

THE INFLUENCE OF HANNIBAL OF CARTHAGE ON THE ART OF WAR AND HOW  
HIS LEGACY HAS BEEN INTERPRETED

by

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the influence of Hannibal of Carthage on the art of war over time. Hannibal's war with Rome provides a complex example of strategic and tactical successes and failures that have been modeled and studied throughout military history in one fashion or another. The method of research was a literature review organized into chapters with relevant examples from ancient through modern history. The primary finding was that Hannibal's examples have been interpreted according to the needs of each observer. There was no uniform conclusion of lessons drawn from Hannibal's campaigns. Perceptions were drawn by each author based on time and particular circumstances. For instance, Machiavelli pillories Hannibal's use of mercenaries as the antithesis of a virtuous society. Alfred von Schlieffen studied the tactical battle of Cannae and attempted to construct a strategic level plan for war in Europe based on lessons drawn from his study. Victor Hanson cites Hannibal's war with Rome as a metaphor for the West's current conflict with Islam, implying that the West will be ultimately victorious in this latest confrontation owing to the superiority of its institutions. The main conclusion that can be drawn is that Hannibal's successes and failures are still relevant for study by historians and practitioners of the military arts even though there is no one set of definitive lessons learned.

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## **Dedication**

To my wife who provided endless encouragement to see this project to completion.

## CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

*“The Gauls were not conquered by the Roman legions but by Caesar. It was not before the Carthaginian soldiers that Rome was made to tremble, but before Hannibal.”*

MajGen J.F.C. Fuller

Perhaps no other commander in the history of warfare has exerted such a long-term influence on the minds and actions of warriors and scholars of the military arts. It is almost impossible to read military history and not come across some reference to Hannibal and his exploits.<sup>1</sup> His strategic genius enabled him to project a large army, almost undetected, from its marshalling area of Spain to the northern frontier of Rome via an improbable route.

His tactical acumen allowed him to consistently outfight and outsmart his opponents in almost every encounter. His skill in the application of strategy and innovative tactics allowed him to consistently unhinge his opponents and set battlefield conditions for his army's success. His leadership ability allowed him to take a multicultural body of troops with disparate fighting abilities and forge them into an effective and virtually unbeatable instrument of war. Hannibal's accomplishments are only magnified when viewed in light of the larger, better-equipped, frequently better-trained, and more complex forces that he faced.<sup>2</sup> For 16 years he marched and fought almost unchecked on the Italian Peninsula and established a reputation and record of achievement that is remarkable by any standard.

Historian Adrian Goldsworthy describes the conflicts between Carthage and Rome as being fought on a scale seldom rivaled until modern times.<sup>3</sup> Livy calls them the most significant confrontations in ancient history.<sup>4</sup> Known as the Punic Wars, the two states fought three major wars in a period of just over 100 years. The area of operations stretched from southern Europe across the Mediterranean to the North African coast and from the Iberian Peninsula eastward to Macedonia. The conflict embroiled peoples of the entire region and caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of combatants and civilians alike. At the conclusion of the Third Punic War, Carthage lay in ashes and Rome stood unchallenged astride the Mediterranean. Much of the warfighting character of the Romans was shaped and hardened during this conflict. This character manifested itself through an unflinching tenacity, willingness to mobilize huge armies

time and again, and the strategic acumen to fight effectively in multiple widely separated theaters, and most importantly a belief that it was their destiny to rule the world.<sup>5</sup>

As architect of the Carthaginian war effort in the Second Punic War, Hannibal brought Rome to the brink of strategic defeat. His acts of leadership and warfighting skill nearly changed the course of history by preempting the rise of the Roman Empire in its early days. Had Carthage prevailed, the course of Western Civilization would have been altered significantly.<sup>6</sup>

Although Hannibal ultimately lost his contest with Rome, and contributed directly to the downfall of Carthage, he achieved immortality in the minds of military men and students of the art of war. In spite of his losing effort many have regarded him through the ages as the ultimate general. As this paper will show, he has been studied and analyzed by a number of historians and strategists including Vegetius, Machiavelli, Napoleon, Schlieffen, and Eisenhower. He is considered one of the “great captains” of history and is still studied and at times emulated by commanders and students of warfare.

Perhaps the first example of “winning every battle but losing the war” Hannibal’s practice of the art continues to fascinate scholars, generals and laymen. His knack for taking a heterogeneous mix of troops and welding them into a fighting machine that was without peer for many years stands as an example of excellent leadership and achievement. His audacious actions in the tactical sense set the standard for the conduct of battles. He has been labeled the “father of strategy” and today his exploits are still studied in light of how a successful general ought to conduct a campaign and might derive a strategy to ensure that strength is always placed opposite enemy weakness.<sup>7</sup>

However, as this thesis will show, there are other interpretations of Hannibal’s legacy that are less flattering. Machiavelli viewed him as a failure for several reasons in spite of his achievements. Although there are aspects of his abilities that cannot be ignored for their positive lessons, there are also many negative lessons that military thinkers have drawn from Hannibal’s legacy.

He has been faulted for embarking on a war that critics say he could not possibly win. He has been criticized for trying to implement a strategy that would never produce success. He has been condemned for failing to turn an unbroken string of tactical victories into strategic success.<sup>8</sup> Although he turned the disparate elements of his army into an excellent fighting instrument, he (and Carthage) has been criticized for fighting wars relying almost exclusively on

mercenary armies that would never have a stake in the outcome like citizen soldiers. In another vein of criticism A.T. Mahan takes him to task for failing to recognize the importance of sea power to the prosecution of a land campaign.

A survey of references to Hannibal yields the conclusion that interpretations of Hannibal's legacy are not uniform. Interpretation varies across time and circumstance. Each critic seeks to draw relevant lessons applicable to his own circumstances and context. For example, Machiavelli thoroughly criticizes Hannibal's use of mercenaries to constitute his army rather than using loyal citizen troops; Schlieffen studies Hannibal's tactical success at Cannae as a means to discover how to remedy his own strategic concerns in advance of the First World War. Victor Hanson criticizes the culture and institutions of Carthage in his discussion of their ability to defeat Rome, linking the current struggle between Islamic culture and the West with that of Rome and Carthage. This paper will show the differing interpretations of Hannibal's legacy over time based on observer and context.

## **CHAPTER 2 - Background**

No discussion of Hannibal's legacy is complete without some background on the origins and conclusion of the Punic Wars. These wars spanned over a hundred years, caused hundreds of thousands of casualties on both sides and resulted in the ultimate destruction of Carthage. Hannibal's successes during the Second Punic War engendered such fear and resentment in the Romans that they dreaded the rise of another military leader as capable as he. As a foundation for this analysis we will look at a short background of the Punic Wars in general and a more detailed examination of the Second Punic War in particular. This information will provide an understanding of Hannibal's achievements in tactical operations and demonstrate the shattering successes which have been emulated over time and are still studied today. We will also see examples of Hannibal's strategic acumen, and provide examples where his skills in this area have been criticized.

### **First Punic War**

The clashes began in 264 BC as a confrontation between a long-established maritime power and a budding land power in the First Punic War and lasted for 23 years. It saw significant fighting on Sicily and some fairly large land battles on the African mainland. There were also several important naval battles, which directly challenged the naval supremacy of Carthage. Already a formidable foe on land, Rome became a significant threat at sea.<sup>9</sup>

Through several initiatives including development of the *corvus* (a moveable wooden bridge with a large spike on the bottom that was used to grapple Carthaginian ships for boarding), and recruiting of non-Roman sailors and shipwrights to establish a viable navy Rome shaped conditions to bring her main source of military power (infantry) to bear against Carthaginian sea power with decisive results. Once a Roman ship was maneuvered close enough to the enemy vessel, the *Corvus* was allowed to drop and pierce the deck of the enemy ship. It became nearly impossible for the ship to escape, and Roman marines were then used to board the enemy ship and complete its capture or destruction.



Carthage was unable to turn a clear-cut advantage in individual seamanship and skill into consistent military success. The superiority of the individual Carthaginian sailor did not guarantee the superiority of Carthaginian fleets against their Roman counterparts. Except for some successes at sea, Carthage went from being virtually unchallenged as a naval power to being frequently defeated by a state that previously had no navy and no naval experience. It is a credit to the adaptability of the Romans that they were able to learn from a worthy opponent the necessary skills to build and maintain fleets, and train the sailors and marines that were then able to unseat Carthage from its position as master of the sea.<sup>10</sup>

Hannibal's father, Hamilcar Barca was the one bright spot for Carthage during that conflict, and although he achieved no significant victories, he had at least been able to avoid defeat during his campaigning in Sicily.<sup>11</sup> The end result of over two decades of fighting was disastrous for Carthage. Her military power had been severely eroded and her unchallenged mastery of the seas was gone. The government and people were weary from a war that would not end against a foe who would not quit. Carthage ended up saddled with a huge indemnity, losing the bulk of her island possessions in the Mediterranean, and perhaps worst of all, was no longer the leading sea power. In short, the first war with Rome ended terribly for Carthage and contained the seeds of future confrontation with the Romans.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps the only thing that saved Carthage from complete destruction at that point was the fact that the Romans were weary of the war as well.<sup>13</sup> After years of fighting and a series of stalemates the Romans had finally achieved a decisive victory at sea. Rome's newly found hegemony of the sea-lanes ensured that she could maintain the initiative by landing wherever and whenever she chose. This superiority also severely compromised Carthaginian sea-trade, which was the historical basis of her wealth. Carthage, which had traditionally exercised relatively unchallenged leadership in the Mediterranean Basin, was forced to acknowledge the primacy of Rome. Carthaginian sea power was broken and never recovered. This was a shattering loss that continued to plague Carthage throughout its conflict with Rome.

If the maritime situation were not bad enough, the government of Carthage also faced a mutiny in its mercenary army, which in 241 B.C.E. was marching on the city of Carthage itself. The mutiny was the result of the government's failure to pay its soldiers for an extended period of time during the war. As there was no victory, there were no spoils and the desperate situation

was only magnified. Faced with a crushing debt to pay, mutinous soldiers, a depleted treasury, and severely compromised ability to trade at sea – the situation in Carthage was dire.

