

## Hannibal

[1] Most people will recall Hannibal for his crossing of the Alps with elephants. But history remembers him as the greatest Carthaginian general who waged a formidable war against the elite Roman power during the Second Punic War. Having won almost every battle he fought, Hannibal proved to be a military genius of his time whose tactics are still studied in modern military academies. From 218 to 201 BC, the ancient western world was turned into a battlefield as Hannibal extended his war from Spain to Italy. His influence and power during the Second Punic War was without boundary. So it seemed until the end of the war.

[2] It was around 247 BC, in Carthage, when Hannibal was born. He was the first son born to Hamilcar Barca, the great Carthaginian general who fought in the First Punic War. At the age of nineteen, Hannibal was taken to an altar where his father had him swear an oath to always be an enemy of Rome. Perhaps much of this hatred can be understood by first understanding his father and the First Punic War. Just as the Carthaginians had dominated the Mediterranean and prospered greatly from trade, the Romans were also growing in power. As Carthage extended its presence closer to Rome, both powers struggled for territories in the Mediterranean, including Sicily, and eventually went to war. Rome, the victor of this war, took over all the territories that once belonged to Carthage. Thus expanding Rome's empire and power. The defeat came as great humiliation to Hamilcar for he was supposed to be a great general who never knew defeat. He despised the enemy that had brought this shame upon him. Thus a legacy of hatred toward Romans and a thirst for revenge passed down to Hannibal.

[3] In 237 BC, Hannibal accompanied his father in his conquest of Spain. Hamilcar Barca died around 230 BC wherein Hasdrubal, his son-in-law, succeeded in Spain. The Romans were wary of Carthaginian interests in Western Europe and sent emissaries to meet with Hasdrubal. A treaty was formed whereupon the Ebro river would become the boundary separating Roman and Carthaginian spheres of influence. Hasdrubal was assassinated in 221 BC. The army chose Hannibal as his successor as commander in chief. He was only 25 years old at this time but his experience and expertise in military warfare had prepared him to lead this great army.

[4] In almost 2 years, he captured all of Spain after a few battles with native Barbarian tribes. **Although he fought and drove the Barbarians out of their homes or put them into slavery, Hannibal had a deep admiration and respect for their culture.** So much so that he married a Spanish princess by the name of Imilce who gave birth to a son. His resounding victory in Spain came as a threat to the city of Saguntum which, although allied with Rome, was located in Carthaginian territory, south of the Ebro. The Romans warned Hannibal that any harm brought to the city would leave Rome with no choice but to step in and confront the Carthaginian force. Hannibal ignored this threat and, in 219 BC, he attacked Saguntum and seized the entire city. The battle for Saguntum lasted for over 8 months and left Hannibal seriously wounded, but victorious. The Romans demanded Carthage to surrender Hannibal or face all-out war. Carthage refused to turn him in and accepted their ultimatum.

[5] This was the beginning of the Second Punic War in 218 BC. At this time, Publius Cornelius Scipio was a consul for Rome. He gathered an army and was ordered to stop Hannibal and his troops from getting closer to Italy. His plan was simple: to attack both Spain and Carthage, forcing Hannibal to retreat from his conquest to defend his homeland and territories. When he was at his most vulnerable, Scipio would kill Hannibal. **Fully aware that Rome's Navy held supremacy over the seas, Hannibal realized that an invasion of Spain and Carthage was almost inevitable.** He was also aware that the Romans were too great of a power to take head on. His plan was to invade Italy at its heart and cut their supply lines and completely disrupt their

forces. After hearing that Romans were closely guarding Italy's coastlines, he planned to attack from the Alps. He reasoned that the Romans would not expect him to travel through that route.

[6] During the winter of 218, his plan was set into motion as he made preparations for carrying out the war. Hannibal left Spain with about 90,000 troops; 12,000 men in cavalry. His army consisted of highly skilled Numidian archers and horsemen, Balearic slingers, heavy infantry of spearmen of Lybia, Gallic and Iberian tribesmen, cavalry from Phoenicia, and of course his war elephants. To protect Spain from an attack by Rome, he left his brother, Hasdrubal, to protect it while he was gone. Hannibal crossed the Ebro in late April of 218. [A] He seized the coastal plains in northern Spain. [B] Although it was inhabited by Greek settlers who were allied with Rome, there was little resistance. [C] He stationed troops to guard his coastline in case Rome would invade it. [D] Upon traveling north toward the Pyrenees, Hannibal's troops were met with hostile Barbarian tribes who were swiftly defeated. There were many casualties. This combined with the detachment of a large number of his men who were sent back to guard Spain, reduced Hannibal's army by 50,000 men. Nevertheless, he advanced still and reached the River Rhone. There were Barbarian tribes on the opposite side of the River who opposed his crossing. Hannibal cunningly defeated the tribesmen by sending troops further upstream to flank them from the rear. More skirmishes with barbarian tribes after crossing the Rhone further weakened his forces. To replace lost soldiers, Hannibal recruited men from Celtic tribes who shared Hannibal's hatred for Rome.

