

MACHIAVELLI AS A MILITARY THEORIST

by

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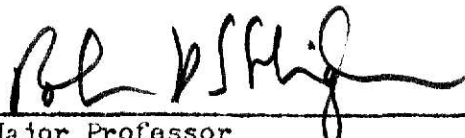
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INTRODUCTION

Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) famous Renaissance statesman and historian of the Republic of Florence was best known for his book, The Prince, in which he analyzed methods of gaining and holding power in a state. Much has been written about this book by scholars and his impact on political and historical thought but little has been written about him as a military thinker. Since Felix Gilbert's article, "Machiavelli: The Renaissance of the Art of War" in Makers of Modern Strategy (1943) the recognition of Machiavelli as a military theorist has gained ground. **This, in turn, has forced a** reconsideration of the influence of his ideas upon subsequent military thought.

Although Machiavelli spoke of war in general terms in The Prince and more from a political viewpoint, the specifics of military science and the theories to which they gave rise, were not spelled out. The search for specifics had to begin elsewhere. His treatises on The Art of War and The Discourses illustrated his military ideas in detail and proposed a method of dealing with the changing nature of warfare in Renaissance Italy.

Warfare was undergoing revolutionary change during his lifetime. War in the feudal system depended on land tenure; the fief was given to the knight by his lord in exchange for his services in war and it was conducted according to a fixed code of ethics in line with Christian teachings. Therefore, the knight who served in the employ of his lord

in time of war fulfilled a religious and moral obligation. The shakiness of this system became evident in Machiavelli's time.

A rising money economy based on trade, as it existed in Venice and Genoa, started to undermine the agricultural base of the medieval military system. Some of the wealthier cities hired mercenaries instead of requiring the aid of knights. For instance, Florence hired Sir John Hawkwood and seven thousand men in 1390 to defend the city against the Milanese. By 1392 Hawkwood had defeated them. Because of this type of development the foundation of permanent professional armies became possible.

Money was the foundation of these mercenary armies. Men who had never been in the army before joined the ranks; personal gain was their end. These adventurers and cutthroats had everything to gain and hardly anything to lose. With the altered make-up of armies, citizens of the more civilized parts of Europe had very little to do with this "new" soldier.

In addition to the change in the composition of armies new weapons and new tactics had their effect. Although artillery and firearms had existed in a crude form as early as the mid-fourteenth century they only came into general use during Machiavelli's lifetime. In the Middle Ages heavy cavalry had been the most influential arm in deciding battles. Infantry could not stand up alone against the shock effect of massed horsemen. The English victories of Crécy (1346) and Poitiers (1356) proved the worth of infantry in conjunction with longbowmen. Cavalry as the principal arm was on its way out. The Swiss Confederation's victories over the troops of Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, at the Battles

of Morat and Nancy in 1476 showed that warfare was in a state of transition. The Swiss countered the cavalry of Charles with pikes (long spears which were held at chest height to combat footmen or planted in the ground to make a "hedgehog", the men being arrayed in ranks of four deep, against cavalry).

Due to these victories, the Swiss tactics became standardized and widely copied. As the military historian Lynn Montross put it: "After their triumph over Burgundy the Swiss could have challenged any army on the Continent" ¹ They became the standard of excellence against which all were measured. Often they were hired as mercenaries by the various contending powers in Italy and they composed the elite units of those armies. So it was that they appeared with the French under Charles VIII in their invasion of Italy in 1494.

