

BELLARIA CV



Publius (Flavius) Vegetus Renatus (late 4th C AD)

Epitoma Rei Militaris (iii)

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BOOK 3

3. How much attention should be devoted to the procurement and storage of fodder and grain.



Grain store in Ostia

The order of subjects demands that I speak next about the provisioning system for fodder and grain. For armies are more often destroyed by starvation than battle, and hunger is more savage than the sword. Secondly, other misfortunes can in time be alleviated: fodder and grain supply have no remedy in a crisis except storage in advance. On any expedition the single most effective weapon is that food should be sufficient for you while dearth should break the enemy. Therefore, before war is commenced, careful consideration should be given to supplies and their issue in order that fodder, grain and the other army provisions customarily requisitioned from provincials may be exacted in good time, and quantities always more than sufficient be assembled at points well-placed for waging war and very well-fortified.

ordo postulat, ut de com meatu pabulo frumentisque dicatur. saepius enim penuria quam pugna consumit exercitum, et ferro saeuior fames est. deinde reliquis casibus potest in tempore subueniri, pabulatio et annona in necessitate remedium non habent, nisi ante condantur. in omni expeditione unum est et maximum telum, ut tibi sufficiat uictus, hostes frangat inopia. ante igitur quam inchoetur bellum, de copiis expensisque sollers debet esse tractatus, ut pabula frumentum ceteraeque annonariae species, quas a prouincialibus consuetudo deposcit, maturius exigantur et in oportunis ad rem gerendam ac munitissimis locis amplior semper modus, quam sufficit, adgregetur.

3. But if the taxes in kind be insufficient, everything (needed) should be compulsorily purchased from advance payments in gold. For there is no secure possession of wealth, unless it be maintained by defence of an army. Often an emergency is doubled and a siege becomes longer than expected, when the

opposition, though hungry themselves, do not give up besieging those whom they expect to be overcome by hunger. Also all livestock, any sort of fruit and wine which the enemy invader can seize for his own sustenance should be collected into strong forts secured by armed garrisons, or into very safe cities, by landowners acting under the admonition of edicts or the compulsion of specially appointed escorts, and the provincials impelled to shut themselves and their property behind fortifications before the invasion.

quod si tributa deficiunt, prorogato auro comparanda sunt omnia. neque enim diuitiarum segura possessio est, nisi armorum defensione seruetur. frequenter autem necessitas geminatur et obsidio saepe fit longior, quam putaris, cum aduersarii etiam ipsi esurientes circumscindere non desinant quos fame sperant esse uincendos. praeterea quicquid in pecore uel quacumque fruge uinoque hostis inferens bellum ad uictum suum poterit occupare, non solum admonitis per edicta possessoribus sed etiam coactis per electos prosecutores ad castella idonea et armatorum firmata praesidiis uel ad tutissimas conferendum est ciuitates urguendique prouiciales, ut ante inruptionem seque et sua moenibus condant.



Walls of Caerwent

3. Repairs to all walls and torsion-engines should be taken in hand in advance too, for if the enemy once find you unready, everything becomes confused in panic and things needed from other cities are denied you through the roads being closed. Faithful stewardship of granaries and controlled issue usually provides for a sufficiency, especially if taken in hand from the outset. But economy comes too late to save (grain) when there is a deficiency.

reparatio etiam murorum tormentorumque omnium ante curanda est. nam si semel hostes praeuenerint occupatos, metu uniuersa turbantur, et quae ex aliis

urbibus petenda sunt interclusis itineribus denegantur. sed fidelis horreorum custodia et erogatio moderata consuevit sufficere pro copia, maxime si ab initio procuretur. ceterum sera parsimonia est tunc seruare, cum deficit.

6. The degree of caution to be observed when an army moves in the vicinity of the enemy.



6. Those who have made a careful study of the art of war assert that more dangers tend to arise on the march than in battle itself. For in battle everyone is armed, and they see the enemy at close quarters and come mentally prepared for fighting. On the march, the soldier is less armed and less alert; he is thrown into instant confusion by a sudden attack or concealed ambush. Therefore the general should take steps with all caution and prudence to ensure that the army suffer no attack on the march, or may easily repel a raid without loss.

qui rem militarem studiosius didicerunt, adserunt plura in itineribus quam in ipsa acie pericula solere contingere. nam in conflictu armati sunt omnes et hostem comminus uident et ad pugnandum animo ueniunt praeparati; in itinere minus armatus minusque adtentus est miles et superuentus impetu uel fraude subsessae repente turbatur. ideo omni cura omnique diligentia prouidere dux debet, ne profiscens patiatu r incursum uel facile ac sine damno repellat inlatum.

