MILITARY DECORATIONS AND THE BRITISH WAR

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An inscription from Cyrene gives the details of the career of C. Iulius Karus. The posts he held in the first two militiae contain many points of interest. The inscription was first published and studied by Professor Eric Birley:

C. Iulio C. f. Vo[.] Karo ex provincia Narbonensi, trib. mil. leg. III Cy[r.], praef. coh. II Astyrum eq.,
(5) donato bello Britannico [or]. murali corona vallari cor. aurea hasta pura,
[c]entyriones et milites leg. III Cyr. et leg.
(10) [X]XII missi in provinciam [Cyrenensem] dilectus caussa.

He pointed out that the terminus post quem for the cohort's coming to Britain was 89, when the cohort as part of the army of Lower Germany under the command of the governor, A. Buccius Lappius Maximus, received the titles pia fidelis Domitiana for its loyalty in resisting the rebellion of the governor of Upper Germany, L. Antonius Saturninus. However, by 105 cohors II Asturum had been transferred to Britain, as a diploma of that year shows. The terminus ante quem was 128, by which date these two legions had ceased to be stationed.

1. *AE* 1951, 88, which reads [Cyrenesium in line 11.
2. E. Birley, 'Britain after Agricola and the End of the Ninth Legion', *Roman Britain and the Roman Army* (1953) 20–30, especially 22–24; this paper was first published in *Durham University Journal* XL, June 1948, 78–83.


in Egypt. As Hadrian was not generous in awarding military decorations, Birley assigned the British War to the reign of Trajan. He also pointed out that Cyrenaica was unlikely to be a fruitful recruiting area during the Jewish Revolt of Trajan’s last years. He noted that between 103 and 117 cohors I Cugernorum had received various titles of honour and became cohors I Ulpia Traiana Cugernorum civium Romanorum; its men had presumably been awarded en bloc Roman citizenship as a reward for valour in the same British War. 5

However, since Birley wrote his paper, several pieces of evidence have appeared which point strongly to the fact that this dating is too late. The letters of C. Iulius Apollinarius show that he was recruited into legio III Cyrenaica which was transferred from Egypt to be the first garrison of the new province of Arabia in 105. 6 Secondly, two milestones have been discovered in Cyrenaica, both dated to 100, and each recording the construction of roads per tirones lectos ex provincia Cyrensis. 7 That the recruits enlisted by Karus and the recruits building the roads belong to the same period is an extremely tempting, if not virtually inescapable, conclusion. 8 When allowance is made for Karus to have finished his service in Britain, been transferred to Egypt, and subsequently assigned to his recruiting mission in Cyrenaica, it seems inevitable that the British War must belong to the last years of Domitian’s reign. However, it is hard to make such a date fit in with the known changes of frontier policy attested by archaeology. The dating seems too late for the abandonment of Inchtuthil and the Agricolan forts in North Scotland with the withdrawal from Strathmore to the Forth-Clyde line in c. 87; equally it seems too early for the abandonment of the rest of Scotland and the adoption of a new frontier line on the Tyne-Solway isthmus c. 105; for the former there is no evidence to suggest enemy action, for the latter many forts were destroyed by fire, though not necessarily at the hands of the enemy. 9 With this new dating there is thus no link between the events for which Karus received his awards and those for which cohors I Cugernorum was decorated; indeed, it may even be that this unit was temporarily transferred as part of a vexillatio Britannica and won its

5. CIL XVI 48 and 69.
7. AE 1951, 210; 1957, 133.
decorations in Trajan’s Second Dacian War or even his Parthian Campaigns.10

As Birley rightly pointed out, Karus received military decorations on a very lavish scale, three crowns and a silver spearshaft; this is far more than an equestrian officer on the most junior militia would normally have received.11 Thus Cn. Octavius Titinius Capito, on the second militia and therefore senior to Karus, received only one crown and one spearshaft from Domitian.12 This lavish award of decorations to Karus cannot be paralleled for any member of the equestrian militia; consequently, it seems inevitable to suppose that he must have performed some extremely heroic and memorable feat to have earned such honours. It is therefore surprising that no mention was made on his tombstone of what this was; it was standard policy on such inscriptions at the very least to say that the decorations were awarded ob virtutem and at times the citation itself was quoted.13 What is even more surprising is that the cohort he commanded, when he won these honours, received no honours itself. It might have been expected that it would have received en bloc Roman citizenship or an imperial name to add to its titles as a battle honour, as in the case of cohors I Cugernorum; it might also have been awarded the right to decorate its standards with torques and be called torquata or other decorations, such as armillae, or to have received some title, such as invicta or felix.14 This sharp contrast between the commander and his unit is noteworthy.

