

# The Sertorian Wars, Seeds of a Nation

By Richard M. Dorsey

*This article is based on: "Quintus Sertorius and the Legacy of Sulla," by Phillip O. Spann, the foremost authority on Sertorius, and Plutach's "Makers of Rome."*

## Preface

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish army was considered the military standard for the world. By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Golden Age of Spain of the Spanish military had faded to a dream for reasons that go back over two thousand years.

History records wars of invasion in the Iberian Peninsula in the 6<sup>th</sup> CBC when the Tartessians fought off incursions by the Phoenician/Carthaginians. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> CBC, the natives of Hispania (Roman name) had been fighting for and against invaders from Rome and Carthage for more generations than they could remember. Hispanic warriors fought in the front lines during Hannibal's invasion of Italy and were considered among the most formidable fighters throughout the Mediterranean world. While Hispanic tribes fought often and fought well, they repeatedly failed in their attempts to repel invaders because they failed to unite and fight the enemy together.

After the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup> CBC, Rome was deep into the wars of the Socii, (Italian allied cities seeking Roman citizen's rights). To counter efforts of the Popular Party, Sulla organized government power around Patrician-class traditions and many Roman citizen-soldiers, magistrates and merchants found it prudent to seek retirement. Rome's richest provinces were in Hispania; the preferred land of retirees. In Hispania Ulterior (Farther Spain), a decent farm could still be purchased cheaply and an extravagant villa was patently affordable for those who could pay the tab.

As a result of the huge influx of Romans into Hispania, the provincial culture was changing. A new breed of Celtic-Roman was coming into existence. To match the needs of burgeoning Hispania, a "new man" was sent out by the Peoples' Party to make inroads in amending a century of exploitation by avaricious Roman magistrates. The "new man" from Rome was a non-aristocrat, a man of the people. Someone who had attained stature based on merit not on family. The new man was only a mid-level magistrate, but he came to Hispania as rectifier of old ills. The new man stayed and he guided these Ibero-Celts and newly minted provincial Romans into a unified fighting force. The new man was Quintus Sertorius and his legacy was to plant the seeds that would grow over the next fifteen hundred years into the nation of Spain.

Historians have described Quintus Sertorius a patriot or a traitor and sometimes both. Sir John Harrington in the 17<sup>th</sup> century summed up the dichotomy with this pithy epigram: "Treason doth never prosper; what is the reason? For if it prosper, none dare call it treason."

Sertorius was a true "outsider." Never had he held high enough office to be considered one of the nobles. Never did his enemies let him ever forget that he was only a *peregrinus*, a foreigner in his own lands. Born in Norcia (Nuria), 70 miles north east of Rome, Sertorius came from a family without noteworthy ancestors. If he were going to make it in the world he would have to do it on his own. If he was going to raise himself up to the next level he had to align himself with those who recognized meritocracy.

Driven to achievement by a loving mother, Sertorius was schooled in military skills, letters, architecture, grammar, history and law. Attending religious ceremonies in Rome, he watched firsthand, the timely debates, the procedures of passing laws and the process of voting. Practicing his martial arts, Sertorius became adept at throwing the javelin, fighting in armor, riding, boxing, swimming against river currents, and enduring extremes of cold and heat. Among his comrades, Sertorius was admired both for his courage and for his virtues.

The Rome of young Quintus was overpopulated with brawling indigent mobs, and governed by factions and a ruthless nobility adorned with the spoils of slaves of conquered peoples. In a climate of *dignitas* by violence, Sertorius was seen as a tool of the schemers and the financiers, where politics was a dangerous game. Bribing and intimidation got things done. Organized systems of dependence on a patron rivaled those of medieval princedoms. Inside the senate two family factions commanded, the Caepiones and Metelli. You were with one or the other. Sertorius joined with the Capiones and the Popular Party. They were patricians and backed Sulla. The Metelli were in the ascendant.

Sertorius began his military experience in Gaul fighting the massive waves of Cimbri and Tuetones under the first and foremost of “new men,” seven time consul Gaius Marius. In 105 BC, the Romans were crushed by the barbarian hordes at Arusio, loosing as many as 80,000 men. Sertorius was among those who escaped and came back hardened by the ordeal. Under Gaius Marius, one of Rome’s all time leading generals, Sertorius learned to recruit, train and fight with daring and resolution. He demonstrated the breadth of his abilities by learning enough of the Celtic tongue to dress as a Celt and mingle as a spy gathering information on enemy dispositions.