6. First, he should have itineraries of all regions in which war is being waged written out in the fullest detail, so that he may learn the distances between places in terms of the number of miles and the quality of roads, and examine short-cuts, by-ways, mountains and rivers, accurately described. Indeed, the more conscientious generals reportedly had itineraries of the provinces in which the emergency occurred not just annotated but illustrated as well, so that they could choose their

route when setting out by the visual aspect as well as by mental calculation. In addition, he ought to find out everything from intelligent men, from men of rank, and those who know the localities, individually, and put together the truth from a number of witnesses.

primum itineraria omnium regionum, in quibus bellum geritur, plenissime debet habere perscripta, ita ut locorum interualla non solum passuum numero sed etiam uiarum qualitate perdiscat, compendia deuerticula montes flumina ad fidem descripta consideret, usque eo, ut sollertiores duces itineraria prouinciarum, in quibus necessitas gerebatur, non tantum adnotata sed etiam picta habuisse firmentur, ut non solum consilio mentis uerum aspectu oculorum uiam profecturus eligeret.

6. Furthermore he should collect at the risk of those responsible for choosing them able guides, knowledgeable of the roads, and keep them under guard having given them a demonstration of punishment and reward. They will be useful when they understand that there is no longer any chance of escape for them, and that there is ready reward for loyalty and retribution for treachery. He should also make sure that men of discernment and experience are found, lest the error of two or three individuals put everyone at risk. Occasionally inexperienced rustics promise more than they can deliver and believe they know what in fact they do not.



Roman rustic

ad hoc a prudentioribus et honoratis ac locorum gnaris separatim debet uniuersa perquirere et ueritatem colligere de pluribus, praeterea (sub periculo eligendum) uiarum duces idoneos scientesque praecipere eosque custodiae mancipare addita poenae ostentatione uel praemii. erunt enim utiles, cum intellegant nec fugiendi sibi copiam superesse et fidei praemium ac perfidiae parata supplicia. prouidendum quoque, ut sapientes exercitatieque quaerantur, ne duorum aut trium error

discrimen pariat uniuersis; interdum autem imperita rusticatas plura promittit et credit se scire quae nescit.

6. But the most important thing to be careful about is to preserve secrecy concerning the places and routes by which the army is to proceed. The safest policy on expeditions is deemed to be keeping people ignorant of what one is going to do. It is for this reason that the ancients had the standard of the Minotaur in the legions. Just as he is said to have been hidden away in the innermost and most secret labyrinth, so the general's plan should always be kept secret. A safe march is that which the enemy least expect to be made.

sed cautelae caput est, ut, ad quae loca uel quibus itineribus sit profecturus exercitus, ignoretur; tutissimum namque in expeditionibus creditur facienda nesciri. ob hoc ueteres Minotauri signum in legionibus habuerunt, ut, quemadmodum ille in intimo et secretissimo labyrintho abditus perhibetur, ita ducis consilium semper esset occultum. securum iter agitur quod agendum hostes minime suspicantur.

6. Nevertheless, some words should be said about how one ought to go about meeting an attack, because scouts sent from the other side can detect an expedition by its tracks or by sighting it, and occasionally deserters and traitors are not wanting. When a general intends to set out with his army in column, he should send ahead very reliable and quick-witted men on excellent mounts to reconnoitre those places through which the army is due to march, both in advance and in the rear, and to right and left, to prevent the enemy laying ambushes. Scouts operate more safely at night than in daytime. In some measure a general betrays himself if his scout is captured by the enemy.

uerum, quia exploratores altrinsecus missi profectionem suspicionibus uel oculisprehendunt et interdum transfugae proditoresque non desunt, quemadmodum occurri ingruentibus debeat, intimetur. dux cum agmine exercitus profecturus fidelissimos argutissimosque cum equis probatissimis mittat, qui loca, per quae iter faciendum est, in progressu et a tergo, dextra laeuaque perlustrent, ne aliquas aduersarii moliantur insidias. tutius autem operantur exploratores noctibus quam diebus. nam quodammodo ipse sui proditor inuenitur cuius speculator fuerit ab aduersariis comprehensus.