That year was the watershed of modern military history. The invasion started the Italian Wars (1494-1525) and showed that warfare, if not completely changed, was at the very least, in a state of transition. As the Italian historian Francesco Guicciardini (friend and contemporary of Machiavelli and the best historian of the period) noted:

A fire and pestilence had entered Italy. States toppled and the methods of governing them changed. The art of war changed too. Before, nearly all of Italy had been divided among five states: the Papacy, Naples, Venice, Milan, and Florence. Each tried to preserve its possessions: each was concerned that no one should occupy anyone else's territory or grow strong enough for the others to fear. For that reason, attention was paid to every slight movement, and a fuss was raised even when only some

tiny castle was at stake. When war did break out, the sides were so evenly balanced, the methods of warfare so slow, and the artillery so inefficient that it took nearly a whole summer to take a castle. Wars were very long, and battles ended with few or no deaths. The French invasion, like a sudden storm, turned everything topsy-turvy. The unity of Italy was broken and shattered, and gone were the care and consideration that each state used to give to common affairs. Seeing cities, duchies, and kingdoms attacked and conquered, everyone sat tight and attended only to his own affairs. No one moved, for fear that a nearby conflagration or the destruction of some nearby place might lead to the burning and destruction of one's own state. Now wars were sudden and violent; entire kingdoms were conquered and captured in less time than it used to take to conquer a village. Sieges were successfully carried out not in months, but in days or hours. Battles were fierce and bloody. And finally, states were maintained, ruined, given, and taken away not by plans drawn up in a study, as used to be the case, but in the field, by force of arms. ²

The French army of 1494 reflected this change in warfare. It was composed of 40,000 infantry of which 10,000 were Swiss mercenaries and approximately 25,000 cavalry. Of the cavalry there were 6500 lancers including 1000 light horse which were used for scouting purposes. The remainder were retainers for the lancers and each lancer had a few attendants armed with cross-bows. ³

Accompanying this army was a siege train of artillery, the like of which had not been seen before by the Italians. The field pieces were mostly made of bronze and were drawn by horses. Considering the heavy iron guns with which the Italians were familiar the French guns were quite an improvement; mobile enough to keep pace with a marching army, they were also more mobile in the field and could fire more rapidly than their Italian counterparts. Ammunition for these guns had altered too. The old stone shot was obsolete, as were the iron bombards that had fired them. However, muzzle-loading artillery was still preferred because it was more effective. Breechloading guns were extant at this time but they were not considered to be too practical because they had the unfortunate tendency of letting too much gas escape when fired, thereby reducing the velocity of the shot.

Another weapon, the arquebus, had improved also. Previously, as during the Hundred Years' War, the weapon had been so large that two men could not handle it easily. By shortening the butt and reducing its weight to thirty pounds the weapon could be handled by one man. Greater range and accuracy was achieved by lengthening the barrel and by making a smaller calibre bullet. With the invention of the matchlock the arm improved further. The British military historian, Sir Charles Oman, describing the matchlock said that a cock and trigger was fixed

. . . on to the original simple tube of the hand-gun, the cock having a hole in it through which passed the string of a long coil of 'match' which was kept continually smouldering. A small pan with 'touch powder' was fitted on to the tube, and

a hole in the pan communicated with the powder inside the tube. When the trigger was pulled and the cock with the smouldering match clashed with the pan, the touch-powder was kindled and passed on its explosion into the main charge inside the barrel.⁴

The arquebus was an important factor during the Italian Wars. It was used effectively by the French, but to an greater extent and with even a greater effect by the Spanish.

MACHIAVELLI'S CAREER

It was in this milieu of war and upheaval in 1494 that Machiavelli obtained a position in the Florentine government. Piero de Medici had surrendered his main fortresses on the approach of Charles VIII. This surrender sparked a popular revolt against Piero and he was driven out of Florence in November 1494. A popular government was set up by the Dominican Friar, Savonarola, and it was at this point that Machiavelli's public career began. Little was heard of him, however, until May, 1494, when he was named Second Chancellor to the Grand Council. This followed the execution of Savonarola who, though he had guided the policies of the Florentine Republic, had run afoul of the church hierarchy by his constant criticism of it. The aristocratic faction, not willing to incur the wrath of the Pope had had him condemned to death and burned at the stake. Shortly thereafter Machiavelli received the job of Secretary to the Council of Ten, (a body dealing with diplomacy and war) a post he held for the next fifteen years.