Seeing his potential, the Caepiones sent Sertorius to Hispania Citerior (Nearer Spain) as military tribune under the praetor Didius. Wintering in Castulo, Sertorius found the provincially backwater legionnaires had lost their discipline and spent most of their time drinking and gambling. The locals despised the Romans and when a neighboring tribe attacked the town, the Castulians joined in the slaughter. Sertorius again escaped, rallied the fleeing soldiers, and counter-attacked. He won back the town and used his experience with disguise, to have his soldiers don the dress of the Castulians and marched on their attackers, the neighboring Oritanii. Not expecting the routed Romans and welcoming what they thought were their victorious neighbors, the Oritani were caught off guard and Sertorius captured their town, as well.

The Castulo/Oritani incident made Sertorius well known in both Hispania and Rome. He was appointed quaestor of Cisalpine Gaul (Gallic lands this side of the Alps), where his daring exploits, successes and failures cost him the sight of one eye. From then on Sertorius became “the one-eyed general,” always displaying his eye patch like a badge of courage. Sertorius’ fame caused envy and his name caught the eye of the Metellii. Promoted within the military for his achievements, Sertorius decided to make a public run for the people’s Tribune, only to be blocked by the forces of Sulla.

The main elements of the Popular Party were defeated, and Gaius Marius fled to Africa. When the triumphant Sulla set out to subdue Mithridates in Asia, he left the local patrician generals to wrap up remnants of the Popular Party. In a great battle at the Forum, nearly ten thousand Popular Party supporters were killed and Sertorius, along with other leaders, were forced to flee to the Italian countryside. With Sulla gone from Rome, Marius returned, the popular party was reformed, and a wave of reprisals swept through Rome and its environs.

Reluctant to participate in the retribution, Sertorius was sent in the position of governor of Hispania Citerior as an envoy of the Popular Party to generate support for their cause. In the

midst of the revenge in Rome, Marius died, the leading popular party Senator Cinna was killed by his troops and the other Marian leaders were unable to halt the return of Sulla.

In Hispania, Sulla branded Sertorius and his followers as outlaws. Renewing his previous contacts, Sertorius began gathering Hispanic allies based on his ability to lead and judge fairly. As Sertorius moved about the countryside he found the people distrustful of Roman administration. Where he could he reduced taxation, forced soldiers billeted in towns to move outside the walls and began organizing a force that could ward off his own enemies. When he learned that Sulla had named himself Dictator, Sertorius assembled a force of six thousand and placed them under one of his commanders, Julius Salinator to block the passes of the Pyrenees. Sulla sent Gaius Annius Lucius with 2 legions to capture Sertorius, and when Annius plopped himself down in on the Gallic side of the Pyrenees awaiting direction, Salinator mysteriously abandoned his impregnable defenses and allowed Annius into Hispania. Left with an army one-third the size of his pursuers, Sertorius marched his three thousand loyal men to New Carthage and set sail for North Africa.

Thus ends this “Prelude” and sets the stage for Sertorius’ return to the Iberian Peninsula and the beginning of, “The Sertorian Wars.” Stranded on the shores of North Africa in the year 80 BC, Sertorius finds himself exiled from home and nation and pondering a bleak future, when one of the fates steps in, weaves a new thread into the fabric of history and plants the seeds for a nation called Spain.

### **The Sertorian War**

*The Iberian Peninsula in the 1<sup>st</sup> CBC was a hodge-podge of Hispano-Celtic tribes until one determined man came along and planted the seeds of a nation.*

In the spring of 80 BC, the best general in the Roman armies, Quintus Sertorius, sat on the bluffs of Tangiers overlooking the narrow Straits of Gades (Gibraltar) pondering an uncertain future. Outlawed by the Roman Dictator Sulla, Sertorius had been on the run for a year, chased out as governor of Hispania Citerior (Nearer Spain) by C. Annius Luscus with two Roman legions. Ambassadors from Lusitania, the largest Hispano-Celtic nation on the Iberian Peninsula, had come to Africa to offer him supreme command in their struggle for liberation. Now, he and thirty-three hundred of his Roman outcasts pondered whether the Lusitani could really help them return to Spain in triumph.

