

*Caesar's famous despatch: veni, vidi, vici
refers to which battle...*

These were trying days for **Gaius Iulius Caesar**. He had just defeated Ptolemy XIII of Egypt, now there was fresh rebellion in Asia Minor

Caesar had earlier won the **Third Mithridatic War, 73-63 BCE** against **King Pharnaces I of Pontus**. Rome, ever-empire minded, annexed the western part of Pontus, forming the new province of **Bithynia et Pontus**. The eastern portion of Pontus was now a client kingdom under the rule of **Pharnaces II, the son**

Pharnaces II, sensing an opportunity, occupied **Bithynia** and **Cappadocia**. Initial success begat further adventuresome behaviour for he encouraged local princes to revolt. Events moved quickly. Caesar shipped three Legions from Egypt across the Mediterranean to Asia Minor

Pharnaces II was startled by Caesar's rapid advance to and into Asia Minor. A Greek by birth and ancestry, he played a *cool* game. He sent an envoy to Caesar. The envoy cited the fact that Pharnaces had never cooperated with Pompey, a former Caesarean rival. A truce was respectfully requested. The Greek request was a *two-edged sword*. One knife edge highlighted mounting turmoil in Rome which Caesar could *not* ignore, *forcing* a return to Italy. The other edge allowed Caesar the gloss of victory by granting the truce and departing with honour. (Of course, with either sword cut, Pharnaces kept his gains)

A second envoy was sent, with a second peace offer

A third envoy was sent, with a third peace offer

When the third envoy walked into Caesar's tent, the second envoy was present. All peace offers were rejected

Pharnaces was camped near the **town of Zela, Pontus**. The terrain was hilly. He moved his forces to higher ground three miles away. Caesar counter-marched his troops five miles to the area where a Roman Army had been earlier defeated during the Third Mithridatic War

Pharnaces, caught by surprise with Roman counter-deployment; his only option was to fight a battle

Initially, Pharnaces had success by panicking Caesar's troops; for they were attacked while not fully deployed in battle formation. A second assault composed of chariots was sent against Caesar. This time the Romans were ready with massed missile assaults which overwhelmed the chariots. The Sixth Legion advanced and pushed Pharnaces's forces down a slope and onto uneven ground. Caesar continued his advance to Pharnaces's camp

The **Battle of Zela** had been short and decisive. Caesar's win had resolved a difficult situation. He was delighted

Pharnaces fled the battlefield. Caesar sent a force under **Domitius**, a subordinate commander, who cornered Pharnaces and killed him in battle. At his death, Pharnaces was aged fifty and had reigned for fifteen years

Caesar sent his **victory at Zela** despatch to the Senate

Caesar wrote a private letter to his friend **Amantius**, who lived in Rome. The letter contained the phrase **veni, vidi, vici**

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veni, vidi, vici

is a Latin sentence of three verbs conjugated in the first person singular, perfect tense, indicative mood, active voice; **venire, videre, vincere** mean **to come, to see, to conquer**, thusly the sentence says:

I came, I saw, I conquered

Caesar's sentence, from antique Greek, is known as a **hendiatris, one through three**; *a figure of speech said within three words expressing one thought*. Caesar's three verbal phrases assert one thought, swiftness of act

Caesar's sentence is an example of **comma splicing**, the linking of three independent verbal clauses with a comma

In our era **veni, vidi, vici**; the sense is of a decisive act

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The story continues. The **victory at Zela** occurred in **47 BCE**. After three years of absence, in **44 BCE** Caesar was briefly in Italy. Caesar held Senatorial rank and attended Senate sessions. But **Idus Martiae** was a caucus meeting day, so the Senate met informally in the garden pavilion of the Theatre of Pompey. The Senate's agenda is long lost, may one of the discussion points have been Caesar's new commission to depart Italy in ten days to settle another rebellion in Asia Minor?