

# Hannibal

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When Hannibal was twenty-eight years old he had received a soldier's training through nineteen years in camp. He had disciplined his body to hardship, his appetite to moderation, his tongue to silence, his thought to objectivity. He was "the first to enter the battle, and the last to abandon the field", according to Livy...The Romans accused him of avarice, cruelty, and treachery, for he honored no scruples in seizing supplies for his troops, punished disloyalty severely...Yet we find him often merciful, always chivalrous. The Romans could not readily forgive him for winning battles with his brains rather than with the lives of his men...Hannibal led his troops north...and then struck eastward into the Alps. Celtic tribes had crossed those ranges before him...but he had difficulty getting his elephants through narrow or precipitous passages. After a climb of nine days, he reached the summit and found it covered with snow...His army of 59,000 was reduced to 26,000 by the time he reached the plains of Italy, so great were the hardships. Fortunately, he was welcomed as a liberator by the Cisalpine Gauls, who joined him as allies. The Roman settlers fled southward across the Po River.

Rome mobilized all its resources and called upon all the states in Italy to defend the land. The Romans raised an army of 300,000 foot, 14,000 horse, and 456,000 reserves. Hannibal won two battles in North Italy, but he knew he was still outnumbered 10 to 1. He failed to persuade the Italian states to join him, and his Gallic "allies" were losing heart. The Romans attacked Hannibal at Cannae with 80,000 infantry, and 6000 cavalry. Hannibal had 19,000 Carthaginian and Spanish veterans, 16,000 unreliable Gauls, and 10,000 horse. He placed the Gauls at his center, expecting them to give way, which they did. When the Romans followed them into the pocket, his veterans closed in on the Roman flanks and the cavalry attacked from behind. The Romans lost all chance of maneuvering, and 44,000 fell in one day's battle, including eighty senators who had enlisted as soldiers. This battle ended

the days of Roman reliance upon infantry and set the lines of military tactics for two thousand years.

Hannibal's defeat of the Roman legions at Cannae shattered Rome's hold on the southern Italian states. Several joined Hannibal, and Carthage sent some reinforcements and supplied. For a month, the city of Rome was hysterical in terror. The class war ceased, and all citizens rushed to the aid of the state. Every male who could carry weapons was enlisted and served voluntarily without pay. Rome settled in for a defense against the Lion of Carthage.

But Hannibal did not come! His 40,000 were too small a force against a city to whose defense would come many armies on a moment's notice. If he took Rome, how could he hold it? Hannibal decided to wait until Carthage, Greece (Macedon), and Syracuse could unite with him in an offensive that would retake Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, and Illyria. He released all but a few of the Roman captives and took his troops to winter in Capua.

After a winter of relaxation and pleasure in one of the vice capitals of the world, Hannibal's soldiers were never again the invincible troops which had borne so much hardship. During the next five years Hannibal led them to some minor successes, using Capua as his HQ. The Romans besieged this city with 200,000 legionnaires, and Hannibal was forced to retire to the south of Italy.

Meanwhile, a Roman army had been sent to Spain to keep Hasdrubal, Hannibal's brother, occupied. Hasdrubal was defeated at the Ebro River, but the Romans lost their gains when their leaders were killed. Hasdrubal's main force escaped, crossed the Pyrenees into Gaul and the Alps into Italy. He sent a message to Hannibal with his plans for reinforcing him, but the message was intercepted by the Romans. Despite his excellent generalship, Hasdrubal was defeated by the Romans before he could reach Hannibal. Hasdrubal went to his death in combat rather than face imprisonment and disgrace by the Romans.

In 205 B.C. a new Roman army was raised, sailed for Africa, and attacked Carthage. The Carthaginians appealed to Hannibal to come to their aid. Imagine the feelings of this half-blind warrior, driven into a corner of Italy by an endless stream of enemies, seeing all his toil and hardship of fifteen years brought to nothing, and all his triumphs wasted. Half his troops refused to leave Italy with him. He landed near Carthage, hastily formed a new army, and went out to face Scipio Africanus at Zama, fifty miles south of Carthage (202 B.C.).

The two generals met in courteous interview, found agreement impossible, and joined battle. For the first time in his life, Hannibal was defeated. More than 20,000 Carthaginians were left dead on the field. Hannibal attacked Scipio in personal combat, wounding him. He attacked the leader of the Numidian cavalry, Masinissa, reformed his disorganized forces again and again, and led them in desperate countercharges. Seeing conditions hopeless, Hannibal fled to Carthage and advised the Senate there to sue for peace. Rome settled with Carthage on the following terms:

- Carthage was allowed to retain her African empire
- She was to surrender all war vessels except ten triremes
- She was not to make war against anyone outside Rome or within it without Rome's consent
- She was to pay Rome \$720,000 per year for fifty years

This Second Punic War changed the Mediterranean in a way that is still being felt in the Twentieth Century A.D.

- It gave Spain and all its wealth to Rome, providing funds for Roman conquest of Greece
- It reunited Italy under Rome's unquestioned mastery
- It threw open all routes and markets to Roman ships and goods
- It ravaged or injured half the farmland in Italy, destroyed 400 towns, killed 300,000 men, from

which southern Italy has not quite recovered to this day.

- It weakened democracy by showing that a popular assembly cannot wisely choose generals or direct a war
- It began the transformation of Roman life and morals by hurting agriculture and helping trade, by taking men from the countryside and teaching them the violence of the battlefield, and by bringing new money to finance luxuries and imperialistic expansion.
- In short, the war with Carthage was a pivotal event for almost every phase of Roman history.

To Carthage it was the beginning of the end. Their government became so corrupt that the people again called for Hannibal to come out of retirement and save the nation. He was elected leader in 196 B.C. He punished corruption and virtually eliminated graft. He relieved the citizens of some of the most burdensome taxes.

To get rid of Hannibal, the rich merchants secretly sent word to Rome that Hannibal was plotting to renew the war. Scipio used all his influence to protect his friendly rival, but was overruled. The Roman Senate demanded the surrender of Hannibal. Hannibal fled the city, rode 150 miles to Thapsus, and took ship for Antioch. He found Antiochus III hesitating between war with Rome and peace; he advised war and became one of the king's staff. When the Romans defeated Antiochus at Magnesia (near Ephesus) in 189 B.C., they made it a condition of peace that Hannibal be turned over to them.

Hannibal escaped, first to Crete, then to Bithynia. The Romans hunted him down and surrounded his hiding place with soldiers. Hannibal said, "Let us relieve the Romans from the anxiety they have so long experienced, since they think it tries their patience too much to wait for an old man's death." He drank the poison he carried with him and died at the age of 67. A few months later, his conqueror and admirer, Scipio, followed him in death. In a final war with Carthage lasting from 151 to 146 B.C., Rome completely annihilated the Carthaginians and razed their cities to the ground, sowing them with salt.