Because he was the head of the Second Chancery and Secretary to the Committee of Ten all the state business of Florence went through his hands. Showing great administrative ability, he was then entrusted by the republic with diplomatic missions to various states, not as a full ambassador but as a government agent. His first diplomatic errand (1500) was to the court of Louis XII of France. This was the first of many; in a period of fourteen years he went to France five times, once to

Germany, several times to Milan and once to every other Italian state that encroached on Florentine concerns. ⁵

One of his most fruitful experiences on which he drew for his military writings was his mission to Cesare Borgia, whom he accompanied as a diplomatic envoy during his reduction of Romagna and Cimbria. Sent by Soderini (head of the Florentine Republic at this time) in October 1502, ostensibly to negotiate an alliance with the Borgia, Machiavelli's real purpose was to keep an eye on Borgia and report on developments. Florence at this time played a dangerous game; she wished to stay neutral by not offending the French until their intentions became clear (although they had supported Borgia's moves) while at the same time pursuing her own policy of expansion which could only weaken potential allies against Borgia or weaken their own position vis-a-vis the French. ⁶

Another experience which greatly influenced the Florentine Secretary sprang from his duties in regard to the war with the rebellious city of Pisa that Florence had been waging since 1499. He had been intimately involved in one way or another with the war. The heart of the problem for Florence revolved around the pay the mercenaries received. Once in 1499 and again in 1500 the siege of Pisa had collapsed due to outrageous pay demands by Florence's hired soldiers. In both cases, Machiavelli had been sent to convince the mercenaries that their wages would shortly arrive from Florence--all to no avail. ⁷ These experiences in part explain his adamant opposition to the condottieri in general and his proposals for reform.

The war plan for the year 1503 took a different tack; the Florentines

tried to starve Pisa into submission rather than storming the walls. This too failed when the city of Lucca secretly reprovisioned Pisa. In 1504 a plan to divert the Arno River above Pisa in order to deprive her of an outlet to the sea failed because the difficulty of the task had been underestimated by Soderini. So, when the campaign of 1505 began the Florentines reverted to their traditional attack on the walls of the city. This also failed because of the mercenaries' greed along with the harsh discipline of their captain. ⁸

The commander of that army, Antonio Giacomini (member of the Committee of Ten and the army commissioner of Florence) advocated the use of militia from Tuscany as a means of freeing them from reliance on undependable hired armies. After numerous failures in the war with Pisa, the committee had become desperate; they could not afford another debacle.

Giacomini proposed that recruits be garnered from the rural districts and be composed of citizens of the republic. Thus the recruits owed obedience to the civil authority as well as to the military. Mutiny or desertion could then be handled so as to have a direct bearing on the soldier's livelihood; that is, his possessions could be taken by the state and he could be sent into exile if he failed to comply with strict military discipline. ⁹

Some members of the committee opposed the militia but for two different reasons. One faction feared Caesarism on the part of Soderini while the other thought that amateurs such as citizen recruits were just not able to master the complexity of war. In other words, only long-term professionals could be effective against Pisa. Both these objections

were met by the Florentine Secretary's militia ordinance of 1506 which drafted conscripts from the Tuscany countryside rather than the cities as being less likely to support a popular dictatorship, and ones with military tendencies to provide as much skill as possible.

The job of recruiting, organizing and training the Tuscan peasants fell to Machiavelli in 1506; he had full authority to do so. Whenever possible he selected those men who had had some military experience, in addition to other criteria such as physical strength and agility. It was also important that the recruit be of fine moral character because of Machiavelli's belief that it would be hard to discipline and keep under control any soldier who lacked it. ¹⁰

These efforts were interrupted in that year by the routine business of his office so that the project did not really get started until 1507. Even then it took two more years to get the militia ready for action. In 1509 they made their presence felt by preventing reinforcements from reaching the city of Pisa and blocking off canals and the river Arno. Their participation made the difference and the city fell on June 8, 1509. ¹¹

When the Florentine Republic itself fell in September 1512 as a result of the French retreat from Italy (whose power had at least occupied some of Florence's stronger enemies) the Medici returned to Florence-- and to power. Because Machiavelli had opposed them he lost his job and this marked the end of his public career. A little later in 1513 he was accused of being party to a plot to get rid of the Medici, which led to his imprisonment and torture. He did not confess to being involved in the plot but the Medici held him in prison anyway.