In short, the circumstances in which Karus won his decorations seem most mysterious. He received decorations on an unparalleled lavish scale, yet his unit received none; his great feat was not mentioned on his otherwise quite fulsome epitaph nor was the name of the emperor who had bestowed such rewards so generously; there is no literary, archaeological, epigraphic, or numismatic evidence for a British War at this time. However, the sole known fact about Britain in the period 89–96 may provide the key which explains


12. CIL VI 798 = ILS 1448.


these puzzles. During the terror of these last years of his reign Domitian had Sallustius Lucullus, the governor of Britain, executed; the reason given was that he had armed troops with a new type of weapon named after himself.\(^{15}\) It is very probable that, as governor of the largest army in the West, he was involved – or at least suspected of involvement – with the carefully planned but unsuccessful rebellion of Saturninus.\(^{16}\) The fact that Maximus burnt all of Saturninus’s papers strongly suggests that other governors had been in touch with Saturninus.\(^{17}\) It might be that Lucullus was one of the \textit{viri militares} who objected to Domitian’s new policy of non-expansion.\(^{18}\) Whatever the real reason for Lucullus’s execution was, his behaviour was deemed to be treason. As his Foot Guards (\textit{pedites singulares}) were soon removed from the province and ever afterwards seem to have been given a special separate but inferior status, it would appear that their loyalty, rightly or wrongly, had come under suspicion and Domitian had taken steps against them.\(^{19}\)

It may be considered that Karus received his exceptionally high rewards for some outstanding act of loyalty towards the emperor at the time of Lucullus’s ‘treason’; perhaps he provided Domitian with secret information about Lucullus or acted resolutely in preventing the spread of the treason. Whether or not it is a mere coincidence that \textit{cohors II Asturum} was transferred from Lower Germany, is not known.\(^{20}\) One may note as a parallel that in the period of the civil wars of 69 L. Antistius Rusticus, \textit{tribunus legionis II Augustae}, received decorations appropriate for a legionary legate; Tacitus records that it was this very legion that swung the army of Britain over to Vespasian’s side, and it is clear that the new emperor gave Rusticus far higher decorations than he was entitled to, plus adlection to the rank of ex-praetor, as a reward for the


\(^{16}\) See note 3. The connection is made by Frere, o.c., 119; A. R. Birley, o.c., 68; \textit{Cambridge Ancient History} XI (1936) 174; A. Garzetti, \textit{From Tiberius to the Antonines} (1974) 271. One may note that A. R. Birley, o.c., shows at least thirteen governors of Germany transferred to govern Britain and it must remain a possibility that Lucullus had governed one of the Germanies in the 80’s; Ritterling, o.c. shows enough blanks in the \textit{fasti} at this period.

\(^{17}\) Dio 67, 11.


\(^{19}\) Birley, o.c., 22; R. W. Davies, ‘Singulares and Roman Britain’, \textit{Britannia} 7, 1976, forthcoming. It should be noted that Domitian transferred various of the German units as a result of the revolt.

\(^{20}\) As the troops of Lower Germany helped to crush the revolt, it is perhaps possible that the transfer of Karus was used as a cover for the arrest of Lucullus. Domitian was an expert at such ploys, Frontinus, \textit{Strat.} 1, 1, 8.

\(^{21}\) AE 1925, 126; Tacitus, \textit{B.} 3, 44; Domaszewski, o.c., 184. The client king Cogidubnus was probably given a palace at Fishbourne for winning over civilians at the same time; B. Cunliffe, \textit{Fishbourne: A Roman Palace and its Garden} (1971) 168; J. Wacher, \textit{The Towns of Roman Britain} (1974) 257–60.

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services he had rendered during these troubled times. There are other parallels for officers receiving unusual rewards for the role they play in the suppression of coups, conspiracies, and rebellions, or being on the winning side in a civil war. It was policy on inscriptions not to refer specifically to such civil wars or treachery but to have some vague phrase. One may note that Maximus, who crushed the revolt of Saturninus, was described as confector belli Germanici; he was transferred by Domitian very quickly to the key Eastern province of Syria and can scarcely have had time to campaign against his ex-colleague's barbarian allies; one must assume that the 'German War' was a euphemism for the suppression of the revolt. It thus seems highly probable that Karus received his awards for a parallel 'British War' that was the suppression of another governor. It may be noted that Maximus received the prestigious rewards of the governorship of Syria, a second consulship in 95, and the appointment as pontifex, while the procurator of Pannonia, Norbanus, was subsequently appointed Pretorian Prefect for his role in preventing the revolt spreading to the armies of the Danube. On the death of Domitian his memory was damned; consequently, Karus's recruiting party could mention the decorations but neither the emperor who had given them, nor the circumstances under which they had been won. With these considerations the mysterious pieces of the jigsaw seem to fit into place and form a coherent picture: C. Iulius Karus received his unparalleled lavish awards for the conspicuous part he played in the fall of the treacherous governor of Britain, Sallustius Lucullus, at some time in the period 89–96.

Attention may be drawn to the nomenclature of one of the British units.