The changed strategic landscape necessitated a change in Carthaginian strategy. If Carthage were to maintain its power as a state, and maintain a dominant position in the Mediterranean, it would have to come up with additional sources of revenue and manpower resources that could be forged into instruments of state power. Because of Rome's newfound dominance at sea, Carthage was forced to look west to the Iberian Peninsula.

## **Second Punic War**

Spain contained in large quantities all manner of resources necessary for the prosecution of war. There was a significant amount of arable land, much mineral wealth (silver and gold), and robust populations of warlike peoples living there. Once brought under the sway of Carthage, this area would be a strong foundation upon which to build and maintain an army as well as refresh the coffers of Carthage. An added benefit was the fact that this “sphere of influence” was far away from the prying eyes of Rome.

Although Carthage had long traded with various tribes in Spain, Hannibal's father determined to expand Carthaginian influence. Phoenician and Greek settlements had existed for centuries on the Iberian Peninsula, and it is apparent that Hamilcar and the government of Carthage recognized the region for the immense source of wealth it was. The Carthaginian presence grew from a few widely separated trading posts into a full-fledged colony.

Hamilcar set about conquering a large portion of Spain in the name of Carthage. Polybius writes “The success of the Carthaginian enterprise in Spain must be regarded as the third cause of the war, for it was the assurance which they drew from this increase in their strength which enabled them to embark on the war with confidence.”<sup>14</sup> (According to Polybius the other two reasons were Hamilcar's anger over the outcome of the First Punic War, and Rome's subsequent annexation of Sardinia and demand for additional money to avoid making war on Carthage once again.) There is some speculation that Hamilcar's actions were driven by greed and the desire to enrich his own household. However it seems safe to say that given the strategic setting, the primary goal was certainly to rebuild the power of Carthage relative to that of Rome, especially in light of the results of the First Punic War. Hamilcar was quite successful and succeeded in a relatively short period of time to reducing the tribes of southern Spain to

vassal status.<sup>15</sup> Hamilcar's campaign was cut short by his death in 227 B.C.E. He was succeeded by his son-in-law (Hasdrubal), who managed affairs for nearly six years until his betrayal and murder. He was in turn succeeded by Hannibal in 221 B.C.E.

During his service in Spain under his father and then his uncle, Hannibal's mettle was developed. He became a skilled warrior, a brilliant commander, and developed the leadership skills dealing with disparate peoples that would stand him in such good stead for the duration of the Second Punic War.

Hannibal's war was thus a continuation of a longstanding and growing conflict between Rome and Carthage that had begun in the third century B.C.E. Although there were extended periods without open warfare between the two states, a close reading of the history reveals that conflict was never far from the surface. As a seafaring, trading empire, Carthage was the regional powerhouse long before Rome entered the scene. That Rome was initially a land-based power only delayed the conflict between the states. With the rise of Rome and the gradual subjugation and absorption of the tribes in Italy, conflict with Carthage was inevitable.

No other general came as close as Hannibal to destroying Rome. During his 16-year sojourn on the Italian Peninsula, he would repeatedly defeat Roman armies sent to fight him. He would outwit and outfight almost every general sent against him in Italy. His polyglot army consisted of professionals, mostly mercenary, from every province under Carthaginian rule or sway. Hannibal displayed an exceptional talent for molding this mixed group of troops into a highly capable and effective fighting force.

Although Rome's legions were never short of courage and willingness to fight, Hannibal regularly outfoxed them. Rare was the occasion when Hannibal was caught in a position of disadvantage. He was consistently able to set the conditions in order to fight with the advantage. One of his principal traits was the ability to understand opposing commanders and tailor his tactics to take advantage of them. He was a master in the use of terrain and stratagem to gain an advantage. His ability to always remain a step or two ahead of his opponents ensured that they were always reacting to his initiative instead of the opposite. Polybius writes, "Everything that befell both peoples, the Roman and the Carthaginian, originated from one effective cause – one man and one mind – by which I mean Hannibal."<sup>16</sup>

Hannibal's campaigns included some of the most costly, in terms of Roman casualties, in Roman history. In the early years of the war, he inflicted several staggering defeats on the

Romans by taking advantage of their aggressiveness and lack of appreciation of the usefulness of deception. Roman soldiers invariably gave a good account of themselves in any fight, but Hannibal always managed to pit his strengths against Roman weakness.<sup>17</sup> These actions took various forms, including pitting Carthaginian cavalry against its weaker Roman counterpart, or by taking advantage of deception and surprise to gain the upper hand. Roman writers referring to the perfidy of the Carthaginians frequently had in mind Hannibal's ability to manipulate and deceive. During the first several years of the war, Hannibal and his army seemed unbeatable.

### **Hannibal's Signature Victory**

Traditional discussions of Hannibal are bound to cover the "Alps and elephants," as a result of the maneuver that is rightly lauded as a model of strategic thinking. However, maneuvering is not all that wins battles, and although Hannibal did achieve a measure of strategic surprise, the Romans were not completely caught off guard. Roman armies only missed interdicting Hannibal by a day or so prior to his ascent of the Alps. Although this achievement cannot be minimized, his real brilliance was shown time and again at the tactical level in his conduct of warfighting. If brilliant maneuvering is necessary to the most successful outcomes, much still remains to be done when the maneuvering phase is over. The details are in the execution and history is littered with examples of generals who failed to combine maneuver with successful tactical execution.

Hannibal's place in history was cemented by his success at Cannae. Of all his achievements throughout years of campaigning, Cannae was the most significant defeat that Hannibal administered to the armies of Rome. In fact it has been described as one of the most significant defeats of any Western army in the history of warfare.<sup>18</sup> As long as Rome existed Cannae was remembered as one of the darkest days in its history.

The battle came less than two years into the war on the heels of several other decisive victories against Roman armies. Following the Roman defeats at the Ticinus, the Trebbia, and Lake Trasimene, the Romans according to Polybius were very nearly in a panic and in no shape to give battle.<sup>19</sup> Their vaunted legions and reputation for invincibility in battle was seriously in doubt. Their available resources were stretched to the breaking point and their plans for the conduct of the war had been completely upset.

Not only was there no chance to make this a short war and carry it into the back yard of the enemy, but the reality was that Rome seemed to be in a fight for its very existence. Several Roman allies surrendered to the Carthaginians while others questioned their support of the Romans and even refused to send additional troops to support the war effort. Polybius writes, “As for the Romans, after this defeat they gave up all hope of maintaining their supremacy over the Italians, and began to fear for their native soil, and indeed for their very existence, since they expected Hannibal to appear at any moment.”<sup>20</sup>

According to the evidence available, Hannibal’s probable strategic goal was to fragment Rome’s alliances with the Latin city-states. Apparently he had no intention of destroying Rome as a state.<sup>21</sup> After the battle of Cannae in his attempt to ransom Roman captives, Livy writes that Hannibal had the captives brought before him and told them that “He was not engaged in a war to the death with Rome; he was fighting for honor and empire.”<sup>22</sup> He had every notion of avenging the Carthaginian defeat in the first Punic War and intended to ensure that Carthaginian status in the Mediterranean was restored to the position of preeminence. It seems his approach was to separate the Romans from their allies and then whittle away their state power. He seemingly intended that they might survive, but in a much reduced condition, and without the means or the desire to interfere with the affairs of Carthage.

It seems apparent that Hannibal fully expected the Romans to behave according to the rules of warfare that existed at the time – at least as Hannibal understood them. The rules were those of the Hellenistic world and based on the assumption that if one administered a series of crushing defeats to the opponent, then the opponent would modify his behavior, do the sensible thing, and seek a solution at the peace table.<sup>23</sup> According to Livy, he was not intent on the destruction of Rome.<sup>24</sup> Hannibal expected that the Romans would adhere to their own standards in the conduct of war. Polybius writes, “In the past the Romans had made war upon all peoples, but only to the point at which their opponents had been defeated and had acknowledged that they would obey them and execute their commands.”<sup>25</sup>

Hannibal’s actions, including the offer to ransom prisoners, and his attempts to fracture alliances indicates that he may have expected his Roman opponents to realize the error of their ways and accept defeat. This proved to be one of the key elements of miscalculation on his part. He completely misjudged how the Romans would react in the face of extreme adversity. What he understood as the accepted standard of conduct among nations did not seem to apply here.

Even after the significant defeats and slaughter of thousands of men at the hands of the Carthaginians the Romans would not submit. Although several of the leading cities in southern Italy went over to the Carthaginians, the Romans would not yield. And even with thousands of their soldiers on the line as potential bargaining chips, the Romans still refused to treat with Hannibal.<sup>26</sup>

It is also apparent that the government of Carthage miscalculated how long the war with the Romans would last. Although the sources are not as clear as we would like, it is apparent that the Carthaginians expected the war to last but a short while. They did not exhibit the long term thinking and vision required for a long term campaign against a tenacious foe. Although the government apparently all but placed the war in the hands of the Barca family, it did very little in the way of contributing to long term victory. There were several occasions when a concerted effort by the government to provide assistance to Hannibal might have tipped the war effort irrevocably in their favor. That help was never forthcoming.

What reinforcements Hannibal did receive he arranged for on his own. Although the government did not dabble much in the affairs of the war in Italy, it was extremely interested in ensuring the retention of Spain and the wealth it was generating for Carthage. It appears that the struggle to defeat the Romans being waged on the Italian peninsula and elsewhere was left to Hannibal.<sup>27</sup>

Although the battle of Cannae itself is fascinating, many of the events leading up to it are equally worthy of mention. The Romans had found a general who was successful in his own right at keeping Hannibal's armies at bay, and if not able to defeat Hannibal, was himself at least able to avoid being defeated by him. This represented no small achievement given the resounding victories that Hannibal had attained versus the generals previously sent against him. The Roman general was Fabius Maximus and for the Roman strategist Frontinus and historian Vegetius he represented acumen and skill. Unlike those before him, he alone had been able to preserve his army and in some measure keep Hannibal in check. In spite of his abilities, the Romans associated his tactics with stalling, dithering, and general indecisiveness. He lost his position over the very caution that had allowed him to keep his army intact in the field against Hannibal.