After Giuliano de Medici (brother of Piero who ruled Florence)

became Pope Leo X, there was general rejoicing in Florence and Machiavelli was released in the amnesty granted to those who had been involved in the plot. The Medici even pardoned the Soderini. The former Florentine Secretary then retired to his villa outside the city and lived the life of a quiet country gentleman. ¹²

During this time he wrote The Prince (1513), The Discourses on Livy (1516), The Art of War (1519), and The History of Florence (1520). All came out after his death in 1527, except The Art of War. The latter was a reflection upon the practical problems facing any prince who would engage in war. In it, however, Machiavelli also wished to provide solutions for the current problems of Italy.

THE ART OF WAR

The work itself was dedicated to a friend, Lorenzo di Filippo Strozzi, who had introduced him to the Medici. The book was in the form of a dialogue which was a common literary device of the time. Set in the Oricellari Gardens, the conversation supposedly took place in 1516 between Cosimo Rucellai, Zanobi Buondelmonti, Battista della Palla, Luigi Alamanni, and the condottiere leader, Fabrizio Colonna who had just returned to Florence after the Lombard War. All these were friends of Machiavelli except for Colonna.

There were seven subdivisions of the book. The first covered the raising, training, and disciplining of troops. The second considered how best to arm them and their tactical formations. The third illustrated an imaginary battle according to Machiavelli's ideas. The fourth was a consideration of military stratagems, while the fifth related methods of march and stratagems en route. Book six concerned itself with camps and fortifications, while the last book discussed the attack and defense of towns.

Some of the ideas and topics discussed in The Art of War were not new. The De Regimine Principum of Egidio Colonna was a good example of the similarity of Machiavellian ideas to their predecessors. Although St. Thomas Aquinas had started the book in 1280, Colonna, his disciple, finished it. He preferred to compose armies of small, select forces in preference to large armies, but Aquinas' disciple realized such an

ideal was no longer possible. The alternative which he advocated was to press everyone into military service regardless of rank or occupation. Machiavelli said much the same thing later except he placed certain restrictions on the composition of the militia, that is, restricting it to citizens of the Republic of Florence.

The prime inspiration for Colonna, as for the later humanists, became Vegetius, a Roman military writer of the fourth century A. D. Though not a military professional, he was a very astute student of military history. He thought that constant training and exercise comprised relevant preparation for war which would stop the decline in the military virtues of the troops and consequent reliance on mercenaries. The same idea was repeated by Machiavelli: "If I were to conscript an army or establish a militia in a state where none had previously existed, it would be necessary to take the best and most qualified men I could find of all ages--provided they were neither too young nor too old to carry arms--in order to discipline them" ¹³ He also did not like mercenaries. As the former Florentine Secretary stated in The Prince:

The mercenaries and auxiliaries are useless and dangerous, and if anyone supports his state by the arms of mercenaries, he will never stand firm or sure, as they are disunited, ambitious, without discipline, faithless, bold amongst friends, cowardly amongst enemies, they have no fear of God, and keep no faith with men. Ruin is only deferred as long as the assault is postponed; in peace you are despoiled by them, and in war by the enemy. The cause of this is that they have no love or other motive to keep them in the field beyond a trifling wage, which

is not enough to make them ready to die for you. They are quite willing to be your soldiers so long as you do not make war, but when war comes, it is either fly or decamp altogether. I ought to have little trouble in proving this, since the ruin of Italy is now caused by nothing else but through her having relied for many years on mercenary arms. ¹⁴

Another important forerunner of Machiavelli, this one anonymous, wrote the Pulcher Tractatus de Materia Belli, compiled sometime between the years 1290 and 1310. This borrowed heavily from Aristotle, Egidio Colonna, and most of all, Vegetius. Again, as in Colonna's work, the author came out in favor of a militia. ¹⁵ The only drawback seemed to be whether militia troops would be able to obtain the necessary training.