22. E.g. Michael Grant, *Nero* (1974) 215–216 for special awards made as a result of the suppression of the Pisonian conspiracy. I am indebted to Dr Valerie Maxfield for the following examples: Nonius Asprenas (no recorded military service), probably for his role in the suppression of the Pisonian conspiracy (*AE* 1952, 232 = *IRT* 346); Antonius Naso, probably for involvement in suppression of the revolt of Vindex (*CIL* III 14387 = *ILS* 9199); Valerius Festus received awards on a consular scale for deeds performed as a praetorian, presumably securing Africa for Vespasian (*CIL* V 531 = *ILS* 989).


After the death of Domitian his name was deliberately not mentioned; cf. *CIL* VI 472 = *ILS* 274: *libertati ab imperatore Nerva Caesare Augusto anno ab urbe condita DCCC-XXXIX Xlll k act restitutae s p q R."

24. *CIL* VI 1347 = *ILS* 1006; *Assa*, o.c., 37; Gsell, o.c., 210, 250.

The diploma of 98 includes cohors I Fida Vardullorum civium Romanorum.\textsuperscript{26} Of the seven cohorts attested in Britain which were or which became military, this is the only one that was ever awarded en bloc Roman citizenship. Of the fifty quingenary cohorts attested as part of the British garrison only one or two could possibly have been awarded Roman citizenship in the first century in Britain.\textsuperscript{27}

Consequently, this cohort must have rendered conspicuous service to be so honoured. Equally notable is the other honour awarded to this unit, the title fida. All the units in Germany had been awarded the titles pia fidelis Domitiana (though the last was dropped after the emperor's death) which were tacked on to the end of each unit's nomenclature, as was noted above.\textsuperscript{28}

Cohors I Vardullorum was awarded the title fida, which was placed in the far more distinguished and prestigious position before the tribal name, a place normally reserved for such imperial titles as Augusta and Flavia.\textsuperscript{29} No other auxiliary unit in Britain was ever awarded the title fida or a non-imperial name in this honoured position;\textsuperscript{30} indeed, this practice is hard to parallel for any military unit in the entire Empire.\textsuperscript{31} Clearly the men of cohors I Vardullorum performed some exceptional act that won them all immediate Roman citizenship and their unit the unique title fida displayed in a unique position, proudly declaring that they had displayed outstanding loyalty, clearly to the emperor and clearly at a time of crisis. As this title is first attested on this diploma, the cohort must have received the awards by 98 at latest.\textsuperscript{32} Had they been awarded under Agricola, Tacitus could scarcely have not mentioned the reflected honour to his father-in-law. The conclusion seems inevitable: cohors

\textsuperscript{26} CIL XVI 43.
\textsuperscript{27} Only seven quingenary cohorts are attested with en bloc Roman citizenship: I Baetastorum does not have it in any diploma and so presumably acquired it in c. 140 (cf. RIB 2170); II Nerviorum does not have it on any diploma and so presumably won it after that of 146; I Thracum c R is not attested in Britain before the third century; I Ulpia Traiana Cugernorum acquired the titles and citizenship in the years 103–117 (see notes 5 and 10); I Ulpia c R is a Trajanic creation. Only II Vasconum (not created until 69) and I Afrorum (attested only by 122 diploma) are possible candidates and could easily have been sent to Britain, already with citizenship, in late first or early second century.

\textsuperscript{28} See above, note 3; Walser, o.c., 505; Gsell, o.c., 256-257.

\textsuperscript{29} E.g. the British units I Ulpia Traiana Cugernorum, I Aelia Classica, I Aelia Dacorum, I Augusta Bracarum.

\textsuperscript{30} The present writer believes that possibly ala I Asturum was awarded the title praetoria in the Severan campaigns and this appears on RIB 1334 = ILS 4828 and RIB 1337; Chiron 6, 1976, 'The ala I Asturum in Roman Britain'.

\textsuperscript{31} C. Cichorius in REI (1894) 1226–1227, 1240 and IV (1901) 234, 284–285 cites no other parallels. The only other possibility is ala I Flavia fida vindex (?) of Germany in CIL V 538 and XIII 8307; Alfeldy, o.c., 14–16 assigns the title fida to the civil war of 69.

\textsuperscript{32} This is a standard issue diploma, not a special award for valour in the field before normal discharge time, as with CIL XVI 160. It is here assumed that the title fida and the en bloc citizenship were awarded simultaneously.
I Vardullorum was outstandingly loyal and received appropriate honours. In short, the unique decorations and rewards received by C. Iulius Karus and cohors I Vardullorum make perfect sense in the context of loyalty to the emperor Domitian at the time of the treachery of the governor, Sallustius Lucullus.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{33} There must have been other measures taken by Domitian. Possibly other units were transferred from Germany to Britain (see above, note 19); Alfoldy, \textit{o.c.}, shows numerous possibilities. One may wonder if it was as a result of the behaviour of Lucullus that Domitian in his last years planned two new \textit{coloniae} at Lincoln and Gloucester; Wacher, \textit{o.c.}, 120, 137, 430–431; these would have acted as bulwarks of loyalty, cf. Tacitus, \textit{A.} 12, 32.
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