7. How to cross large rivers.



Crossing the Danube (Trajan's column)

7. When crossing rivers careless armies often get into serious difficulties. For if the current is too strong or the river-bed too wide, it is likely to drown baggage-animals, grooms and sometimes even the weaker warriors. So when a ford has been reconnoitred, two lines of horsemen on picked mounts are lined up in parallel with sufficient space between them for infantry and baggage-train to pass through the middle. The upper line breaks the force of the waters, while the lower line collects up any who may be snatched away or swept under, and brings them safely across. But where the water is too deep to allow either infantry or cavalry to cross, if the river flows through flat country, it may be dispersed by digging multiple channels and easily crossed when divided.

in transitu fluuiorum grauis molestia negligentibus frequenter emergit. nam si aqua uiolentior fuerit aut aluens latior, impedimenta pueros et ipsos interdum ignauiores solet mergere bellatores. ergo explorato uado duae acies equitum electis animalibus ordinantur interuallis competentibus separatae, ut per medium pedites et impedimenta transeant. nam acies superior aquarum impetum frangit, inferior qui rapti subuersique fuerint colligit atque transponit. at cum altior fluctus nec peditem nec equitem patitur, si per plana decurrat, ductis multifariam spargitur fossis diuisusque facile transitur.

7. Navigable rivers, however, are made passable by driving in piles and boarding over the top, or else, for a temporary work, empty barrels may be tied together and timbers placed upon them to provide a passage. Also the cavalry are accustomed to take off their accoutrements and make *fasces* [bundles] from dry reeds and sedge and place upon them cuirasses and arms, so as not to get them wet. They and their horses swim across, drawing the *fasces* that they have tied to themselves. But it has been found better for an army to carry around with it on carts single timbers, which are rather wide canoes, hollowed out of single trunks, very light because of the type and thinness of the wood. Planks and iron nails are also kept with them in readiness. The bridge thus speedily constructed, tied together by ropes which should be kept for the purpose, provides the solidity of a masonry arch in quick time.

nauigeri uero amnes stilis fixis ac superpositis tabulatis peruli flunt uel certe tumultuario opere colligatis inanibus cupis additisque trabibus transitum praebent. expediti uero equites fasces de cannis aridis uel facere consueuerunt, super quos loricas et arma, ne uidentur, inponunt; ipsi equique natando transeunt colligatosque secum fasces pertrahunt loris. sed commodius repertum est, ut monoxylos, hoc est paulo latiores scafulas ex singulis trabibus excauatas, pro genere ligni et subtilitate leuissimas, carpentis secum portet exercitus, tabulatis pariter et clauis ferreis praeparatis. ita absque mora constructus pons et funibus, qui propterea habendi sunt, uinctus lapideri arcus soliditatem praestat in tempore.

7. The enemy often launch rapid ambushes or raids at river crossings. Armed guards are stationed against this danger on both banks, lest the troops be beaten by the enemy because they are divided by the intervening river-bed. It is safer to build stockades along the bank on either side, and bear without loss any attack that is made. But if a bridge is needed not just for one crossing, but for returning and for supply-lines, broad fosses are dug around each bridgehead and a rampart constructed to receive soldiers to defend and hold it for as long as strategic needs require.

festinanter aduersarii ad transitus fluminum insidias uel superuentus facere consueuerunt. ob quam necessitatem in utraque ripa conlocantur armata praesidia, ne alueo interueniente diuisi obprimantur ab hostibus. cautius tamen est sudes ex utraque parte praefigere ac sine detrimento, si qua uis inlata fuerit, sustinere. quod si pons non tantum ad transitum sed etiam ad recursum et commeatus necessarius fuerit, tunc in utroque capite percussis latioribus fossis aggereque constructo defensores milites debet accipere, a quibus tamdiu teneatur, quamdiu locorum necessitas postulat.

9. What and how many things are to be considered when judging whether to engage the enemy in raids and ambushes or else in pitched battle.

9. Whoever will deign to read these commentaries on the art of war abridged from authors of the highest repute, wishes to hear first and foremost the science of battle and the recommended tactics. But a pitched battle is defined by a struggle lasting two or three hours, after which all hopes of the defeated party fall away. That being so, every expedient must be thought of previously, tried out in advance and implemented before matters come to this final pass. For good generals do not attack in open battle where the danger is mutual, but do it always from a hidden position, so as to kill or at least terrorize the enemy while their own men are unharmed as far as possible. In this connection I shall describe the measures which the ancients found quite essential.