[7] Meanwhile, Publius Cornelius Scipio was planning the attack on Spain. His army sailed from Italy to Marsilia (modern day Marseille). Expecting a face-to-face confrontation with Hannibal, he later realized that Hannibal had already crossed the Rhone and was nearing Italy. Scipio had missed Hannibal completely because Hannibal had managed to evade his pursuit. By traveling north, almost parallel to the Rhone, he was able to throw off Roman scouts. Hannibal then proceeded to cross the Alps. The terrain was treacherous and left his army more dwindled and weakened. In one instance, an ambush on a mountain trail left a bloody scene as combatants from the Allobroge sent boulders from cliff-sides crashing down upon Hannibal's forces. Through rugged terrain and dark gorges, his men faced assaults from the rear, which sent both soldiers and animals into a panic and disrupted the ranks. Hannibal's military genius came into play when he ordered his men to leave the campsite fully lit one night. This tricked the Allobroge scouts into thinking the troops were resting for the night. So they returned to their homes. At this time, Hannibal moved men up the cliff-sides to hide and ambush the Allobroges when they returned the next day. The tactic permitted his victory but at the price of many casualties and loss in much needed time. The journey through the mountains was very dangerous. Landslides and starvation claimed the lives of man and animal. [A] The bitter cold was too much to bare for the soldiers and even more for the elephants who were used to African climates. [B] The Gauls, anxious to defeat the Romans themselves, promised to support Hannibal and join him in his conquest. [C] By recruiting more Gauls and various Gallic tribesmen, Hannibal was able to sustain his army's strength. [D]

[8] Hannibal's army first met the Romans at the battle near the Ticino river. His strategy of enveloping the enemy after encircling them with his lines of cavalry and troops resulted in a sound victory. Scipio had fought in this battle and it left him severely wounded. The Romans were very battered and forced to withdraw. Hannibal did not stop there. Under the command of his brother, Mago, infantry and cavalry were sent to harass the Romans early in the day as they were eating. The cavalry acted as "bait" and drew the Romans across the Trebbia river. On the other side of the river awaited the rest of Hannibal's men. After clashing with the Carthaginian army, the Romans retreated when they realized how completely outnumbered they were. The ambush killed almost 20,000 Romans.

[9] Hannibal and his men entered Italy and continued to travel South. After suffering from an eye infection, Hannibal lost sight in one eye during his trek through the Appenine mountains. Nevertheless, he pushed deeper into Italy. His men were able to outmaneuver two Roman armies that were stationed at the west and east routes of the mountains. Yet the Romans, led by general Flaminius, pursued Hannibal. Hannibal set up his ambush near Lake Trasimeno. His men lit fires at the top of the Tuoro hills. The low visibility

due to fog deceived the Romans into believing that Hannibal's troops appeared farther away than they were and drew them further into a trap. It was on June 24, 217 BC when he attacked the Romans at the Battle of Trasimeno. Again, his lines of cavalry and troops were set up to encircle the enemy. The Romans had their back against Lake Trasimeno with no means to escape. The result was a massacre in which very little Romans were left alive.

[10] The Battle of Cannae, the greatest battle Hannibal fought, was a shining moment in his continuing victories. In the spring of 216 BC, Hannibal engaged the Romans at a large supply depot in Cannae, located in central Italy. [A] The Romans had a massive infantry force that numbered twice as many as Hannibal's. [B] Once again, military strategy proved to be in Hannibal's favor. [C] While both armies advanced against each other, Hannibal's forces gradually pulled back, drawing the Romans closer into their lines while his army encircled them. [D] His brother, Hasdrubal, was successful in destroying the Roman cavalry and slaying infantry men as he snuck behind the Roman phalanx. This move helped the Carthaginian army overlap the Roman lines and a massacre ensued. The Romans were battered until their forces were completely defenseless. Nearly 50,000 Romans were slain! Hannibal lost about 6,000 of his men. Rome now seemed defenseless.

[11] Rome found in Scipio Africanus, the one who would lead their people to destroy Hannibal once and for all. In 209 BC, the Navy deployed enough troops to attack Carthaginian settlements in Spain. Scipio was able to defeat the Carthaginian army under the command of Hasdrubal and capture the capital of Carthaginian Spain. Scipio landed in northern Africa around 204 BC with about 35,000 soldiers whose numbers would increase with the gradual arrival of envoys. During the invasion, he was able to kill about 50,000 Carthaginian soldiers. Hannibal, still in Italy, was recalled to Africa in 203 BC after Scipio had already devastated his homeland. Hannibal was able to muster an army of 45,000 infantry soldiers and 3,000 cavalry. He would engage Scipio in combat at the Battle of Zama, the last battle Hannibal would fight. Before the battle took place, Hannibal and Scipio got to face each other up close. Hannibal offered to surrender all the lands taken from Rome in order to avoid fighting Scipio's army, which outnumbered Hannibal's. Scipio refused to accept the terms and so the battle began. Scipio had previously learned of Hannibal's double encirclement tactics and use of trained war elephants. Scipio's soldiers were organized in columns which created lanes through which the Carthaginian elephants could be herded. Hannibal's infamous charge was no longer effective. Scipio mastered Hannibal's techniques used at the battle of Cannae and was able to use it against him. His infantry gave way for Hannibal's men to be drawn deeper into Roman lines while the cavalry extended their flanks around Hannibal's army. Scipio was able to surround Hannibal's forces while the allied Numidians charged at Hannibal's rear. Hannibal faced his first and final major defeat at Zama in 202 BC. Hannibal was able to escape to Hadrumentum. Although he continued to help other nations fight against Rome, his capture seemed inevitable. For Rome was determined to punish her nemesis. Around 182 BC in Libyssa, Hannibal poisoned himself to avoid surrender to Rome.

[12] History respects Hannibal just as any other renowned general. It is astounding how far he was able to triumph and carry on his father's legacy. His numerous victories attest to his genius in military tactics and the courage he possessed to face Roman authority. The ancient western world trembled as Hannibal's troops clashed against those that opposed him. But in the end, Rome proved to be too much for him to face. Had Hannibal succeeded in his conquest, he would have undoubtedly shaped Western civilization as well as the modern world.