The Roman Senate replaced Fabius with Terentius Varro and Aemilius Paulus. Of the two, Varro was considered more lacking in the positive attributes of Fabius, and considered not

of the same caliber. Whatever his faults, he was at least aggressive in the proper Roman tradition. Per the Roman custom of the time, command of the army was changed on alternate days between the two pro-consuls. Knowing that Varro was more aggressive than his fellow pro-consul, to the point of being impetuous, Hannibal hoped to take advantage of that personality trait. Livy tells us that:

Hannibal had as full and accurate knowledge of the state of things in the Roman army as he had of his own. He was well aware that the command was in the hands of two dissimilar men, who would never agree, and that almost two thirds of the Roman force was raw recruits. He was confident that the time was ripe, and the means at hand, to catch them in a trap.<sup>28</sup>

Having offered to fight and having been refused by Paulus, Hannibal appears to have finally timed his display to goad the Romans in to battle on a day that Varro was to be in command. The frustration of the previous day's refusal of combat apparently weighed heavily on Varro and his commanders. Varro was confident in his abilities to defeat the Carthaginians.<sup>29</sup> He believed the terrain was in his favor. He had a decisive advantage in the main Roman strength of heavy infantry. His right flank was anchored on a natural obstacle and he had sufficient infantry to weather any Carthaginian attempt to turn his left flank. According to Caven, Varro also appears to have believed that with his advantage in infantry he could punch a hole in the Carthaginian center and defeat the divided forces in detail.<sup>30</sup> At this point in history, this was the largest army that Rome had ever put into the field in one place and confidence was running high.<sup>31</sup>

Hannibal laid the trap perfectly and an obliging Varro took the bait all too readily. Hannibal arrayed his forces in a manner that placed his most aggressive troops opposite the Roman center and in a position well forward of his own line. This disposition achieved two things; the first being that the bulk of those troops were Gauls and Spaniards whose presence was calculated to enrage the Romans and goad them into pressing forward. The Romans regarded these forces as barbarian, traitorous, and a conquered people. Their readiness to fight the Romans on the Romans' own turf was sure to incite the Romans to attack all the more readily.

Hannibal was also able to take advantage of Varro's disposition of troops. Varro intended to punch a hole through the weaker Carthaginian infantry. This resulted in Varro deploying the center of his line of troops in an unfamiliar and uncharacteristically deep

formation. This ensured that for all practical purposes, Varro's large advantage of heavy infantry was effectively nullified owing to the fact that based on the size of the battlefield only some 2000 Roman infantry could be brought to bear against the Carthaginian line at one time. This deployment gave Hannibal the parity in heavy infantry he would need to spring the trap he was setting for Varro.

Hannibal arrayed his numerically superior cavalry on the flanks, which is where he intended to deliver the decisive blow against his enemies. He was always able to count on the superiority of his cavalry, and like Alexander before him the cavalry was the main striking force and normally delivered the knockout blow in his battles.

Another aspect of Hannibal's deployment required that he post his best heavy infantry on the wings of his formation. This too was risky, for it split his best infantry and ensured that it would be defeated in detail if his plan failed to materialize as envisioned. If however he was able to bring events about in a manner of his choosing then this posting would allow him to pin the Romans in a vice and attack them from all sides and completely nullify the overwhelming Roman superiority in numbers.

The final aspect of Hannibal's concept, which requires mentioning, is that of the requirement for absolute synchronization of the plan. Without it, his thin center might be defeated before his cavalry could win on the wings and deliver the decisive blow. If the cavalry did not win decisively on the flanks in a rapid manner, the plan would come to naught. And finally if the cavalry was successful, those troops must exhibit the highest standards of discipline by returning to the main fight and not joining in the pursuit of defeated Roman cavalry or destruction of his camp as cavalry of the day, and particularly mercenary cavalry were wont to do. There was also significant risk to his widely separated blocks of Libyan infantry. Although generally equal to Roman infantry in an even fight, they were deployed in such a manner as to ensure their defeat if the plan failed to work.<sup>32</sup>

In the end, Hannibal achieved everlasting fame through the execution of his complex plan. He stationed himself and one of his brothers in the center of the line with the Gauls and Spaniards at great personal risk. His presence helped ensure that the center fought long enough for the rest of his army to bring its power to bear on the awkwardly deployed Romans and their hapless leader.<sup>33</sup> The Celts and Spaniards were forced to withdraw as Hannibal had anticipated and drew the densely packed Romans into the awaiting jaws of Hannibal's African infantry.



These troops wheeled in place and faced towards the center, and at the signal, engaged the flanks of the Romans.

The Romans pressed forward so strongly against the Celts that their normally well disciplined fighting formations collapsed into a huge press of men that could not properly wield its weapons. The formation was so deep that the troops in the rear ranks could not see or readily discern what was happening. Those closer to the front lines were so hemmed in that they could do nothing to influence the action, many being so pressed that they could not draw or employ their weapons.

Just as Hannibal had planned, his cavalry struck the decisive blow. If the infantry had their foes in a death grip, the cavalry delivered the final shock. Displaying tremendous discipline, the Carthaginian heavy cavalry defeated its opposite handily but rather than pursue came around to attack the Roman infantry in the rear. This was the final shock to the Roman army. Although its troops were credited with fighting savagely, they had been completely outgeneraled and were placed in a position where it was virtually impossible for them to win. According to the best available information, tens of thousands of Romans were killed in the space of several hours of fighting. Thousands more were captured in the nearby town of Cannae, and perhaps just as importantly, the Roman state was denuded of its field army and thrown into a panic. Hannibal was never closer to ultimate victory than after Cannae. In a single afternoon Hannibal and his hodgepodge army were able to destroy nearly 50,000 Romans.<sup>34</sup>

As time wore on and the Romans became more cautious in dealing with Hannibal, the spectacular victories became much harder to achieve. The Romans displayed one of their more admirable traits, and that was the ability to learn and adapt from their opponents. After a succession of catastrophic losses, the Romans simply stopped giving battle to Hannibal and his army. This strategy succeeded in no small way owing to the fact that simply maintaining an army in the field was a minor victory for them. Hannibal could not defeat what he could not fight, nor could he be everywhere at once.

His strategy of trying to get Rome's Italian allies to turn against it enjoyed some partial successes, but not on a large scale.<sup>35</sup> As the Romans were able to keep many more troops under arms than the Carthaginians, the Roman strategy evolved from fighting Carthaginian armies towards that of attacking and retaking any of its allies that chose to break with the Romans. This strategy on the part of the Romans proved highly successful, as the Carthaginians could not

defend every province that broke with Rome and maintain a credible threat against the Roman armies that constantly shadowed their every move.

In the end, Hannibal was unsuccessful in getting substantial numbers of Rome's allies to defect.<sup>36</sup> His army was not strong enough, nor did it have the right equipment to capture Rome itself. His lack of control of the sea-lanes helped ensure that he received only a trickle of reinforcements during his entire time on the Italian peninsula. The Roman tenacity, evidenced in the First Punic War, and its ability to change its strategy and tactics in the face of repeated setbacks, effectively blocked any hope that Hannibal had of ultimate victory.

By the year 202 B.C.E, Hannibal was effectively hemmed in on the southern end of the Italian peninsula. His army was still composed of mercenaries, but was no longer made up of troops as reliable as those he had brought over in 218. Although he was never defeated in Italy, the Romans forced him to leave just the same, owing to their invasion of Carthage that year. Hannibal was recalled to defend his homeland and was subsequently defeated at the battle of Zama, which ended the Second Punic War.

### **Third Punic War**

Hannibal's string of successes against the Romans carried with it an unintended consequence that would not become apparent until many years after the Second Punic War. Although the Romans eventually defeated him, there was a large and growing faction within the Roman government that believed that the Romans could never coexist with the Carthaginians. They would always fear a resurgent Carthage and were even more concerned about the appearance of another "Hannibal." Few Roman leaders believed they could ever completely trust their long time rival even after the Roman victory in the Second Punic War. The fear of Punic treachery was aggravated by Hannibal's many successes that lay in whole or in part on the use of deception. Polybius writes:

But now they had given a foretaste of their future intentions in their behavior towards Perseus, which had involved the destruction, root and branch, of the Macedonian kingdom, the new policy had reached its climax in the decision concerning Carthage. The Carthaginians had committed no irretrievable offence against their opponents, yet the Romans had inflicted penalties which were not

only harsh but final, even though the enemy had agreed to accept all their conditions and obey all their commands.<sup>37</sup>

Hannibal's record of achievement proved ultimately disastrous for Carthage. Although the immediate aftermath of the Second Punic War was humiliating for Carthage, it had survived and in fact still had most of her territories intact. Carthage suffered the indignation of being required to pay a large indemnity to Rome and suffered the imposition of having Rome's officials embedded in her affairs, to include passing judgment on whether Carthage could wage war in her own territories. She had also suffered the loss of some territory, most notably in Spain and Sicily, but at least survived as a state.

The final reckoning for Hannibal's extraordinary success was that some 55 years after the Second Punic War was concluded, Carthage went to war with Rome again, but this time it was a war it had no hope of winning. Although defeated, Carthage had exacted a heavy toll from Rome during the Second Punic War. The Third Punic War was to carry a much heavier price for Carthage. The end result was the utter destruction of Carthage as a state in 146 B.C.E., which can be traced directly to Hannibal's successes in the Second Punic War and the fear he fostered in the minds of his enemies. Roman leadership never got over the idea that Carthage might spawn another Hannibal. Rome's concept of warfighting and how to deal with powerful enemies was indelibly shaped through its dealings with Carthage in general and Hannibal in particular.<sup>38</sup> His influence continues to resonate.

## CHAPTER 3 - Peers

Hannibal's influence on warfighters can be seen early on as Roman leadership struggled to divine a way to counter his tactical brilliance. The Romans discovered that their customary aggressiveness and straight-ahead style of attacking regularly led to disaster. In spite of having a large reservoir of manpower and solid training abilities, the traditional style of Roman warfare was not achieving success against Hannibal. In what had become an ironic reversal of roles, the much-feared Carthaginian navy was rendered ineffective by the Roman naval effort, and the powerful Roman infantry was seemingly unable to best Hannibal and his troops on land.

