

# BELLARIA CVI



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

### *Epitoma Rei Militaris* (iv)

By kind permission of Liverpool University Press, these extracts are taken from *Vegetius: Epitome of Military Science* translated, with introduction and notes dealing with the many problems, by N.P. Milner (1993). To buy the print book, go to <https://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/books/id/53421/>

**Note:** *Bellaria* will now be taking a summer break and intends to return in September.

### Introduction

Book III ends with a summary of the most important 'general rules' for warfare derived from Vegetius' work. These were extremely popular in the Middle Ages.

### 26. General rules of war.

In all battles the terms of campaign are such that what benefits you harms the enemy, and what helps him always hinders you. Therefore we ought never to do or omit to do anything at his pleasure, but carry out only that which we judge useful to

ourselves. For you begin to be against yourself if you copy what he has done in his own interest, and likewise whatever you attempt for your side will be against him if he chooses to imitate it.

*in omnibus proeliis expeditionis condicio talis est, ut quod tibi prodest aduersarium noceat, quod illum adiuuat tibi semper officiat. numquam ergo ad illius arbitrium aliquid facere aut dissimulare debemus, sed id solum agere, quod nobis utile iudicamus. contra te enim esse incipis, si imiteris quod fecit ille pro se, et rursum quicquid pro tua parte temptaueris contra illum erit, si uoluerit imitari.*



In war, he who spends more time watching in outposts and puts more effort into training soldiers, will be less subject to danger.

*in bello qui plus in agrariis uigilauerit, plus in exercendo milite laborauerit, minus periculum sustinebit.*

A soldier should never be led into battle unless you have made trial of him first.

*numquam miles in acie producendus est, cuius antea experimenta non ceperis.*

It is preferable to subdue an enemy by famine, raids and terror, than in battle where fortune tends to have more influence than bravery.

*aut inopia aut superuentibus aut terrore melius est hostem domare quam proelio, in quo amplius solet fortuna potestatis habere quam uirtus.*

No plans are better than those you carry out in advance without the enemy's knowledge.

*nulla consilia meliora sunt nisi illa, quae ignorauerit aduersarius, antequam facias.*

Opportunity in war is usually of greater value than bravery.

*occasio in bello amplius solet iuuare quam uirtus.*

In soliciting and taking in enemy soldiers, if they come in good faith, there is great security, because deserters harm the enemy more than casualties.

*in sollicitandis suscipiendisq[ue] hostibus, si cum fide ueniant, magna fiducia est, quia aduersarium amplius frangunt transfugae quam perempti.*

It is preferable to keep additional reserves behind the line than to spread the soldiers too widely.

*melius est post aciem plura seruare praesidia quam latius militem spargere.*

It is difficult to beat someone who can form a true estimate of his own and the enemy's forces.

*difficile uincitur qui uere potest de suis et de aduersarii copiis iudicare.*

Bravery is of more value than numbers.

*amplius iuuat uirtus quam multitudo.*

Terrain is often of more value than bravery.

*amplius prodest locus saepe quam uirtus.*



Few men are born naturally brave; hard work and good training makes many so.

*paucos uiros fortes natura procreat, bona institutione plures reddit industria.*

An army is improved by work, enfeebled by inactivity.

*exercitus labore proficit, otio consenescit.*

Never lead forth a soldier to a general engagement except when you see that he expects victory.

*numquam ad certamen publicum produxeris militem, nisi cum eum uideris sperare uictoriam.*

Surprises alarm the enemy, familiarity breeds contempt.

*subita conterrent hostes, usitata uiliscunt.*

He who pursues rashly with his forces in loose order is willing to give the adversary the victory he had himself obtained.

*qui dispersis suis inconsulte sequitur, quam ipse acceperat, aduersario uult dare uictoriam.*

He who does not prepare grain-supplies and provisions is conquered without a blow.

*qui frumentum necessariaque non praeparat, uincitur sine ferro.*



He who has the advantage in numbers and bravery, let him do battle with a rectangular front, which is the first mode.

*qui multitudine et uirtute praecedit, quadrata dimicet fronte, qui primus est modus.*

He who judges himself unequal, let him rout the left wing of the enemy with his right, which is the second mode.

*qui inparem se iudicat, dextro cornu suo sinistrum cornu pellat inimici, qui secundus est modus.*

He who knows he has a very strong left wing, let him attack the right wing of the enemy, which is the third mode.