Quisquis hos artis bellicae commentarios ex probatissimis auctoribus breuiatos legere dignabitur, quam primum rationem proelii depugnandique cupit audire praecepta. Sed conflictus publicus duarum aut trium horarum certamine definitur, post quem partis eius, quae superata fuerit, spes omnes intercidunt. Ideo omnia ante cogitanda sunt, ante temptanda, ante facienda sunt, quam ad ultimum ueniatur abruptum. Boni enim duces non aperto proelio, in quo est commune periculum, sed ex occulto semper adtemptant, ut integris suis, quantum possunt, hostes interimant uel certe terreant, in qua parte quae necessaria admodum sunt ab antiquis reperta perscribam.



Discussing tactics

9. An important art useful to a general is to call in persons from the entire army who are knowledgeable about war and aware of their own and the enemy's forces, and to hold frequent discussions with them in an atmosphere from which all flattery,

which does so much harm, has been banished, to decide whether he or the enemy has the greater number of fighters, whether his own men or the enemy's are better armed and armoured and which side is the more highly trained or the braver in warfare. A further question is which side has the better cavalry or infantry, bearing in mind that the strength of an army depends mainly on its infantry. And, among the cavalry, which side has more pikemen or archers, which is wearing more cuirasses and which has brought better horses.

praecipua ars et utilitas ducis est, ut adhibitis ex uniuerso exercitu scientibus belli et sapientibus uiris de suis et hostium copiis saepius tractet, omni, quae plurimam nocet, adulatione summot, utrum ipsius an aduersariorum homines magis armati sint et muniti, qui magis exercitati, qui sint innecessitatibus fortiores. quaerendum etiam, utra pars equites, utra pedites habeat meliores, sciendumque in peditibus uel maxime consistere robur exercitus; et inter ipsos equites, qui contatis, qui sagittariis antecedit, quis plures loricas induat, quis utiliores equos adduxerit.

9. Then he should consider whether the terrain itself in which one is to fight appears advantageous to the enemy or to ourselves. For if we are strong in cavalry, we should opt for plains; if in infantry, we should choose confined places, obstructed by ditches, marshes or trees, and sometimes mountainous. Also, which side has more food or lacks it, for hunger, they say, fights from within, and often conquers without a blow.

postremo loca ipsa, in quibus pugnandum est, utrum inimicis an nobis uideantur adcommoda; - nam si equitatu gaudemus, campos debemus optare, si pedites, loca eligere angusta, fossis paludibus uel arboribus impedita, et aliquotiens montuosa -; cui magis uictus abundet aut desit; nam fames, ut dicitur, intrinsecus pugnat et uincit saepius sine ferro.

9. But most important of all, he should deliberate whether it is expedient for the crisis to be prolonged or fought out more swiftly. For sometimes the enemy hopes that the campaign can be ended quickly, and if it becomes long-drawn out, is either reduced by hunger, or called back to his own country by his men's homesickness, or through doing nothing significant is compelled to leave in despair. Then very many desert, exhausted by effort and weariness, some betray others and some surrender themselves, since loyalty is less common in adversity, and the enemy who came in great force begins to be denuded.

uel maxime autem tractandum est, utrum expediat necessitatem protrahi an celerius dimicari; interdum enim sperat aduersarius expeditionem cito posse finire et, si dilatus fuerit in longum, aut penuria maceratur aut desiderio suorum

reuocatur ad propria aut nihil magnum faciens per desperationem abire compellitur. tum fracti labore et taedio plurimi deserunt, aliquanti produnt, aliquanti se tradunt, quia aduersis rebus rarior fides est et nudari incipit qui copiosus aduenerat.

9. It is also relevant to find out the character of the adversary himself, his senior staff-officers and chieftains. Are they rash or cautious, bold or timid, skilled in the art of war or fighting from experience or haphazardly? Which tribes on their side are brave or cowardly? What is the loyalty and courage of our *auxilia*? What is the morale of the enemy forces? What is that of our own army? Which side promises itself victory more? By such considerations is the army's courage bolstered or undermined.

ad rem pertinet, qualis ipse aduersarius uel eius comites optimatesque sint, nosse, utrum temerarii an cauti, audaces an timidi, scientes artem bellicam uel ex usu an temere pugnantes; quae gentes cum his fortes, quae ignauae sint; nostra auxilia cuius fidei quarumque sint uirium; quos animos illius copiae, quos habeat noster exercitus; quae pars sibi magis uictoriam repromittat. eiusmodi enim cogitationibus uirtus augetur aut frangitur.