There are at least two examples of Hannibal's peers whose thinking was influenced significantly by his actions. The examples include two men who fought against him and who were relatively successful, although employing much different methods.

The first example is Fabius Maximus who assumed command of the Roman army in 216 B.C.E., after the Roman defeats of Trebbia and Lake Trasimene. Fabius was not aggressive against Hannibal and adopted tactics that would ensure the preservation of his own army rather than the destruction of Hannibal's. Essentially Fabius adopted the strategy of shadowing Hannibal everywhere, but not giving pitched battle anywhere. Fabius sought to maintain contact with Hannibal's army without fighting it, and was always on the lookout for opportunities to attack isolated elements of Hannibal's army, forage parties, or raiders, but never allowed himself to engage in a pitched battle. Polybius writes:

During the ensuing months he continued to move on a parallel line to the enemy, while he occupied in advance all those positions which he knew from his experience of the country to be most advantageous. Since he could always count on an abundance of supplies in his rear, he never allowed his soldiers to forage or to become separated from the camp on any pretext. Instead, his forces were kept continually concentrated, while he watched intently for whatever opportunities time or place might provide. By these methods he contrived to kill or capture many groups of the enemy who had strayed from their camp on foraging expeditions. In following these tactics he had two aims: first, to keep on reducing

the enemy's limited manpower, and secondly, by means of these minor successes to rebuild the spirit of his own troops whose confidence had been shattered by their earlier defeats. But as for fighting a pitched battle, which was what his opponent purposed, nothing would induce him to accept the challenge.<sup>39</sup>

Although this strategy provided limited success it also was self-limiting and did not provide Fabius any opportunity to destroy Hannibal. The Roman leadership was not satisfied with this style of warfare that would never produce an outright victory. It was as if Fabius was playing for a tie, rather than a win. Fabius ultimately became so unpopular with the Roman leadership for his "Fabian Strategy" that he was replaced by a much more aggressive general. The strategy implemented by Terentius Varro led to the spectacular slaughter of the Roman army at Cannae and the eventual vindication of Fabius and his strategy.

The most well known example of Hannibal's influence on a peer is that of Scipio Africanus who eventually led Roman armies to victory against Hannibal and Carthage. Scipio's is a classic case of a young man learning from the master and eventually employing the master's tactics to defeat him.

Polybius tells us that Scipio saved his father from death during the battle of the Ticinus only by an extreme act of courage.<sup>40</sup> Scipio was also present at the crushing Roman defeat of Cannae. He was one of only a few thousand to escape the day's carnage and can only have been deeply impressed by the resourcefulness and tactical acumen of Hannibal. This action surely provided a profound lesson in his military education.

He was an apt learner and eventually rose to the position of consul, and was the youngest to assume that title. He was so young in fact that the Romans had to modify their procedures for appointment to this position in order to grant him the office. Such was his demonstrated skill that the Romans leadership was willing time and again to bend the rules to keep him in command of portions of its armies.

Scipio absorbed the lessons that Hannibal had to teach including not only the tactical lessons of actually employing troops in combat but the higher lessons of strategy as well. In clear-cut examples of application, he applied them by shaping a war-winning plan later in the Second Punic War. He helped craft the strategy that took Roman armies to Carthage, and directly forestalled Carthaginian reinforcements to Italy. He also did not succumb to fear of the Carthaginians but studied them and their battles in detail in order to learn their secrets of success.

Polybius tells us “The result was that he was not weighed down, as most of his compatriots had been, either by fear of the Carthaginians or by the general feeling of dismay.”<sup>41</sup>

In perhaps his finest example of the application of strategy, Scipio argued for and received permission to take the war directly to the Carthaginian homeland.<sup>42</sup> His actions caused the Carthaginian government to recall Hannibal and his army from Italy, thereby achieving by strategic maneuver what no Roman general ever achieved in battle. Scipio delivered the final lesson wherein student became teacher, defeating Hannibal on the plains of Zama southwest of Carthage.

In an ironic twist, the decisive factor in his victory over Hannibal was delivered by Numidian cavalry which had gone over to the Romans, and had previously helped deliver so many of Hannibal’s victories. In this final battle of the Second Punic War, Scipio’s cavalry drove its Carthaginian counterpart from the field, and then returned in a timely fashion to attack Hannibal’s infantry in the flank and rear and ensure the outcome of the battle. The course of this battle bears resemblance to that of Hannibal’s victory at Cannae, with a key component being his use of cavalry to achieve victory. He also used deception by developing tactics to negate the impact of Carthaginian elephants. He utilized a formation that allowed the elephants to pass relatively easily through his formations rather than confronting them directly.<sup>43</sup> These actions and the thinking behind them were significant for an army that traditionally relied on shock infantry and a direct advance to contact rather than mobile forces and ruse to achieve victory. It shows a willingness to use deception reminiscent of Hannibal. The circle was complete as Hannibal’s enemy used his own tactics against him to achieve a decisive victory.<sup>44</sup>

Although not a peer, Julius Frontinus attempted to distill the essence of war for posterity, writing some 200 years after the death of Hannibal. In A.D. 76 he wrote a book entitled “The Stratagems.” In it he attempted to reduce military rules to a system that could be comprehended and put to immediate use by peers and successors.

In the course of several hundred pages of observations and anecdotes, he provides a great deal of information useful to any commander. His book was broken into three main sections; stratagems prior to battle, stratagems relating to battle itself, and finally stratagems pertaining to sieges. In each chapter he relates specific examples that a discerning reader, one knowledgeable in the military arts, could put to use in a variety of circumstances.

In the period in which he was writing, the Roman Empire was continuing to expand and already held sway over huge amounts of territory and sea space. Although the notion of “professional” generals as understood in the twentieth century was foreign to the Romans, it became obvious that appointing generals based on politics rather than skill was not a wise choice for an expanding empire. This environment necessitated a body of knowledge and training that could be inculcated into Roman senior leadership.

Frontinus’ book was an attempt to capture relevant information covering a wide variety of topics and present it in a useful format to aspiring and experienced generals. The impact of the Second Punic War in general and Hannibal specifically is spread throughout the pages of the book. In one example after another, Hannibal or one of his commanders is cited for some action. The examples are generally favorable to the Carthaginians and Hannibal, particularly where the use of ruse or stratagem is concerned.<sup>45</sup>

Of particular note are those examples that pertain to gaining an understanding of one’s opponent in order to apply some trick against him. The success of these types of stratagems depends on an in-depth knowledge of the personality of the opponent and how he would respond to some stimulus or action. Where Hannibal and the Carthaginians receive less than positive review are those attempts at strategies that imply less than perfect character on the part of the Romans in their response. An example would be Hannibal’s burning of the countryside outside Rome but sparing the lands of his antagonist, Fabius. The intent was to engender more distrust and dislike of Fabius in the minds of the Roman people and their leadership in the Senate. Fabius was already out of favor for his delaying strategy that preserved his army but failed to engage in decisive action. It is ironic that the Romans’ dislike of Carthaginian employment of deception and trickery (which are central to Frontinus’ discussion of the Carthaginians) became some of the key elements Scipio used to ultimately defeat Hannibal.

In Frontinus’ book, Fabius is regarded as the genius. He successfully stood up to Hannibal and perhaps even more importantly, his honor was never sullied. In response to Hannibal’s tactics, Fabius had his own holdings burned in order to ensure there was no appearance of impropriety or wrongdoing.<sup>46</sup> Frontinus seems to appreciate the utility of deception and ruse but resists the notion of it being used successfully against his fellow Romans whose character he regarded as above reproach.

Hannibal is also recognized for his ability to read and use the ground to his advantage to implement some type of ruse, and Frontinus clearly believes this is one of the main reasons Hannibal was so often victorious. He writes:

Again at Cannae, when Hannibal learned that the Volturnus River, at variance with the nature of other streams, sent out high winds in the morning, which carried swirling sand and dust, he so marshaled his line of battle that the entire fury of the elements fell on the rear of his own troops, but struck the Romans in the face and eyes. Since this difficulty was a serious obstacle to the enemy, he won that memorable victory.<sup>47</sup>

This discussion seems to show an evolving Roman mindset and appreciation for the use of trickery or deception to win. Rather than displaying a disdain for the use of a ruse, Frontinus suggests that it would be a useful tool to help achieve victory.

The text of this book contains several examples from the Second Punic War and it is clear that even though the war was nearly 300 years past, it still loomed large in the mind of at least one thinker on the art of war. This is not surprising, but given the number of opponents Rome had faced up to that point in time it is significant that this book would reference the experiences of Rome dealing with Hannibal and the Carthaginians.



## CHAPTER 4 - Middle Ages to the Renaissance

Owing to the dearth of sources from the Middle Ages it is virtually impossible to establish direct links between the practitioners and writers on the subject of war to Hannibal. There are however numerous helpful clues and tenuous connections that would lead one to conclude that the shadow of the Carthaginian still influenced thinking on the art of war during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire to Germanic invaders, documentation pertaining to the evolving art of war became virtually non-existent. During this period the general trend on the battlefield involved the ascendancy of the mounted arm over that of the infantry. Hannibal's reliance on his mounted forces to deliver victory into his hands was a foreshadowing of what was to become common practice during the Middle Ages. Mounted troops established superiority over their dismounted foes during the long march of this period, as technological advances ensured the advantage in combat swung in favor of horse and rider.

As one of the premier warriors of this period, and inheritor of the Frankish empire forged by his father, it is well documented that Charlemagne desired a mounted arm as the primary strike force of his army. Although mounted troops were expensive, records show that he in fact wanted his "strike force" to consist of mailed cavalry.<sup>48</sup> This is a direct result of the fact that well trained and armored horseman had achieved ascendancy on the battlefield and that the well disciplined "citizen" legions of infantry of the Romans had all but disappeared from the battlefield.

