

Military commanders that have risen to power in rome: gaius, sulla and caesar

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A Tale of Three Great Roman Commanders: Gaius, Sulla, and Caesar

In the early era of the Republic of Rome, there were great instances of military power undermining the very democratic fabric of the empire, and military leaders leading a stunning rise to prominence.

General Gaius Marius (157- 86 B. C. E.) is one such example. He was elected consul a historic five times. He greatly expanded the ranks of the army in that time by removing “ property ownership” as a qualification for service, and opening the doors to industrial wage-earners and dispossessed farmers. Although his newly enlarged army was a semi-professional one, they were indeed loyal to Marius first and to Rome second. Thus, with the whole army behind him, he could intimidate and put pressure on Senate and civilian leaders, thus enhancing his own political influence. Consequently, the empire experienced both civil and foreign wars due to this imbalance of power. Marius would eventually be deposed by one of his own generals, a victorious commander, Sulla.

At the vehement urging of a helpless Senatorial authority, Sulla invaded Rome in 88 B. C. E. and overthrew Marius. The Senate feared Marius for the monstrosity he was becoming in terms of his power, and they felt he spent money unnecessarily on too many wars. In a rather unfortunate outlook, Sulla was victorious in his efforts to take control of Rome in leading a bloody slaughter of Romans at the hands of his personal army (also Romans). In the year 82, Sulla made himself Rome’s “ dictator for life” still with the backing of Senate leaders. He was successful in reinstating the Roman constitution

and restoring the traditional powers of the Senate. In 79 B. C. E. Sulla retired from power.

After Sulla a number of ambitious military commanders rose to power and subsequently faded into the print of history books, the famous of these being Julius Caesar. Caesar governed the Roman province of Spain from 61 to 60 B. C. E and later served for eight years as the governor of Gaul. He proved himself a very formidable ruler in his conquest and expansion of Roman territory into Asia and Europe, from the Rhine River west to the Atlantic. Caesar was publicly appointed consul with two other men by year 59. He was the first to send Roman military forces into Britain. After serving as governor in Gaul, he sought to return to Rome but was met by a disapproving Senate who felt he had become too powerful and that the Roman army was too loyal to him.

Caesar waged war on his opponents (49- 45 B. C. E.), and prevailed in his resumption of rule in the empire. Some of his reforms include revising the calendar, enlarging the Senate (although this backfired in it becoming less effective), and relieving some of the debt. Yet, in 44 B. C. E. he made the mistake of announcing himself to be dictator of Rome for life. Sixty members of the Senate decided to bring his wave of power to an abrupt end; they assassinated their leader Julius Caesar on March 15 of the same year. Following his death, thirteen years of civil unrest and war ensued bringing about the demise of the Republic.