One other point this anonymous author emphasized was stratagems to confuse the enemy rather than direct confrontation. The use of traitors, sedition fostered amongst the civilian population, ambush, and surprise attacks on stragglers were all seen as a legitimate means to defeat a foe. Bloodless victory became the epitome of the military art. Anything, rather than an out-and-out battle, could be done to destroy and demoralize an enemy so he would withdraw or surrender.

Francesco Petrarch, (1304-1374) scholar, poet, and first humanist of the Italian Renaissance, was a predecessor of Machiavelli in his opinion of mercenaries. He can be considered a precursor also in that he thought all mercenaries should be removed from Italy, although he appeared to be lukewarm towards a militia. Further, by condemning hired soldiers as thieves, murderers, and slothful, ignorant barbarians he even sounded like the Florentine Secretary. ¹⁶

Another early work, De Ingeniis Moribus, by Petrus Vergerius, (1404) that paralleled a Machiavellian idea emphasized the importance of physical training along with a variety of exercises as good practice for war. In fact this opinion was commonly voiced in the fifteenth century by a number of educators.¹⁷ The former secretary stressed this with reference to ancient practices:

The ancients, therefore, had very strict laws and ordinances to enforce the constant practice of their exercises in every particular. Their youth were accustomed to run races, to leap, to pitch the bar and to wrestle, all of which result in very necessary qualifications for soldiers.¹⁸

Other forerunners were Matteo Palmieri (1406-1475), a Florentine statesman and Patricius (1412-1494), a humanist. Palmieri criticized mercenaries and instead, wanted to arm the citizens. Patricius urged that military training for all young men be made mandatory. Both expressed ideas similar to predecessors and to Machiavelli.¹⁹

The Art of War itself drew heavily on ancient writers such as Frontinus, Livy, Polybius, Vegetius, and to some extent on Caesar and Xenophon. Machiavelli, like other humanists, borrowed a great deal from ancient writers. Similarly, he sought general laws to explain social life and human activities so that any sequence of events could be controlled.

How much did he borrow from these early writers and what was unique to him?

In the first book of The Art of War Machiavelli discussed the criteria for the selection of soldiers; a topic on which he followed Vegetius for advice. Vegetius, though having little practical experience of war was

a student of military history. His book, Military Institutions of the Romans summarized Roman military theory up to his day (c. 383 A. D.). It was intended to be an instructional work for the armies of Valentinian II. The book did not influence those of his own day, perhaps because it was a bit impractical for that time in not taking into account the changes in methods of warfare. It did, however, influence military practice in the Middle Ages.

Machiavelli, following Vegetius, made the general assertion that men from warmer climates produced soldiers that were quick to act and shrewd, but not especially courageous. Those that came from colder climes though dull-witted were stronger and more courageous than their warmer counterparts. ²⁰

Both writers recommended the recruits be taken from all walks of life so as to have a well-balanced army. The former secretary preferred plowmen, smiths, furriers, carpenters, butchers and hunters for soldiers; he figured the harder the occupation in civilian life, the hardier the soldier. Additionally, those chosen were to be men of good moral character. ²¹

Sometimes, the only criteria on which to select potential soldiers rested on their initial appearance, age, ²² and the area from whence they came. Those from rural areas were to be taken in preference to those from cities. ²³ Ideally they had ". . . quick and lively eyes, muscular necks, wide chests, brawny arms, long fingers, small bellies, round sides, spare legs, and little feet" ²⁴ These qualities indicated strength and endurance and on these points Machiavelli agreed with

Vegetius completely.

Book two covered arms, training, and tactical formations. Some of the significant information contained in this section came from Polybius. He lived between the years 200 and 118 B. C. and came from an influential family in Greece. One of the many hostages sent to Rome after the battle of Pydna (168 B. C.), he became a friend of Scipio Aemilianus, the son of Aemilius Paullus, the Roman commander at the battle. Due to his distinguished friend Polybius travelled quite a bit in the Roman world and gathered a tremendous amount of information for his history. After Herodotus and Thucydides he was the best historian of the ancient world and the best military historian of the three.