The most influential work on the art of war that existed at this time was that of the Roman writer Vegetius. T.R. Phillips writes, "Numerous manuscript copies of Vegetius circulated in the time of Charlemagne and one of them was considered a necessity of life by his commanders."<sup>49</sup> Vegetius, writing in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, deplored the current status of arms and training of Late Roman armies. His proposed solutions to the problems all center on a return to the ways of the "ancients." He believed that by returning to the organizational precepts and training methods of the ancients the military arts would be reinvigorated.

Vegetius specifically discusses Hannibal in his writings and this directly colors his observations on the practice of the art of war. Referring to Hannibal's successes, he emphasizes what can happen to an army that allows itself leisure and complacency. In his references to the Punic Wars and Hannibal, Vegetius describes those traits necessary for success in the training and discipline of soldiers. As such, it is not a stretch to state that Hannibal, through the writings of Vegetius, played an important part in the conduct of war during the reign of Charlemagne.

Although Vegetius acknowledges the achievements of the Carthaginian, he does not hold him or his methods up for emulation. He uses Hannibal as an example of how the failures of the "ancients" (the Romans) could be exploited if their previously successful methods were not rigidly followed. He praises the discipline and training of the Roman armies at the height of their empire, and focuses on their successes as the epitome of what could be achieved with proper training and standards of discipline. He specifically discusses the dearth of hard training and discipline failures that had overtaken the Romans after their successes in the First Punic War.<sup>50</sup>

In cases where the Roman armies failed, Vegetius attributes their downfall to their failure to maintain their traditionally high standards of discipline, training, and selection of troops.<sup>51</sup> In any event Hannibal's successes are not attributed to any particular genius or ability of his armies, but cast in the light of some failure of the Romans to adhere to their previously proven training systems and methods of conditioning. The only credit Hannibal is given is that of being insightful enough to exploit the weaknesses of the Romans. Vegetius appears intent on attributing Carthaginian success to anything other than Hannibal's genius, thereby providing the emperor the keys to success. He cites the importation of Spartan advice as the reason Hannibal was able to defeat the Romans so often and decisively. Referring to the First Punic War then transitioning to the Second, he writes:

The extent to which military science was of benefit in the battles of the Spartans is made clear from the case of Xanthippus, not to mention the rest. When he brought help as an individual to the Carthaginians not by courage but by skill, with armies that had been utterly defeated, he captured and conquered Atilius Regulus and an often victorious Roman army. By triumphing in a single encounter, he concluded the entire campaign. So also did Hannibal obtain the services of a Spartan tactician, when he was going to invade Italy. It was due to

his advice that he destroyed so many consuls and legions, though inferior himself in numbers and strength.<sup>52</sup>

Vegetius has nothing but disdain for the non-citizen armies of Carthage, despite their successes under the leadership of Hannibal. He writes:

However, a sense of security born of long peace has diverted mankind partly to the enjoyment of private leisure, partly to civilian careers. Thus attention to military training obviously was at first discharged rather neglectfully, then omitted, until finally consigned long since to oblivion. Neither let anyone wonder that this happened in the preceding age, because after the first Punic War twenty and more years of peace so enervated those all-conquering Romans because of private leisure and neglect of arms, that in the Second Punic War they could not stand up to Hannibal. So it was that after so many consuls, so many generals, so many armies lost, they only finally achieved victory, when they had been able to learn military science and training. Therefore recruits should constantly be levied and trained. For it costs less to train one's own men in arms than to hire mercenaries.<sup>53</sup>

He continually extols the virtues of the "ancient" Roman system as the model to be followed and all his recommendations to the current emperor are slanted in that light. He cites the epitome of ancient military virtue and training (the Spartans) as the model to be followed in training the current forces at hand. Hannibal and his victories are cast in the light of what can befall those who fail to pursue military science with the vigor of the Spartans. His notions of the proper composition of an army also follow that of the Roman organization during the period of the Republic – which is to say an infantry-heavy force composed primarily of well disciplined close order troops, augmented by detachments of cavalry and skirmishers. In summary Vegetius sought to return to the ways of the ancient Romans in all things from training to organization and saw only a negative example in Hannibal.

Writing later in the Middle Ages, Maurice, the Emperor of Byzantium (582-602 AD) found several positive examples in Hannibal's campaign against Rome. In his "Strategikon" (attributed to him, although there is some disagreement among scholars) he provides very specific and detailed advice for generals and tacticians. Writing some 700 years after the Second Punic War, he refers to Hannibal in several places as the epitome of a strategist and leader.

Like Frontinus, Maurice addresses Hannibal's use of disguises to confuse his enemies and to shield his appearance from those looking to divine his intentions. He also describes the use of these stratagems as a means to inspire confidence in one's own troops as well as awe in the enemy's. According to Maurice, the barbarians serving with Hannibal thought him a superior being owing to his ability to change his appearance: "Hannibal the Carthaginian used wigs and varied styles of beards, so that the barbarians thought he was a supernatural being."<sup>54</sup>

In yet another example inspired by Hannibal's generalship, Maurice writes of Hannibal's character. In this case he cites Hannibal as an example of a general who inspired confidence in his men. He understood the value of knowing his opponent and setting the proper conditions for success. In the case in point, Hannibal at one point refuses to give battle to a Roman army that clearly is interested in fighting. In this instance, Maurice cites the example of Hannibal realizing that he was up against a much more accomplished general in Scipio, than those of previous opponents he had faced. According to Maurice's tenets, the general must be aware of the character and ability of his counterpart and act accordingly:

An army is judged by the spirit of its general. Hannibal the Carthaginian understood this well, for when he learned that Scipio was commanding the Romans, he spoke highly of the disposition of their army. Some then criticized him for being so slow to march out and fight against those whom he had often defeated. He defended himself by saying 'I would prefer to deal with a troop of lions commanded by a deer than with a herd of deer under the leadership of a lion.'<sup>55</sup>

This may be the most important characteristic emphasized by Maurice for this played to the strength of the Byzantines. Surrounded by enemies of greatly different character and army characteristics, it was important for Byzantine commanders to have an in-depth appreciation of their enemies. The strategic situation required efficient application of resources and a firm appreciation of one's own strengths as well as those of the enemy. These requirements resulted in the publication of several useful texts for use by Byzantine generals that specified unique tactics based on the qualities and characteristics of the enemy being faced. This line of thinking is attributable to the qualities required of a successful general espoused in the *Strategikon*, and relies on Hannibal as one of the archetypes.<sup>56</sup> Maurice's discussion is yet another example of

Hannibal's actions being used as a positive example for his mastery of psychology and deception.

Writing during the Renaissance, Machiavelli uses Hannibal and Carthage as a negative model to drive home his discussions on war, the composition of armies, leaders, and the relations of the State to both. Machiavelli sought as had others before him to emulate the military might of the ancient Romans. As an admirer of all things Roman, he was highly critical of the state of current affairs pertaining to the practice of the art of war in contrast with the example of the Roman Empire at its height of power.<sup>57</sup> Large, well-trained, highly-disciplined, professional armies were not commonly found during the time of Machiavelli and reliance on mercenaries had increased to a level that was unacceptable to Machiavelli. He deplored their use in lieu of citizen soldiers. He believed they were also incapable of the complex maneuvers, synchronization, and battlefield efficiency of the Romans by comparison.

The nature of the armies had changed as well, particularly in the abilities of the infantry and the various types of troops in use. Late in the Middle Ages the main fighting arm had become the heavily armed horseman.<sup>58</sup> The infantry was relegated to a clearly secondary and supporting role that would have been unthinkable to the early Romans. The well-trained and highly disciplined close order infantry of ancient Rome was a relic of the past. It had also become reality that the wealthy and well-to-do had become reluctant to bear arms.

To Machiavelli, these changes boded ill for Italian society. He believed there was an intimate connection between the type of military fielded by a society and the virtue of that society. The military was a clear reflection of the society it served.<sup>59</sup> If the military were highly disciplined and full of soldiers filled with a sense of self-sacrifice, patriotism, and willingness to serve the state, then the state by extension must be highly virtuous and worthy of that service.

In an attempt to address the problems with society as well as the fielding and sustainment of armies during this period Machiavelli captured his thoughts in a book entitled The Art of War. Although Machiavelli is well known for his thoughts in the political arena, his thoughts on the military and warfighting are equally relevant if somewhat overlooked. He believed in the model of the ancient Romans and his efforts and writings were directed towards reproducing that standard.

The military environment facing Florence during the time of Machiavelli could be characterized by constant warfare and shifting alliances. Finding himself in the small and

relatively powerless principality of Florence, Machiavelli believed that a military solution was available to deal with the strategic situation facing his state.<sup>60</sup> According to Machiavelli the necessities of creating the proper type of army had been ignored for a long time. In his mind the state should never employ mercenary soldiers, which was the practice of the time. In order to raise the proper types of armies, the right soldiers must be raised and these should all fit the mold of “citizen soldier” and provide for a well-organized militia along the lines of the Republican Romans. To his thinking these were the epitome of the type of soldiers that should constitute an efficient, victorious army. These troops would have a vested interest in the outcome of any conflict, were of the land, and would be imbued with a patriotism and discipline that would be virtually invincible.<sup>61</sup>

As the antithesis of his model society and the troops it provided, Machiavelli gives us Hannibal and Carthage. Citing the use of entire mercenary armies by Hannibal, Machiavelli scorns the very notion that Hannibal had a reasonable chance of defeating the “citizen militia” of Rome. He discusses the fact that the problems with the string of Roman defeats were not the problem with the fighting ability of the troops but with the leadership and tactical acumen of the generals. He acknowledges Hannibal’s generalship and tactical ability, but, in the same vein as Vegetius, he believes that the Carthaginians were a corrupt society and had no chance of producing armies that could defeat Rome. They were led by leaders produced by that society and who were not to be admired. He writes (referring to the extreme cruelty of Hannibal) that “The historians, having given little thought to this, on the one hand admire what Hannibal achieved, and on the other condemn what made his achievements possible.”<sup>62</sup>

Machiavelli is also adamant about the purpose of war, and that is to defeat the enemy. He believed that the sole purpose of an army was to defend the society from which it came and that when it was committed to battle its sole purpose was to win. He again uses Hannibal and his campaigns against the Romans as the negative example of how to properly use the “state’s army” during time of war.