A sizable navy commanded by C. Aurelius Cotta, governor of Hispania Ulterior (Farther Spain), patrolled the Straits. Sertorius had to cross the sea with the few ships left from recent escapades with pirates. On the opposite shore, the Lusitani had promised to infiltrate four thousand warriors and set up a beachhead at Mons Belleia.

Could he cross at night with so few ships against a superior naval force? Would he meet friend or foe coming ashore? Sailing at midnight to ride the tide across the thirty-five kilometers of water, Sertorius hoped to arrive at dawn. Cotta noted the large influx of Lusitani. Anticipating the crossing, he sent his fleet to meet Sertorius at sea. In the dead of night and against superior numbers, Sertorius defeated Cotta. The victory was auspicious; the first in a ten-year war where Sertorius would never taste defeat.

Upon landing, Sertorius gathered his troops and headed north. He wanted to avoid the lower Baetis (Guadalquivir) River swamps and cross somewhere south of Hispalis (Seville). With him were four thousand Lusitani light infantry, twenty six hundred Romans soldiers and seven hundred Libyans.

Cotta's legate Lucius Fufidius readied two legions and Hispanic auxiliary to crush Sertorius when he tried to cross the Baetis. Squadrons shadowed Sertorius. The navigable river was fordable at places, but the banks were steep. Sertorius crossed the light infantry first. His Romans followed. The Libyans swam their horses upstream to reduce the current flow. Fufidius attacked the Lusitani coming ashore, but the steep banks hindered his heavy infantry. Sertorius' mobility caused havoc, routing Fufidius and killing two thousand. Losing no time, Sertorius headed into the Sierra Morena toward Lusitani territory.

Sertorius considered himself the rightful governor of Hispania Citerior. Lusitania provided him with a base of fifty separate tribes, a population over one hundred thousand and seventy towns and cities stretching from the Anas (Guadiana) River north to the Durus (Duro) River, and from the Atlantic eastward two hundred kilometers.

Backed by fully outfitted staff officers and bodyguards, scarlet cloak draped to the ground, a well-worn, battle-scarred face and a dead-eye grin, Sertorius made a formidable presence. From personal contacts, intimidation and a growing reputation for the bold tactics, tribes began to make inquiries. With each victory warriors turned with pride to a leader with *devotio*.

Aware of their losses in Hispania and Sertorius' growing power, the Roman Senate sent its most illustrious soldier-statesmen, Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius to capture the outlaw and govern Hispania Ulterior. He expected to make short work of Sertorius. He was wrong.

Hispania was home to four legions; two in Citerior under the governor M. Domitius Calvinia, and two in Ulterior. Metellus brought two more legions with him, plus two thousand replacements. Planning to crush Sertorius in a pincer movement with his co-governor, Metellus learned, instead, that L. Hertuleius, Sertorius' legate and quaestor had killed Domitius at the Anas River.

Victories brought Sertorius manpower to match the Romans, but when Metellus offered fixed battle, Sertorius refused. He had no intention of pitting untrained Hispanics against veteran Romans led by a capable commander. Instead, he fought when and where he chose. Using "little wars" with native skills and knowledge of the terrain, Sertorius brought the art of guerrilla warfare to the highest levels in history.

Metellus was experienced only in pitched battles, where orthodox tactics, never varying formations and discipline won the day. Frustrated by Sertorius' hit and run tactics Metellus stayed close to his capital in Cordoba. Garrisoning nearby towns, he hoped to generate information on rebel movements. To cut off his enemy's resources, Metellus instituted a scorched earth policy. To survive, Sertorius had to protect his allies. Metellus only had to kill Sertorius.

Sertorius was in his prime, capable of extraordinary feats of strength, rapid movement, and hard living. He allowed no indulgences, bouts of drinking or lax training. He worked his men and himself to endure physical effort, long marches, and lack of sleep, on coarse food and a meager diet. Constantly moving, hunting, and foraging he became familiar with the countryside. He learned which routes were accessible, which offered escape, where to fake retreat and counter attack, or cut off enemy pursuit. His natives were skilled in moving through the mountains, hand to hand combat, and always fighting with courage. They were also undisciplined, without the proper weapons, and untrained in formations, battlefield maneuvers and tactics.