*qui sinistram alam fortissimam habere se nouit, dextram alam hostis inuadat, qui est tertius modus.*



He who has very experienced soldiers should begin battle on both wings together, which is the fourth mode.

*qui habet exercitatissimos milites, in utroque cornu pariter proelium debet incipere, qui quartus est modus.*

He who commands an excellent light armament, let him attack both wings of the enemy after posting the light troops before the line, which is the fifth mode.

*qui leuem armaturam optimam regit, utramque alam hostis inuadat ferentariis ante aciem constitutis, qui quintus est modus.*

He who has confidence neither in the numbers of his soldiers nor their bravery and is to fight a pitched battle, let him repel the left wing of the enemy with his right having extended the rest of his men in the form of a spit; which is the sixth mode.

*Qui nec numero militum nec uirtute confidit, si depugnaturus est, de dextra sua sinistram alam hostium pulset reliquis suis porrectis in similitudinem ueri, qui sextus est modus.*

He who knows he has fewer and inferior forces, in the seventh mode let him have on one flank a mountain, city, sea, or river, or some (other).

*qui pauciores infirmioresque habere se nouit, septimo modo ex uno latere aut montem aut ciuitatem aut mare aut fluuium aut aliquod debet habere subsidium.*



He who has confidence in his cavalry should find places more suited to horsemen and wage war more by means of cavalry.

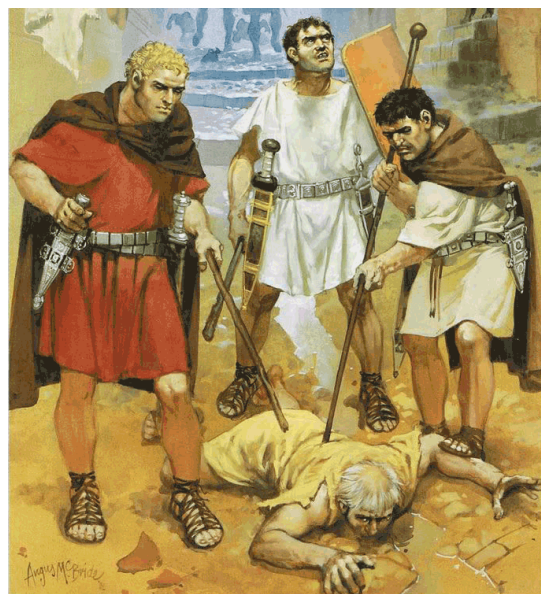
*qui confidit equitatu, aptiora loca quaerat equitibus et rem magis per equites gerat.*

He who has confidence in the infantry forces should find places more suited to infantry and wage war more through infantry.

*qui confidit equitatu, aptiora loca quaerat equitibus et rem magis per equites gerat.*

When an enemy spy is wandering secretly in camp, let all personnel be ordered to their tents in daylight, and the spy is immediately caught.

*cum explorator hostium latenter oberrat in castris, omnes ad tentoria sua per diem redire iubeantur, et statim apprehenditur explorator.*



When you discover that your plan has been betrayed to the enemy, you are advised to change your dispositions.

*cum consilium tuum cognoveris aduersariis proditum, dispositionem mutare te conuenit.*

Discuss with many what you should do, but what you are going to do discuss with as few and as trustworthy as possible, or rather with yourself alone.

*quid fieri debeat, tractato cum multis, quid uero facturus sis, cum paucissimis ac fidelissimis uel potius ipse tecum.*

Soldiers are corrected by fear and punishment in camp, on campaign hope and rewards make them behave better.

*milites timor et poena in sedibus corrigit, in expeditione spes ac praemia faciunt meliores.*

Good generals never engage in a general engagement except on some advantageous occasion, or under great necessity.

*boni duces publico certamine numquam nisi ex occasione aut nimia necessitate confligunt.*

It is a powerful disposition to press the enemy more with famine than with the sword.

*magna dispositio est hostem fame magis urguere quam ferro.*

The mode in which you are going to give battle should not become known to the enemy, lest they make moves to resist with any countermeasures  
*quo genere depugnaturus sis, nesciant hostes, ne aliquibus remediis obsistere moliantur.*

***Bellaria*** will return in September.