He is particularly critical of Hannibal for failing to follow up his victory at Cannae. According to Machiavelli, Hannibal frittered away his opportunity to win the war after crushing the Romans at Cannae, when success was in his grasp.<sup>63</sup> He writes: “When one wins, one must follow up the victory with the utmost speed and in this case imitate Caesar and not Hannibal, who, by staying put after he had beaten the Romans at Cannae, lost the empire of Rome.”<sup>64</sup>

In Machiavelli's eyes Hannibal's only real chance of winning the confrontation with Rome was wasted on the pursuit of a deficient strategy, with tools that were not adequate to the task from the beginning. He believed that Hannibal was intent on applying enough pressure to the Romans to induce negotiations rather than defeating them outright and occupying their principal city. His writing also speaks to Hannibal's "cruelty" and calls it a primary reason for his many successes, but not enough to ensure victory in the long run against the Romans.<sup>65</sup> Carthage and its mercenary soldiers never had the stake in the outcome of the war that Rome and its citizen soldiers had. The Carthaginians, for all Hannibal's tactical brilliance, had only a fleeting opportunity to win in a confrontation with the resources and virtue of a state like Rome.

## CHAPTER 5 - Napoleon

In his writings Napoleon mentions seven generals worthy of study. He counted Hannibal among a small universe of stars and is quoted as saying “The principles of Caesar were the same as those of Hannibal: to keep his forces assembled, to be vulnerable at no point, to move with speed to important points, to make use of moral resources, of the reputation of his arms, of the fear that he inspired as well as of political means to maintain the fidelity of his allies, and the obedience of conquered peoples.”

Napoleon recommended that anyone desiring to be a great captain would do well to study the campaigns of the following generals – Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Gustavus-Adolphus, Turenne, Prince Eugene, and Frederick the Great. Accordingly he believed that the study of these would yield a “complete treatise” on the art of war. He was a voracious reader and student of military arts. He deemed Hannibal among the luminaries he described as most worthy of extensive study and emulation.<sup>66</sup> His chief admiration of Hannibal was the application of audacious maneuver and the destruction of enemy forces, which Napoleon attempted at every opportunity. Napoleon’s model advocated rapid maneuver and complete familiarity with the terrain in order to bring the enemy to battle in a position least favorable to them, much the same as Hannibal’s philosophy.<sup>67</sup> Napoleon writes of Hannibal’s march into Italy:

It took him five months to make this march of 400 leagues. He left no garrison or depot in the rear, nor did he preserve his communications with Spain or Carthage until after the battle of Trasimene. No more vast or extended plan has been executed by man. Alexander’s expedition was not nearly so bold and was much easier: he had many more chances of success. It was wiser!<sup>68</sup>

Upon reading Napoleon’s own words it is clear that he admired Hannibal for his tactical ability. There are no comments on the success of his strategy or how he conducted himself as a statesman. There is no discussion as to how well Hannibal linked tactics to strategy or how well or how close he came to actually winning his war. Napoleon’s gleanings from Hannibal’s campaigns do not appear to focus at all on the linkages between the art of grand strategy and achieving some ultimate stable end-state favorable to the nation. What becomes clear in



Napoleon's writings are the value he places on Hannibal's tactical ability to outthink his opponents, outmaneuver them, and conduct operations in such a manner as to keep his opponents always reacting to his initiative. There are no mentions of Hannibal's missteps. There is no discussion of Hannibal's failure to connect an amazing string of tactical victories into something greater. Napoleon apparently fell into the same trap and committed many of the same errors as Hannibal. He became a master of tactics and operations but still failed to connect them to strategy and he ultimately failed, as did Hannibal.

He extolled Hannibal's ability to succeed without leaving his lines of communication open. He regards Hannibal's ability to live off the land in Italy without support from Carthage for some 15 years as a signal achievement. Napoleon writes:

Hannibal's principle was to keep his troops united, to have a garrison only in one captured fortress which he preserved in good condition in order to keep his hostages, large machines, distinguished prisoners, and his sick, leaving his communications the responsibility of his allies. He maintained himself in Italy for fifteen years without receiving any help from Carthage and evacuated it only under the orders of his government to fly to the defense of his own country. Fortune betrayed him at Zama and Carthage ceased to exist. But had he been defeated at the Trebbia, Trasimene, or at the Cannae, what worse things could have happened to him? Defeated at the gates of the capital, he could not keep his army from entire destruction. And had he left half of his army or even a third at the first and second bases, could he have been victorious at the Trebbia at Cannae, or at Trasimene? No! All would have been lost, even his armies in reserve. History would know nothing about him.<sup>69</sup>

It is apparent that Napoleon appreciated Hannibal's tactical savvy on how best to employ the troops he had at his disposal. He constantly had to adjust his plan to the strengths of the various contingents of troops in his army. Normally after a masterful march to take advantage of some aspect of the terrain, weather, or personality of an opponent there was still the critical matter of disposing the troops in a manner that would ensure their greatest contribution to the coming battle.

These are problems that Napoleon had to deal with as well, and if his armies were somewhat more homogenous than Hannibal's, he still had the issues of coordinating the various

arms in such a manner as to yield the highest efficiency in combat. This situation also changed during Napoleon's lifetime. Although his intent was to establish and maintain a national army, the cost of his battles and campaigns forced him to change. He was eventually forced to mitigate the increasing drain on manpower by increasing use of large contingents of mercenary and allied troops. Hannibal would have been well acquainted with these issues.

Napoleon's focus was normally on how to destroy the enemy army rather than occupy key terrain or the enemy capital. His actions were characterized by the offensive, maintenance of the initiative, and decisive action to keep the enemy off balance. His sense of timing and perception of the battlefield was superb and was the difference between success and failure in many of his battles. His keys to success as distilled by J.F.C. Fuller were unity of command, generalship and soldiership, and planning.<sup>70</sup> The influence of Hannibal's campaigning and tactics are apparent.

Another similarity between the two generals and an offshoot of the influence of Hannibal was Napoleon's thinking on the use cavalry. Napoleon sought to turn his heavy cavalry arm into an arm of decision for his army. Just as the real hammer in Hannibal's army was the mounted arm, Napoleon's intention in reforming the mounted arm of his forces was to make it capable of being a main striking force.<sup>71</sup>

Although Napoleon considered Hannibal one of his main sources of inspiration chosen from a very select few, it is worth noting the differences in circumstances facing the two generals. There were significant discrepancies between the military and cultural environments in which the two generals labored. For all the appreciation of certain aspects of Hannibal's abilities and his warfighting examples, Napoleon faced circumstances of environment, politics, and technology that were quite different than those in which Hannibal labored.

Chief among these differences is that Napoleon was one of the first generals to enjoy the benefits of a "nation under arms." This concept essentially mobilized, or had the potential to mobilize, the entire military age manpower of a nation. It provided a seemingly unlimited capacity to absorb and then replace losses.<sup>72</sup> Napoleon's absolute power and the immense manpower and resources available to him in France allowed him to conduct operations relatively secure in the notion that losses would be replaced and new resources obtained. It was virtually a given that Napoleon would be able to make good the losses he sustained. This idea would have been completely foreign to the Carthaginian commander.

The final evidence of Hannibal's impact on Napoleon is the latter's implementation and understanding of generalship. Napoleon appears to have valued the same character and attributes of a general as modeled by Hannibal, among others. This example from Napoleon's writings includes the fact that he considered the general and his presence, both physical and mental, to be paramount to the conduct and performance of the army. Napoleon states:

In war men are nothing; one man is everything. The presence of the general is indispensable. He is the head, the whole of the army. It was not the Roman army that subdued Gaul, but Caesar; not the Carthaginian army that caused the republic to tremble at the gates of Rome, but Hannibal; not the Macedonian army that reached the Indus, but Alexander; ... In war only the commander understands the importance of certain things, and he alone, through his will and superior insight, conquers and surmounts all difficulties. An army is nothing without the head.<sup>73</sup>

Napoleon clearly believes that like Hannibal, he was the centerpiece and main arbiter of success of the army. It seems clear from his writings that he believes that the general is the key component to success regardless of composition of the army, and he considered himself in the same league as those luminaries he deemed worthy of study.

A contemporary of Napoleon's but with a more strategic outlook, Carl von Clausewitz writes on Hannibal in a context that does not use the Carthaginian or any of his battles as examples of things to be emulated. Just the opposite is true. Clausewitz states that the battles of the ancients are too far removed to be of use in detailed study. The arms, equipment and tactics do not warrant consideration.

Consistent with the thrust of his writings Clausewitz does make note of the wisdom of the Romans in the strategic conduct of their war with Hannibal. Whereas Napoleon focused primarily on the conduct of battles, training and organization for combat, Clausewitz was more concerned with the strategic outcome of those battles – why they were being fought and how they contributed to the desired strategic end state of winning the war. He particularly lauds the Roman decisions to carry the war to other theatres – Spain and Africa, even as Hannibal and his armies were still roaming the Italian peninsula.

In this context, Hannibal's conduct of the war is seen as having relevance to the military thinker at the strategic level. The real lesson that is worthy of study is how Hannibal's opponents bested him from a strategic perspective. Clausewitz writes, "The memorable way in

which the Romans in the Second Punic War attacked the Carthaginian possessions in Spain and Africa, while Hannibal still maintained himself in Italy, is a most instructive subject to study, as the general relations of the States and Armies concerned in the indirect act of defense are sufficiently well known.”<sup>74</sup> His comments state that the most important aspect of study is the strategic picture, not the troops or the battles, but why Carthage failed to turn tactical success into long-term victory.