The Metellus who had won in Italy and Africa was faced with distinct disadvantages in Hispania.

His enemy constantly eluded him. Foraging was impossible without large numbers of guards. Sertorius had to be lured to where he could be enveloped and cut to pieces. Word came of just such a lure; a rich city called Langobriga supporting the rebels.

Metellus sent his best general, Aquinus, with a legion to lay siege to the fortified town. Troops carried only enough food for the march expecting a two-day siege. Believing Sertorius would come their rescue, Metellus intended to surround him with a second legion, hidden nearby.

Sertorius learned Aquinus was besieging Langobriga and had cut off the town's water supply. In a forced march, Sertorius arrived soon after and hid in the woods. He sent natives into the town to assess the situation and his Roman soldiers in disguise to infiltrate Aquinus' camp and gather information.

Without water the town would surrender. Sertorius' Hispanics gathered up many animal skins and tied them off to use as air bladders. The strongest and best swimmers floated the bladders downstream at night to the dam, filled them with water, then slipped past the guard, penetrating the wall where the water would normally have come in. Having resupplied the town with water, the empty bladders were used to float non-combatants to safety downstream.

The spies from the Roman camp told Sertorius that they were getting food from Metellus who was hiding nearby. Sertorius promptly signaled the Langobrigans to attack Aquinus. Caught off guard, his soldiers were routed. Meanwhile, Sertorius deployed his forces along shady ravines lining Metellus' rescue route. When Metellus sent his legion to surround Sertorius, they were ambushed. Metellus called off the fight and marched back to Cordoba so exhausted and discouraged that he spent the rest of the year without leaving his capital.

While Sertorius was winning in the west, Hertuleius did equally well in the east. Q. Calidius replaced Domitius, but was more into lining his pockets than contesting Hertuleius. The Senate sent L. Manlius, the governor of Gallia Transalpina, whom Hertuleius promptly defeated. By the end of the year, Sertorius had consolidated his authority over Hispania Citerior.

A woodsman named Spanos gave Sertorius a milky white fawn. The fawn became a pet of Sertorius, obeyed every command, and accompanied Sertorius on his meditative walks. Sertorius declared that the white fawn must be a gift from the goddess Diana because it communicated with him. When the next battle resulted in victory, Sertorius gave thanks to the goddess. From then on people around Sertorius agreed that the white fawn was sacred.

The Iberians were very superstitious people, but Rome honored more gods than the Iberians. Sertorius used both beliefs to his advantage. He claimed that the white fawn talked to him even in his sleep. Whenever there were warnings of danger or victories by his generals, Sertorius had them bring out the white fawn, garland it with flowers, celebrate the news and rejoice together in a ceremonial sacrifice. Sertorius knew that military leaders could bluster, beg and threaten, but the best way to achieve obedience without hesitation was to assure them they followed the will of the gods.

Early in 78 BC, Sulla died. Sertorius considered that a general amnesty might be declared, but Metellus closed that off by offering one hundred talents of silver and seven thousand plethra of land for his head. In Rome, the new consul M. Aemilius Lepidus began a counter-revolution against the heirs of Sulla's regime. Lepidus contacted Sertorius for military assistance. Sertorius refused. The Hispanics would only defend their homeland. They would not be led to Italy. Without the Hispanics, Sertorius had no army.

To organize the tribes joining Sertorius, he gave out "field promotions," granted citizenship, and

made magisterial appointments among the Hispanic leaders. Sertorius established a Greco-Roman school at Osca, where the sons of nobility were taught Roman administration and Roman military training. The chief problem he faced was uncontrolled valor. Fearless courage was no substitute for sound tactics. Hispanics chafed under the required discipline. Celtic traditions held fighting was for glory. Sertorius had to show the Hispanics that freedom required transferring valor in a fight to winning in a war.

Moving eastward, Sertorius encountered the Characitani who jeered his men for fleeing. They lived in inaccessible hillside caves. Reconnoitering, Sertorius noted the flat land in front of the hillside caves was covered with a crumbly soil easily blown into the air by a casual breeze. He also learned that the local *Caecias* winds were strong this time of year and came obediently every day. Sertorius gave orders for men to scrape up huge piles of soil and that horsemen were to stand by the next day. The Characitani laughed at the mighty warriors reduced to manual labor. When the *Caecias* began, Sertorius commanded the horsemen to churn up the piles with their horse's hooves. The powdery soil rose up into the air like a dense dark cloud covering the hillsides. For three days the winds blew the soil clouds into the caves until at last, blind and choking the Characitani surrendered.