12. One should find out how soldiers are feeling before battle.



Rallying the troops

12. Explore carefully how soldiers are feeling on the actual day they are going to fight. For confidence or fear may be discerned from their facial expression, language, gait and gestures. Do not be fully confident if it is the recruits who want battle, for war is sweet to the inexperienced. You will know to postpone it if the experienced warriors are afraid of fighting. An army gains courage and fighting spirit from advice and encouragement from their general, especially if they are given such an account of the coming battle as leads them to believe they will easily win a victory. Then is the time to point out to them the cowardice and mistakes of their opponents, and remind them of any occasion on which they have been beaten by us in the past.

ipsa die, qua certaturi sunt milites, quid sentiant, diligenter explora. nam fiducia uel formido ex uultu uerbis incessu motibus cernitur. ne confidas satis, si tiro proelium cupit; inexpertis enim dulcis est pugna; et noueris te oportere differre, si exercitati bellatores metuunt dimicare. monitis tamen et adhortatione ducis exercitui uirtus adcrecit et animus, praecipue si futuri certaminis talem acceperint rationem, qua sperent se facile ad uictoriam peruenturos. tunc inimicorum ignauia uel error ostendendus est, uel, si ante a nobis superati sunt, commemorandum.

12. Also say anything by which the soldiers' minds may be provoked to hatred of their adversaries by arousing their anger and indignation. It is a natural reaction in the minds of nearly all men to be fearful as they go to do battle with the enemy. But those whose minds are panicked by his actual appearance are without doubt the weaker sort. Their fears may be lessened by the following remedy. Before the battle, repeatedly draw up your army in safe positions from which they can get used to seeing and recognizing the enemy. Let them also try their hand now and then when an opportunity arises: let them put to flight or kill their opponents; let them learn to recognize their adversaries' characteristics, arms and horses? For familiar things are not frightening.

dicenda etiam quibus militum mentes in odium aduersariorum ira et indignatione moueantur. animis paene omnium hominum hoc naturaliter euenit, ut trepident, cum ad conflictum hostium uenerint. sine dubio autem infirmiores sunt quorum mentes ipse confundit aspectus; sed hoc remedio formido lenitur, si, antequam dimices, frequenter exercitum tuum locis tutioribus ordines, unde et uidere hostem et agnoscere consuescant. interdum audeant aliquid ex occasione: aut fugent aut interimant inimicos; mores aduersariorum, arma, equos recognoscant. nam quae ex usu sunt non timentur.

21. An escape-route should be offered to the enemy so that they may be more easily destroyed in full flight.

21. Most people ignorant of military matters believe the victory will be more complete if they surround the enemy in a confined place or with large numbers of soldiers, so they can find no way of escape. But trapped men draw extra courage from desperation, and when there is no hope, fear takes up arms. Men who know without a doubt that they are going to die will gladly die in good company. For this reason Scipio's axiom has won praise, when he said that a way should be built for the enemy to flee by. For when an escape-route is revealed, the minds of all are united on turning their backs, and they are slaughtered unavenged, like cattle.

plerique rei militaris ignari pleniorē uictoriā credunt, si aduersarios aut locorum angustiis aut armatorum multitudine circumdederint, ut aditum non inueniant abscedendi. sed clausis ex desperatione crescit audacia, et cum spei nihil est, sumit arma formido. libenter cupit commori qui sine dubio scit se esse moriturum. ideoque Scipionis laudata sententia est, qui dixit uiam hostibus, qua fugerent, muniendam. nam cum abscedendi aditu patefacto mentes omnium ad praebenda terga consenserint, inulti more pecudum trucidantur.

21. Nor is there any danger for the pursuers once the defeated have turned round the arms with which they could have defended themselves. In this tactic, the greater the numbers, the more easily is a mass cut down. For there is no need of numbers in a case where the soldiers' minds, once terrified, wish to avoid not just the enemy's weapons but his face. Whereas trapped men, though few in number and weak in strength, for this very reason are a match for their enemies, because desperate men know they can have no other recourse. 'The one hope of safety for the defeated is to expect no safety'.

nec insequentium ullum periculum est, cum uicti, quibus defendi potuerant, arma conuerterint. hoc genere, quanto maior fuerit, tanto facilius multitudo prosternitur. neque enim ibi requirendus est numerus, ubi animus semel territus non tam tela hostium cupit declinare quam uultum. ceterum clausi, licet exigui numero et infirmi uiribus, hoc ipso tamen sunt hostibus pares, quia desperantes sciunt aliud sibi licere non posse. 'una salus victis, nullam sperare salutem'.

Next week: a summary of Vegetius' top tips.