## CHAPTER 6 - The Great General Staff

There is an unmistakable influence of Hannibal on the strategic and tactical thinking of the German Great General Staff (GGS). Perhaps with more than any other association of military thinkers, Hannibal's influence looms largest on the thought process and development of the GGS in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

This influence becomes apparent upon scrutiny of various writers during this period. As the Chief of the GGS, General Helmuth von Moltke provided oversight and revision of the training and development of the German warfighting staff from 1857-1887. Germany's military was faced with a strategic situation that called for the development and application of a strategy that would set the conditions and allow for the consummation of battles of annihilation. The central position of the German state, surrounded by increasingly hostile enemies planted the seeds for the creation of a deliberate, deep looking warfighting strategy. In the words of Arden Bucholz on the strategic situation confronting Germany, "To the southeast stood the Habsburgs, a world power since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. To the west stood the Second French Republic which harbored the traditions of Napoleonic imperialism. Both were recently defeated and therefore dangerous neighbors. To the east stood the armies of the Romanovs who had sacked and burned Berlin in the previous century."<sup>75</sup>

The strategic setting in Europe had changed significantly towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The enemies of Germany possessed resources of manpower and material that Germany could not hope to match in a protracted campaign. Although being in a central position did have some advantages, it also posed several perils. Being surrounded on all sides by enemies required preparation for war on several fronts in a simultaneous or near-simultaneous manner. Therefore the peace-time requirement for Germany became the development of plans with sufficient detail and synchronization to ensure timely success on one front while buying time on another.<sup>76</sup> It then required provision for rapid re-deployment of forces from one front to another. Although war might not be the optimum choice for Germany, it would have to be a viable option given the history of the region and regular resort to warfare to settle issues.

During the Napoleonic wars, one of the lessons Prussia learned was that failing to act quickly and decisively could have disastrous long-term consequences, particularly for a nation easily accessible to its enemies. This fact led Prussian leadership to conclude that any future conflicts would have to be fought quickly and produce decisive results. The German staff envisioned fighting a two front war in the East and West against enemies who would require varying amounts of time to mobilize, thereby allowing Germany to exploit her central position.<sup>77</sup>

When General Helmuth von Moltke (the Elder) inherited stewardship of the GGS in 1857, he instituted a form of war planning that required expertly trained staff officers to plan deeply into the future, visualizing and implementing plans to a level of detail unheard of previously. It set the stage to broaden the scope from what had previously involved armies of hundreds of thousands to become armies of millions in the First World War. The logistics and planning efforts to sustain, move, command and control forces of this size were staggering. Remembering the defeats administered to them by the “new” kind of French army during the early 1800’s, the Prussians set about developing their own “new” army which took the better part of a century to fully blossom.<sup>78</sup>

Alfred von Schlieffen inherited this background of evolving planning methods and preparations for war. Born in 1833, he came of age in the Prussian Army in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Following a successful career as a troop commander, he eventually found himself in charge of the GGS. His background and training under General Moltke and the Prussian system of making war established the foundation of the German war planning effort for World War I.

Schlieffen conceived a plan based in large measure on his studies of the battle of Cannae, Hannibal’s greatest victory. Although there is dispute among historians as to whether there actually was a codified “Schlieffen Plan,” there is abundant evidence that Schlieffen’s thinking about the conduct of war was highly influenced by Hannibal, and more specifically Cannae.<sup>79</sup> The Schlieffen Plan that the Germans intended to execute in 1914 was and perhaps still is the greatest example of the impact of Hannibalic thinking on the practice of war. Regardless of author, the war plan sought to allow the Germans to win on one front while holding on another, and then transfer forces to win on the second front. The method of victory was intended to be the annihilation of the enemy by flank and rear attacks, even if the army had to create a flank where none existed.<sup>80</sup> In this war plan, the Germans attempted to replicate, on an operational level, the stunning tactical success of Hannibal’s victory at Cannae. Typical of thought during

this period, General Erich Ludendorff writes in his memoirs that "... annihilating battles have double weight – they hit the enemy dearly and detract little from one's own strength."<sup>81</sup>

Upon assuming the position as chief of the GGS in 1891, Schlieffen sought to improve the system of planning he had inherited from Helmuth von Moltke and Alfred von Waldersee and set about implementing several reforms. The reforms included streamlining the organization of the staff and implementing a new style of planning intended to forecast one's own moves versus those of the enemy well into the future. This type of planning required technical and mathematical skills in order to quantify as much as possible the science of warfighting. No element of the plan would be left chance. It required calculation of exact ratios of troops, distances to be moved, terrain, availability of mobility assets and all other manner of requirements in order to determine the requirements for victory. It required planning to a level of detail that had previously been unheard of until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Along with developing the techniques of detailed planning, Schlieffen also sought to cultivate in the German Army and the GGS the imperative of waging battles of annihilation.<sup>82</sup> In order to instill this concept into the minds of German generals, Schlieffen chose Hannibal's victory at Cannae as the prototypical example of this form of battle. He determined to integrate this type of warfare into the mindset and training of all German generals. Given the strategic setting that the German army faced, the reality was that Germany could not settle for victories that did not produce rapid, decisive results.<sup>83</sup> Schlieffen's writings indicate he believed that battles that did not result in the outright destruction of Germany's foes only invited the "defeated" army to return at a later date with renewed vigor and strength. Those nominally defeated armies would have to be fought again and again if they were not destroyed outright. The reality of the situation was that Germany could not afford to engage in battles of attrition with its more numerous enemies.<sup>84</sup>

In order to provide his officers the background to his thinking Schlieffen needed a concrete example from which to teach. As a student of military history, Schlieffen was well-acquainted with and enamored of the decisive style of battle waged by Hannibal. Hannibal's battles frequently yielded results similar to those the Germans would need if they had hope of expeditiously defeating multiple enemies on far ranging fronts. In Schlieffen's own words he chose Cannae as the model he would use to train his officers, "The battle of extermination may be fought today according to the same plan as elaborated by Hannibal in long forgotten times."<sup>85</sup>

Cannae provided the Germans – who were regularly outnumbered - a concrete example of how their current strategic situation might be alleviated.

Hannibal's victory at Cannae was mesmerizing to the Germans because it illustrated being able to fight and win when outnumbered. It provided a tangible example of being able to appear disadvantaged on paper, and yet not just defeat the enemy, but achieve a battle of annihilation. It decisively demonstrated how a well trained, well led, smaller combined arms force could successfully defeat a much larger foe.

This notion came to represent the mark of ultimate success for a German general and became a cornerstone in the education of the GGS. Based on Schlieffen's intent, it was not going to be good enough to deliver what he termed an "ordinary" victory. Setting the conditions to execute a battle of annihilation came to represent not just a desirable achievement in battle, but would ultimately determine whether Germany could live or die as a state, surrounded as it was by enemies who were growing in power after 1890. General Ludendorff stated: "Annihilation of hostile armies has become an immutable principle for conduct of all wars, and to bear it in mind is the first task to be carried out in totalitarian war."<sup>86</sup>

In the overhaul of the Great General Staff, the study of how to achieve battles of annihilation became paramount in the curriculum. The overriding desire of the leadership of the GGS became that of inculcating the constant desire, competence, and skill to bring to conclusion these types of battles. The circumstances encompassing the tactical battle of Cannae seemed to fit almost perfectly the strategic conditions confronting Germany and would provide the foundation on which to build a strategy for success in any future war.

Hannibal's army was significantly outnumbered overall, and in most categories of measure during the time, should have been at a relative disadvantage in the fight. He was outnumbered over two to one in heavy infantry, which was the strength of the Roman Army. In overall troops, the Romans possessed the advantage of some 80,000 to 50,000.<sup>87</sup> Of Hannibal's heavy infantry, only about 12,000 were actually the equivalent of their Roman counterparts who numbered some 55,000. This disparity in numbers became a metaphor of the strategic situation facing Schlieffen.

The only area in which Hannibal had a marked advantage was in the disposition of cavalry (both in numbers and quality) in which he had approximately 10,000 versus 6,000 for the Romans. Schlieffen's focus on operational mobility looked to achieve a similar advantage by



sending a "... powerful German right wing swinging around the fortified Franco-German border. This would take the French Army in the rear and force it to fight a battle on unfavorable terms."<sup>88</sup> Reproducing the stunning success of Cannae was seen by Schlieffen as the key to the strategic problems faced by Germany. The promise of this type of victory is what motivated Schlieffen to apparently try to emulate it on a much larger scale (strategic), compared to Hannibal's tactical encirclement.

In spite of Hannibal's tactical victory at Cannae, it did not provide any of the sought after strategic results (seemingly ignored by Schlieffen).<sup>89</sup> Schlieffen appears to have believed that by modeling the tactical success of Hannibal at the strategic level, Germany could in fact achieve a stunning victory over its opponents in the west in a short period of time. This would then allow the Germans to mass the bulk of their armies against their enemies in the east. This attempt to capture Hannibal's success on a grand scale was manifested in the Schlieffen Plan of World War I.

During Schlieffen's tenure as head of the GGS he commissioned a complete study of the battle of Cannae and its bearing and relationship to several previous campaigns and battles. He sought to draw the parallels from the ancient examples with those of his contemporaries in order to capture the lessons for application in the future. For the subjects of his study he chose the campaigns of Frederick the Great and Napoleon, as well as the campaign against Austria in 1866. For the final comparison, he chose to look at the Franco-Prussian War during 1870-1871.

In each of the sections of Schlieffen's study, he compared the actions of the protagonists to the combatants in the battle of Cannae. He sought to validate the overarching principles of Cannae against specific opportunities in which his own country and selected enemies either failed to employ those principles or were able to execute them. In most cases, the examinations yielded negative results and highlighted the fact that most generals would not be able to consummate another Cannae for a variety of reasons.

Chief among these reasons is the notion that most generals would fail to seize the opportunities presented them. An even larger consideration is making the chief objective of any attack the flanks or rear of the enemy. In Schlieffen's mind, the chief obstacle to success was to get his generals to always think in terms of attacking the rear or a flank. It required imagination and audacity to press for these types of conditions and it was not second nature to many of the generals to think in these terms. In every example, Schlieffen cited the reasons why the generals

failed and provided a remedy to the problem and demonstrated how the individual failed to seize an opportunity to attack an exposed flank or rear. The central theme of the book was to examine how one might consistently turn a “normal” battle into a battle of annihilation.