One time when warriors returned disheartened after a failed raid, Sertorius arranged for a feeble horse and a robust one to be brought to their camp. He ordered their strongest man to grab the scrawny tail of the feeble horse and yank it off. As the muscled warrior futilely yanked away, Sertorius had a weak man pull the hairs out of the big horse's luxurious tail. Before long the crowd was heckling the muscled man, while the pile of hair grew at the foot of the weak one. The weak man stripped the magnificent horse of his glorious tail. The exhausted strong man had failed. The warriors saw that to conquer all before them they had to wear down a superior enemy by separating it into small parts and attacking with discipline those points of weakest resistance.

In the summer of 77 BC, the remnants of Lepidus' army, twenty thousand soldiers commanded by Marcus Perperna, fled to Hispania. Perperna camped in Terraco, planning to rest his army and operate independently. Perperna's family was noble and wealthy. He may have felt that he should govern Hispania or at least command all its armies. His troops told him differently. When the Senate sent Pompey to Hispania, his arrival on the other side of the Pyrenees caused Perperna's troops to almost mutiny, demanding subordination to Sertorius.

Prominent Romans and Italians exiled by the Sullan Senate fled to Sertorius. They came not to free the Hispanics, but to survive and eventually recover their wealth and rights. To govern Citerior, Sertorius established a Senate made up of former Roman and Italian magistrates. Although Sertorius never referred to this body of some 300 men as a "Senate," they reinforced fears in Rome of Sertorius' grand intentions.

The threat of Pompey entering Hispania's northeast caused the Indicetes and Lacetani to side with Rome. When Contrebia (near Zaragoza) defected, Sertorius laid siege to the city. Pompey used the opportunity to cross the Pyrenees unopposed.

While the troops trained in Roman tactics, Sertorius established an industry of armaments and production plants for the sinews of war. In the spring of 76 BC, Sertorius was no longer a minor guerrilla leader fighting against overwhelming numbers. He had the men and resources for full-scale war. He had the equivalent of four legions encamped in the northern part of the Ebro valley. His three other generals controlled similar numbers in the northeast, east coast and southwest. He had easy access to supply lines, superior mobility, and a thorough knowledge of terrain. The forces of Pompey and Metellus were a well-oiled machine, full of contempt for an

enemy of provincial bandits. Since his Hispanics were still an inexperienced mixture of conflicting talents, Sertorius resorted to the lessons learned under Gaius Marius.

Sertorius adopted the military strategy of cautious aggression. Above all he wanted his commanders to know when to fight and when to delay and never to react with impetuosity. He cautioned that victory was not openness and bravado, but concealment and impact. Know the enemy. Maximize surprise.

Perperna was ordered to protect allied cities in his area and to ambush columns from Pompey. Hertuleius was to continue to contain Metellus without a pitched battle. Herennius awaited orders. Sertorius did not intend to meet Pompey head on, but planned to attack cities with ties to Rome and ambush Pompey coming to their rescue. During the remainder of the year, Pompey made no significant progress garnering support. Metellus stayed put watching how the young wonder boy fared at the hands of a difficult foe.

Sertorius moved first striking the defected city of Lauron near Saguntum. Harassed by Perperna, Sertorius was well entrenched around the city before Pompey arrived. Pompey maneuvered to offer open battle. Sertorius remained in his fortified camp waiting until Lauron surrendered or Pompey withdrew. Sertorius' cavalry only harassed Pompey's foragers nearest his camp, ignoring the more distant. The foragers far from camp were not attacked, became overconfident, and were ambushed. When the guards formed ranks to meet the darting Hispanics, heavy infantry came out of the forest and routed them. Pompey sent Decimus Laelius with a legion to the rescue. Laelius was flanked by cavalry which feigned fight then flight, wheeled around and assaulted his rear. Laelius turned only to be attacked from the other side by heavy infantry. Finding his foragers and guard killed and Laelius surrounded, Pompey sent his entire army to the rescue. Anticipating Pompey's move, Sertorius brought out six thousand heavy infantry hidden behind nearby hills, ready to attack if Pompey entered the plain below. Forced to return to camp or lose even more men, a disheartened Pompey watched as Laelius and his legion were cut to pieces.