Machiavelli discussed the arms and armor of the ancients, not quite as thoroughly as Polybius, but accurately nonetheless.²⁵ He then proceeded to choose what arms were most useful for the armies of his day. The former Florentine Secretary chose Roman arms in preference to the current German because the German weapons were too light. Therefore they could not have withstood an attack by a more heavily armed enemy. The disadvantage of infantry against cavalry, if it existed in the Roman army, did not exist for Machiavelli.²⁶

The Florentine drew on Vegetius again for his ideas about the training of soldiers. This discipline comprised running and leaping to make the men more agile and able to fight. The men also had to be thoroughly trained in the use of their weapons; swords were two or three times heavier in training so that in battle regular swords were easier to wield. Instructors taught them how to thrust with a sword

instead of hacking or slashing using a pole stuck in the ground to represent an opponent. They were also drilled on how to advance on and retire from an individual foe. Swimming was important too since oftentimes there was no other way to cross a river. ²⁷

Another help to training reported by Vegetius and repeated by Machiavelli was the marking of soldiers attire in some manner so they knew exactly to what unit they belonged and what place they took in the ranks. Each soldier had this information on his shield and his helmet. The Florentine thought that was a good idea and one worthy of emulation. ²⁸

The use of sham battles expressed by the Florentine Secretary was borrowed from another ancient writer, Xenophon, born in Athens around 429 B. C. and died about 357 B. C. He was a general, historian, philosopher, and essayist. His most famous work, the Anabasis, retold the story of the Greek mercenaries' fighting march back through Persia to a Greek city on the Black Sea after the collapse of a rebellion against Artaxexes II by Cyrus, his younger brother. The work Machiavelli drew on was a lesser work, Cyropaedia (The Education of Cyrus), which related the rise to prominence of Cyrus the Great, founder of the Persian Empire.

In the Cyropaedia Xenophon emphasized the mock-battle as being especially useful in training soldiers for the real thing. The great Florentine said the same: "A commander inures his men to sham fights in such a manner that they may be desirous, rather than afraid, to enter into a real one. For it is not the natural courage of men that make an army bold, but order and good discipline . . ." ²⁹

One other writer inspired the Florentine Secretary: Frontinus, whose book, Stratagems, was a compilation of historical examples intended to illustrate how to defeat an enemy. His proper name was Sextus Julius Frontinus. Few details of his life were recorded but he was probably born about 35 A. D. He held the office of Water Commissioner of Rome and was elected Consul three times, once in 73 or 74 A. D., again in 98 A. D., and the last time in 100 A. D. He was not without military experience, having been the provincial governor of Britain after his first consulship. While there, he subdued the Silures, a tribe in Wales, and built a road called the Via Julia in that district. He returned to Rome in 78 A. D., and promptly dropped from the sight of history for the next twenty years. More than likely he did his writing at this time. Besides the Stratagems he wrote a book on the Art of War (since lost) and another surviving work, the Aqueducts. He died in 103 or 104 A. D.

Frontinus served more often than not as a source for historical examples to back up Machiavelli's theories. In the fictional battle described in book three the artillery only fired once at the advancing troops because the attackers moved faster than the guns could be reloaded. He based that on the example of the Roman general Ventidius (38 B. C.) against the Parthians. Ventidius had allowed the enemy to advance up to his entrenchments so the Roman troops were subjected to as few volleys of arrows as possible when they came forward to engage the Parthians. ³⁰

Another reason put forward for the ineffectiveness of artillery was that it produced clouds of smoke, thus blinding or obscuring the vision of those who fired it. Machiavelli cited the example of Epaminondas

(Theban general who defeated the Spartans at the battle of Leuctra in 371 B. C.) ". . . who while going to engage the enemy, had all his light cavalry trot back and forth in the front of their army; this raised such a dust that it threw them into disorder and gave him an easy victory over them." ³¹ Frontinus' statement on the event implied something else. It gave the impression that the dust indicated an attack by Theban cavalry. "Then when he [Epaminondas] had filled the eyes of the enemy with clouds of dust and had caused them to expect an encounter with cavalry, [my italics] he led his infantry around to one side, where it was possible to attack the enemy's rear from higher ground, and thus by a surprise attack, cut them to pieces." ³² Here was an obvious example of Machiavelli altering facts to support his theories.

