the Roman Legions of the period. Julius Caesar’s advantages were his fortified camps, his trenches and the Roman Army itself.

I must say the idea for this **Gergovia** Module has always thrilled me, because I do love this time period, and I find the historical situation very intriguing. The Roman player has few legions available for the initial attack, but he does have excellent TQ and of course Caesar’s leadership. The Allied Gallic units, the Aeduans, are not easily managed. The Gallic player must deal with the initial situation he finds himself in – his units are *taken by surprise* (the units within the camp next to Gergovia). But over time he will receive additional Gallic reinforcements.

I was quite involved in the various playtesting sessions for this GBoH Module, and I was pleased that the design team took into account many

of my observations which were then translated and/or adapted into Special Rules within the supplement (i.e., 6.8 Barbarian Impetuosity, Alternate Deployment; 8.5 Barbarian Ferocity, etc.), but I had suggested more rules, some of which I present to you now for your consideration.

Personal Observations and Optional Rules for Gergovia

As noted above, the **Gergovia** playtests fascinated me, and drove me to double-check my historical sources to see whether the supplement correctly mirrored the historical situation. I think that the deployment of some of Caesar’s legions, especially one, differed from those decided upon by the **Gergovia** Module designer and developer – Richard Berg and Alan Ray.

The reasoning behind my Optional Rules are based on these sources:

From – *De Bello Gallico*, Book VII.

XLV: Caesar sent a small cavalry contingent to Gergovia, with a large number of draught animals, to alarm the Gauls in town (...). He also sent a Legion to the hill’s slopes, that after a short advance stopped on the flat area, hidden amongst the woods.

It is not clear where this Legion was hiding, but it was probably to the left of the smaller camp, since the Aeduans were on the right. The probable position is around hex 3105; during the playtests I suggested drawing various wooded hexes in that area to allow this deployment. If you place a Legion in this area it substantially modifies the game and allows a more fully historical simulation.

Optional Rule 1:

A – Only deploy the 11th Legion with Sextius in the small camp; the 13th Legion, under Caninius, is deployed in hexes 2806, 2705, 2706, 2604, 2605, 2606, 2607, 2504 and 2507.

B – Gallic units cannot move closer than 5 hexes from any unit of the 13th Legion until at least one unit of the latter is visible.

XLVII: (...) Having reached the objective, Caesar ordered the retreat, and stopped and addressed the 10th Legion that was following him. The troops from the other legions, despite not hearing the sound of the trumpet (...)

Caesar stopped the 10th Legion and spoke to the “other Legions”, (so at least 2). This confirms that the 10th and the 7th were in front of the small camp with the 11th ready to reinforce them inside the camp; the 13th was hidden as above.

XLIX: (...) Now, worried about his men, he sent an order to Legate T. Sextius, who was guarding the small camp, telling him to come out rapidly with his cohorts and to deploy them to the enemy’s right flank at the foot of the hill: if our troops were pushed back, they were to frighten the enemy and make pursuit difficult.

Another confirmation that only one legion was left at the small camp.

L: (...) Suddenly the Aeduans appeared on our unprotected flank, who had been sent by Caesar to the right to split the enemy troops. When they arrived the similarity of their weapons with Gallic weapons spread panic in our ranks, who had seen the unprotected right arms, a conventional sign of friendship, but thought it was just a clever enemy trick (...).

Optional Rule 2:

A – When activated the Aeduans must move towards Gergovia or the closest enemy unit. If a Roman unit is within 10 or less hexes of an Aeduan unit then the Roman unit must immediately check their Morale.

Gergovia Module – C3i Analysis and Optional Rules

BELOW is an engraving taken from one of my sources that confirms my thoughts about the “detached legion”.



Historical Background – 52 BC (May - June), Siege of Gergovia

Towards Gergovia

Caesar split his army into two parts: One under Labienus, with four legions, or 20,000 men, faced the Senones and the Parisii; the other, under Caesar himself, with six legions, or 30,000 men, were to fight the Arverns.