Pompey lost ten thousand troops; a third of his forces and their baggage and foraging supplies, but was not about to give up. Sertorius garrisoned a hill commanding Lauron. Pompey surrounded the hill, messaging Laurons to watch him give a lesson to the outlaw. It is said that Sertorius laughed and replied, "To Sulla's pupil, he would give his own lesson; look behind you more carefully than in front." Once again, six thousand heavily armed infantry marched forth from Sertorius' camp. Pompey knew that if he attacked the hill he would be vulnerable to attack from his rear. Frustrated and again outmaneuvered, Pompey watched Lauron surrender.

Why Sertorius did not cut off Pompey, starve his men, and kill them off in small numbers is a great mystery. A colossal blunder or Sertorian strategy? Controlled aggression was designed to wear down the enemy. Wipe out one Roman army and another took its place. Sertorius could only win big battles if the enemy commanders made mistakes. Sertorius held no illusions about returning to Rome. Requests for clemency were unanimously rejected. There was a price on his head. His only hope was a negotiated peace. Bleed the Roman treasury enough and maybe they would negotiate. Unfortunately Sertorius' commanders had other ideas.

As Pompey wintered in the northeast, Sertorius met with emissaries from Mithridates, Eupator of Pontus, requesting officers to train his army and recognition of sovereignty from the "legitimate Roman government in exile." Mithridates offered forty ships and three thousand talents of silver. M. Marius was sent and successfully trained Mithridates forces, but the ships and silver never arrived. Sertorius messaged Mithridates that he had the right to conquer territory that was not the province of Rome. This rhetoric was argued to accuse Sertorius of treason.

Bad news arrived from the south. Hertuleius offered battle. Metellus allowed Hertuleius' men to stand in full armor in the high heat of the day until they wilted, then defeated his half-baked army. Hertuleius fled. Sertorius returned to Lusitania to rebuild his southern army. Metellus readied to move northeast.

In the spring of 75 BC, Pompey advanced down the coast as Metellus moved northeast to join him. Sertorius was again first on the scene, near Valentia. Metellus was his greater threat. Perperna and Herennius were ordered to intercept Pompey at the Turia River. He would meet Metellus near Saetabia. Marching toward Metellus, news arrived that Herrenius was killed and Perperna was retreating toward Sucro. Sertorius rushed back to defeat Pompey before Metellus arrived.

Pompey was eager to beat Sertorius and not share the honors. Pompey quickly he routed Perperna. Sertorius was fighting Pompey's general Afranius when he learned of Perperna's defeat. Rallying Perperna's soldiers, he counter attacked. Pompey was severely wounded and fled the field, narrowly escaping capture by allowing the gold trappings of his horse to be plundered. Sertorius drove Afranius back to his own camp. The contest was a draw. Each side lost ten thousand. Despite the severity of the wound, Pompey was ready the next day for battle. So was Metellus. Sertorius chose not to fight both together and withdrew inland.

Dogged pursuit followed Sertorius into the central mountains. During the confusion, Sertorius' sacred doe was discovered missing causing great consternation. When the sacred white fawn was miraculously returned, there was great rejoicing. Shortly thereafter, Sertorius made ready to strike.

Sertorius turned on his pursuers cutting supply lines, killing foragers, and setting small traps and ambushes. His Romans followers had grown weary of years of guerrilla fighting. They wanted a decisive battle. Although his most capable lieutenants were gone, Sertorius chose to make a stand at Segontia (near Zaragoza).

Sertorius attacked Pompey and killed six thousand, while losing half that number. Metellus destroyed five thousand of Perperna's wing before Sertorius brought in reinforcements. Hispanics were pushing the Romans back. Metellus was at the point of being captured. Fighting on foot with his men, Metellus was struck by a javelin. "Victory," says Plutarch, "changed sides." The inspiration of Metellus ended the fight with a standstill. Next day the Hispanics again routed Metellus' army before being cut off by Pompey. Sertorius needed to regroup and reinforce before assuming the offense. He ordered another general dispersal. He would lead his enemy not on a long wild chase, but to a place he could defend long enough to gather reinforcements. The fox would turn on its hunters when they least expected.