Battles were an important part of any campaign--then and now. Book four of The Art of War covered the specifics of fighting a battle, most of this part being based on Frontinus and Livy. Livy was used by the former secretary as a corroborative source for those examples that dealt with the Second Punic War. Livy's real name was Titus Livius, born at Pavia in 59 B. C. and died in the year 12 or 17 A. D. He had studied Greek and Latin authors to write his monumental history of Rome. Originally a work in 142 books, only 35 have survived. Of these the first ten dealt with the period from the founding of the city in 753 to 292 B. C.; the rest discussed the period from 219 to 167 B. C., with the Second Punic War being the most important topic covered. The books were noted chiefly for their literary style, rather than strict adherence to historical fact.

When to fight was very important to Machiavelli. He urged that the

general should not be too eager to enter into a battle. It was better to wait and ". . . let his the enemy's men wait under arms for some hours until their ardor is abated and then come out of your entrenchments and engage him. . ." ³³ The odds were even better if the commander waited until the enemy was at a moral disadvantage, that is, forcing him to engage when his religion forbade him, as with Vespasian fighting the Jews on their sabbath (70 A. D.) or forcing him to go against a superstition, as Caesar did when he forced Ariovistus, king of the Germans, to fight when the moon was on the wane (58 B. C.). ³⁴

All factors should be considered before engaging the enemy, even the direction from which the wind blew and the place of the sun in the sky. The general should have his men placed in such a manner that the wind would not be against him. A high wind against a thrusting sword lessened the effect of blows on the enemy. Similarly sun in the eyes of the troops blinded them. ³⁵

The tactical alignment of forces was of great importance. The general arranged his forces in a manner to take advantage of the weakness in the enemy's line while exploiting one's own advantages. For this Machiavelli cited Scipio's defeat (206 B. C.) of Hasdrubal, brother of Hannibal, in the Second Punic War. He reported that the decisive movement occurred when Scipio switched his best forces from the center of his line to the wings. Hasdrubal had expected Scipio's best troops to be in the center but the rearrangement meant Scipio's best troops faced Hasdrubal's worst. It became an easy victory for Scipio because Hasdrubal's flanks were crushed. ³⁶

Continuing, Machiavelli emphasized meeting the enemy on his terms

when it could not be avoided and ways in which that could be done. The example given was that of Scipio against Hannibal (Zama, 202 B. C.). Hannibal had placed his best troops in his second line, so Scipio joined together his principes and triarii

. . . so that the intervals among the principes were occupied by the triarii and there was no room left to receive the hastati; hence he had them open to the right and left and wheel off to the flanks. But remember that this method of opening the first line to make room for the second to advance cannot be used except when you have the advantage over the enemy . . . ³⁷

To further illustrate contending against a well-equipped enemy using novel tactics Machiavelli retold the battle Sulla fought against Archelaus (Pontic general) in 86 B. C. Here the problem was scythe-bearing chariots which could cut a swath of destruction through any foe's line. The solution used by Sulla was to place obstacles in front of his first line such as rows of sharp stakes and palisades. This stopped Archelaus' chariots from reaching the first line. Because Sulla had placed his light and heavy infantry in the front ranks with intervals between he was able to mount a counter-attack with his light infantry and light cavalry. This defeated the enemy. ³⁸ Later in the book the use of obstacles was advocated for use against cavalry and artillery.

So far only methods of aligning troops for battle had been discussed. What of battle itself? One of the best ways to defeat an enemy according to Machiavelli was to throw him off balance and confuse his troops so they panicked. One accomplished this in various ways. A rumor could be