

BATTLE DIGEST™

Lessons for Today's Leaders

Volume 1 ★ Issue 6

Ancient and Medieval: *Cannae*

DATE:
August 3, 216 B.C.E.

LOCATION:
Cannae, Southeastern Italy

OPPOSING FORCES

Romans: 86,000 troops (including 6,000 cavalry), comprised of Romans and their Italian allies, commanded by co-Consuls Caius Terentius Varro and Lucius Aemilius Paullus.

Carthaginians: 56,000 troops (including 10,000 cavalry), commanded by Gen. Hannibal Barca. Key subordinates included: Mago (Hannibal's brother and co-commander of infantry), Hasdrubal (a relative and commander of heavy cavalry), Hanno (a nephew), and Maharbal (a relative and commander of light cavalry).

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

During the third century B.C.E., Rome's growing power and influence around the Mediterranean created clashes with older, more established powers. One of these powerful city-states was Carthage. Rome and Carthage fought in three Punic Wars. The first (264-241 B.C.E.) involved influence over Sicily, the second (218-201) involved influence in Spain, and the third (149-146) focused on Tunisia and ended Carthage's independent existence.

It was during the Second Punic War, after Hannibal had been handing Rome defeats and losses for nearly two years, when the Roman Senate had finally had enough. After raising the largest army they had ever fielded, they sent it against Hannibal, who had just seized an important grain supply depot at Cannae. But Hannibal was more than ready. On that fateful day, he handed Rome one of the most crushing defeats in history. Through superior tactics and leadership, Hannibal completely enveloped and destroyed the larger Roman army arrayed against him. And yet, despite his tactical brilliance and generalship, Hannibal would win the battle and still lose the war.

Nevertheless, Hannibal's classic double-envelopment would become one of history's great tactical masterpieces, inspiring military leaders for over 2,000 years. German Gen. Field Marshal Count Alfred von Schlieffen famously tried to expand Hannibal's tactics to the strategic level, in a plan that failed to capture Paris in World War I. More recently, U.S. Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf claimed to have modeled Desert Storm on Cannae.¹

STRATEGY & MANEUVER

Actions by Rome – In the third century B.C.E., the Roman Republic relied on alliances to dominate its non-Roman Italian neighbors. Rome built its army with citizen-soldiers drawn from the city and its surrounding farms, while allies sent troops as needed. The Senate ran Rome, where elites advanced through military fame. Each year, Rome elected two consuls for a one-year term. Because these consuls had only one year to make their mark, they were usually looking for a fight. Ordinarily, a consul led two legions, each of 4,200 men and with a similarly sized legion of *alae* (allied troops).

When Hannibal invaded Italy, Rome initially responded with direct force. In 218 B.C.E., 40,000 Romans attacked Hannibal's 38,000 men at the Trebia River in Northwestern Italy. (Map 2) While around 10,000 Romans fought their way clear, the rest were killed or captured. A year later, on 21 June 217, the Roman army met Hannibal's army at the Battle of