Surrounded by streams on three sides, Clunia was deceptively defensible. Sertorius shored up fortifications while subordinates scoured for reinforcements. To fix his enemy, Sertorius' cavalry damaged the columns of Pompey and Metellus. To reduce the numerically superior Roman cavalry, Sertorius allowed riders to chase his men back to town until they felt comfortable riding up to taunt the inhabitants. One night he trenched the outside wall perimeter with a camouflaged surface. In the morning, infantry formed in front of the wall to provoke a cavalry charge. The attacking horses tumbled their riders into the stake-lined entrenchment.

The cavalry loss was small. The fox was holed. Capture or death was only a matter of time. Taking Sertorius lightly, however, had provided the time to gather reinforcements. Sertorius cut his way through the Roman lines and joined up with his unexpected replacements. The caged

bird had flown the coup and was back in the business of guerrilla warfare as a mobile siege of Hispanic terror.

Metellus wintered in southern Gaul. Pompey camped where he could steal enough food to survive the winter. Messages were sent offering “repatriations with impunity” for deserters from Sertorius below the rank of quaestor. During the winter of Pompey’s discontent, he wrote a scathing letter to the Senate deriding their greed and incompetence, praising his own long hard struggle, failing to mention defeats at Lauron and Segontia, and passing off Sucro as a victory won at Turia. In Rome they said, “Sertorius would come back to Italy before Pompey did.” The Senate sent two legions and “a great quantity of money” to the two *imperatores*.

Pompey had lost ten thousand at Lauro, ten thousand at Sucro and six thousand at Segontia. Starting with thirty thousand men, even if his losses were vastly exaggerated, he was no victor. Metellus originally had four legions; twenty-four thousand soldiers in 80 BC. He had lost parts of two legions at Anas and Langobriga, and had suffered further losses at Italica, Sucro and Segontia. Unsuccessful in open battle, both began a war of attrition. Working independently yet near each other, they captured Sertorius’ allied cities. When Pompey attacked Pallantia (Palencia), chief city of the Vaccaei, Sertorius forced Pompey to desist. As Sertorius rebuilt Pallantia, Pompey and Metellus moved to Calaguris (Calahorra), killing several thousand townspeople before Sertorius could come to their aid. Sertorius held his own while Pompey and Metellus departed one region to plunder another.

74 BC was a year of stand-offs. Pompey wintered in southern Gaul. Metellus returned to Corduba, crowned like a deity because he retired from the field before Sertorius. Roman soldiers deserted Sertorius in great numbers. To maintain control, Sertorius struck at deserters. Reprisals provoked more desertions. To his soldiers, Sertorius of 73 BC was still the best general, but the top ranks reeked with rot. A conspiracy developed. Its leader was Perperna. Learning of the involvement of his Roman officers, Sertorius turned on them, but Perperna escaped detection. To celebrate a victory, a banquet was given. Convinced by his lieutenants to attend, Sertorius lowered his guard. Treachery is a reoccurring theme in Roman history. Like Viriathus before him and Caesar afterward, Sertorius was stabbed to death by a crowd of Roman intimates.

If Sertorius had lived, who knows how long the war would have gone on. Sertorius was never defeated. Leading an untrained, part time army of volunteer farmers, Sertorius had defied Rome for over a decade. Denied his best leaders, Sertorius had taken the field repeatedly and chased away his opponents. With Sertorius gone, the Hispanics dispersed en masse. When Perperna took the field, he was captured hiding in the bushes.

If thousands of Romans died in Hispania, thousands more became the Hispano-Roman population. Caesar conquered Gaul in three years. The IberoCelts were never totally conquered. When Spain was declared a nation at end of the fifteenth century, its rulers were Hispano-Roman-Visigoths, but its people totally Spanish, after two thousand years of fighting invaders had planted the seeds of a nation.

*Author of the upcoming novel, “The Sword Fighter, the saga of an Hispanic Celt who outwitted the Roman,” Richard Dorsey, writes about ancient History by interpreting classical sources a little differently than we were taught in school. For further information, read: “Quintus Sertorius and the Legacy of Sulla,” P. O. Spann; and “Makers of Rome”, Plutarch.*

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