Caesar left Avaricum and moved towards Gergovia, the Arvern capital. Vercingetorix destroyed all the bridges over the Elaver, the modern-day river Allier, the left affluent of the Liger, the modern-day Loire River. The Romans needed to cross the Elaver to get to Gergovia. The Gallic army deployed on the bank opposite the Roman army and the two armies advanced along the banks southwards. Caesar managed to rebuild one of the bridges, and led his legions across. Vercingetorix refused open battle and moved swiftly to Gergovia.

The Gallic army deployed near Gergovia, on a hill, at 740 meters altitude. A two-meter wall was built to defend the soldiers around (700 meters alt.). Another camp was built 500 meters to the west at Risolles, (720 meters alt.). Yet another camp was built to the south at La Roche-Blanche (400 meters alt.), but the Romans managed to push this garrison before them.

Caesar deployed his troops near Gergovia in two camps. The largest contained four legions and was 400 meters up to the southeast of the town, and more than 2 kilometers away from it. The smaller camp held just two legions and was to the south near La Roche-Blanche, about 1 km from the Gallic walls. The two camps were connected by a double trench more than two kilometers long. The legionaries used the trench to send messengers to-and-fro safely.

Convictolitavis had given Litavicus the command of 10,000 Aeduan soldiers that were to support the Roman troops. When the militia got to 45 km from Gergovia, Litavicus killed the Roman citizens that were with him and asked the troops to rebel against Caesar.

The noble Aeduan knight Epeoredorix, who was at the Roman camp,

advised Caesar of this around midnight. Gaius Fabius was left to guard the camp with two legions while Caesar and his other four legions and all the cavalry left immediately to put down the rebellion. After a 35 km march the Roman cavalry met the Aeduan. Epeoredorix and Viridomarus restored order in the Aeduan army that then returned to the Roman fold, while Litavicus fled to Gergovia.

Meanwhile the Arverns learned about the absence of the legions and then made the most of the situation by attacking the Roman camp. Caesar got back just in time and repelled the attack at dawn.

The Aeduan, who had learned of Litavicus' rebellion but not of his defeat, started to persecute, rob and kill the Roman citizens at Bibracte. Convictolitavis sided with the rebels. Then news came that Epeoredorix and Viridomarus had restored order amongst the 10,000 rebels. The Aeduan leaders immediately confiscated Litavicus' wealth as well as that of his brothers, investigated the pillaging and sent ambassadors to Caesar to explain to the Tribune Aristius that the rebellion had not been approved by the authorities.

The Battle

Caesar decided to attack Gergovia from the smaller camp. The Legionaries had to run uphill for about 1 km with a rise of 300 meters. Caesar specified that the aim of the attack was to occupy some positions near the walls and not to take Gergovia itself, given the obvious inferiority of the Roman Army's starting positions. The legionaries managed to surprise the enemy and take some positions between the walls and the town, but in their enthusiasm they did not obey the trumpets ordering the retreat and tried to take Gergovia. After showing some initial weakness the Gauls took control of the situation and repelled the attack.

On the Roman right the Aeduan arrived. The legionaries thought that they were the enemy and thought that they were being attacked on two fronts. Their will started to weaken and fled down the hill pursued by the Gauls. Caesar, who had placed the 10th Legion in reserve, intervened and managed to stop the Arverns. Legate Titus Sextius also managed to intervene with the cohorts that had been kept to guard the smaller camp. At the bottom of the slope the legionaries adopted normal battle formation and stopped the Gauls, who were forced to return up the hill to protect Gergovia. That day 46 Centurions died (there were 60 in a legion). 700 legionaries also died (a Legion contained around 5,000 men). Losses were bad, but even worse was the fact that the Gauls had beaten the Romans for the first time. This threatened to have an impact on Roman morale – moreover news of Caesar's defeat would trigger rebellion all over Gaul.

On the day after in an attempt to strengthen his troops and show the Celts that the defeat had only been a matter of luck, Caesar led the legions to Gergovia and tempted the Gauls to fight in the open, but the latter refused battle. The same thing happened the next day. The Romans then abandoned the siege and started to move away from Gergovia. Caesar moved towards the Aeduan's town. After two days he was at the river Elaver, where he rebuilt a bridge and crossed to the other side. Vercingetorix decided not to give chase.