Owing to the environment that he was operating in and the tradition of detailed planning bequeathed from his predecessors, particularly Moltke, Schlieffen judged that failure in battle was due to lack of proper planning, lack of audacity and failure to recognize the situation as it was presented.<sup>90</sup> In the discussion of Cannae, the battle is dissected into its many subordinate parts, and Schlieffen shows his faith above all else that, “The battle of extermination may be fought today according to the plan as elaborated by Hannibal in long forgotten times.”<sup>91</sup>

The victory appealed to Schlieffen because it seemed to confound all the current theories. That the outnumbered force could in fact win and win decisively ran counter to prevailing notion that the weaker force could not attack “concentrically” and should not try to attack on the wings.<sup>92</sup> Another aspect that appealed to Schlieffen was the notion that the smaller force might not necessarily be superior to the larger in all areas but could still win if the proper conditions were set. At any rate, the prevailing belief was that the decisive blow must be delivered against the flanks or rear of an enemy.

Schlieffen believed that the future fight would be a “struggle for the flanks.”<sup>93</sup> Therefore, all effort must be expended to achieve victory there vice the front of the enemy. In the examination of Napoleon and Frederick, Schlieffen cites several instances that buttress the notion that the true lesson to be gained is that one or more flanks must always be attacked, the enemy must be turned out of his position and that the only way to achieve destruction of the enemy was through a rear or flank attack. He writes that “Frederick the Great failed in many a battle of annihilation, because his forces were too small and he had nevertheless dared the utmost. Napoleon failed at Prussian-Eylau because he had spent too much on a frontal attack, left too much in reserve and used too little on the decisive flank attack.”<sup>94</sup>

Schlieffen cites several examples including Leuthen and Zorndorf to support his thesis. It is also hard to miss the fact that the GGS, particularly Schlieffen, identified strongly with Frederick. The circumstances facing Prussia were quite similar to those facing Germany in the late nineteenth and early 20<sup>th</sup> century – surrounded by numerically larger foes (Russia and France), operating on interior lines, and being unable to mobilize forces to match the size of her enemies.<sup>95</sup> It is apparent that Schlieffen considered Cannae the benchmark with which to

compare all other battles and that their degree of merit for the commander was directly proportional to how well they mirrored Hannibal's achievement.

In many ways, the example of Frederick provides many parallels with that of Hannibal in Italy and it is easy to see why Schlieffen would concatenate the two. Hannibal was operating virtually surrounded in a hostile land and could never hope to match his foes man for man. What he could not achieve in raw numbers and resources he could hope to offset through superior tactics. All these militated for achieving decisive victories with smaller forces in battles of annihilation. According to Schlieffen "It may be seen from all the battles, won or lost by Frederick the Great, that his aim was to attack from the very beginning a flank or even the rear of the enemy, to push him if possible against an insurmountable obstacle and then to annihilate him by enveloping one or both of his flanks."<sup>96</sup>

The second area of Schlieffen's examination and relation to Cannae was that of Napoleon. Although Schlieffen, his contemporaries and history have judged Napoleon one of the greatest generals, Schlieffen found numerous flaws in Napoleon's battles when judged against the standards of Cannae. He also cites specific instances during Napoleon's career where he exhibited those characteristics that led to decisive battles. However later in Napoleon's career, Schlieffen maintains that Napoleon was a different sort of commander and failed to exhibit those requirements necessary for decisive battle. The decisiveness of previous battles was absent and the results failed to live up to the standards he had set early in his career. "The day of Prussian-Eylau marked a turning point in Napoleon's life as a general. The series of annihilating battles – Marengo, Ulm, Austerlitz, Jena – does not continue."<sup>97</sup>

Napoleon is lauded for his planning and his "large turning movements" which would begin days and weeks in advance of the actual battle as the conditions were being set.<sup>98</sup> He also noted that even in battles where the situation had turned awry, victory was still possible if the object of the main attack was still the flank or rear.<sup>99</sup> He praises Napoleon in his early campaigns for realizing that battle and victory was necessary and not simply some contest to outmaneuver the enemy. The concept of decisive battle was an emerging paradigm. Napoleon's examples provided ample fodder to bolster Schlieffen's thinking on battles of annihilation. He was audacious in thought and decisive in execution and expected his subordinates to execute his will.<sup>100</sup> In Schlieffen's calculus, the strategic circumstances facing Germany required nothing

short of a knockout blow.<sup>101</sup> Even though enjoying an interior position, Germany still had too many strategic challenges to allow for anything but decisively defeating its enemies.

Schlieffen takes Napoleon to task for failing to exploit opportunities presented to him late in his career. In Schlieffen's eyes, Napoleon had gone from being bold and audacious to a point where he missed many situations that could have been exploited with decisive consequences. In Schlieffen's strongest criticism, he cites Napoleon's greatest failure at Waterloo to be an example of failing to apply the principles gleaned from Cannae. The prequel to Waterloo at Ligny in 1815 provided Napoleon ample opportunity to decisively defeat the Prussians thereby rendering half the coalition out of the fight and setting up Napoleon for victory.

Writing with explicit reference to Cannae, Schlieffen criticizes Napoleon for failing to choose the ground wisely, and taking up a position that rendered his forces ineffective against the Prussians. Schlieffen writes:

This however did not compensate for the disadvantage of a narrow front and a deep flank. The position was worthy of a Terentius Varro. It was bound to be surrounded whether the adversary wanted to or not. One flank he was forced to envelop. To envelop both was an easy matter. Should the latter take place the defense was lost. Should there also be a Hasdrubal for attacking the rear, for which no less than three cavalry corps ought to have been made available, the highest aim would have been attained. On the eve of his fall, Napoleon was given an opportunity for a battle of annihilation such as had not arisen during the 19 years of his career.<sup>102</sup>

“In the final analysis Napoleon had left the road which brought him to his great victories (*annihilation*).”<sup>103</sup> Waterloo is compared to the Battle of Marengo some 15 years earlier which was not a well-conducted fight by either side and resulted in great casualties on both sides. It was primarily a head on clash with indecisive results. This was exactly the type of battle that Schlieffen intended his generals to avoid. Although it contained elements of a Cannae, it was not fully developed and a great opportunity missed.

In a separate assertion, Schlieffen states that the battle of Leipzig could have been another Cannae, had not the Allied generals been so in awe of Napoleon's reputation. He cites evidence that generals failed to seize and maintain the initiative and thereby lost a great chance

to defeat Napoleon. In this battle, the allies missed the chance with some 350,000 men to utterly destroy Napoleon's army of 200,000, all because of fear of Napoleon.<sup>104</sup>

In the chapter dealing with the Prussians, Schlieffen contrasts their performance with that of Napoleon some 50 years earlier. If Napoleon had gradually lost his imagination and desire to execute battles of destruction, the baton was seemingly passed to the Prussians. However, even they failed to see and act in a completely decisive manner. According to Schlieffen, the Prussian generals were too set in their ways to accept the principles that Moltke wanted to instill in them.<sup>105</sup>

Part of the problem lay in the fact that for all their excellence the Prussian generals were too stodgy and unimaginative in their grasp of how to conduct battle. They had apparently absorbed many lessons from the Napoleonic wars but Schlieffen states they were all the wrong ones. They represented the notion that the proper way to conduct a battle was for one side to take up a position – generally the numerically weaker side, then the other with a battalion or two more would attack in a head on fight.<sup>106</sup>

The Cannae study makes the claims that the Prussian generals were incapable of “...entering into the cycle of ideas of the gray-haired theorist who had never commanded even a company (Moltke).”<sup>107</sup> They were incapable of truly seeing the battlefield, preparing it, and exploiting its possibilities. It states that the Prussians were irretrievably mired in an old mindset.

The main point of discussion in the chapter is that if the generals had listened to the advice of Moltke, they could have won an easy battle in the manner of Cannae on June 25<sup>th</sup> during the Austro-Prussia War of 1866. However, because they could not visualize the possibilities and discounted Moltke's suggestion, they lost the opportunity. In spite of themselves and owing to the iron will of Moltke, the Prussians were led towards victory. The description of the battle (Langensalza) says it developed in exactly the same manner as Cannae. The battle saw an early victory by Austrian troops in the center of the line similar to that of Varro over Hannibal's Spaniards and Gauls at Cannae. This act was necessary for the Prussians to then deliver the decisive blow to the previously unexposed flanks of the enemy on the 28<sup>th</sup>. The victory on the 28<sup>th</sup> is described as “corresponding to the ancient program of the Aufidus (reference to the site of the battle of Cannae).”<sup>108</sup> It provided another seemingly ironclad successful application of the principals gleaned from Cannae.

The final example in the study is that of the German campaign against the French in 1870-1871. In one example after another the failure to think as a Hannibal at Cannae is exposed. First the French, then the Germans miss opportunity after opportunity to surround and destroy the enemy. Timidity, fear, even downright terror are characterized as the main reasons for failing to act in a manner that will achieve annihilation in battle.

Schlieffen uses the example of Napoleon in the autumn of 1813 to emphasize the point that those who fail to seize the opportunity to surround may themselves fall victim to the same fate. According to Schlieffen:

He (Napoleon) found himself in the minority and determined that ... the weakest and decisive point was the front, and assembled against it his not inconsiderable forces. An heroic, a superhuman attack, an annihilating piercing should be executed. The future depended on it, it had to decide if the world was to be once more turned upside down. The monstrous attack broke as so many of those preceding it had done. And then the inevitable occurred. The man, who did not wish to surround, was surrounded on both sides, pressed together, encircled and would have been annihilated if pale fear had not left a back door open to the terror inspiring one (Leipzig).<sup>109</sup>

This chapter provides yet another example of how a general should not fail to take the initiative and strike for the flanks. In this scenario, not only does he not achieve the results he might have, but even more is at stake. The general failing to act has his flanks attacked with terrible consequences. In this example, Schlieffen makes the argument that whether the general is stronger or weaker, if he does not strike for the flanks, the tables will be turned on him. He makes the even broader claim that if the general does not seek to envelop both flanks he exposes himself to being attacked on the other flank.<sup>110</sup> This concept is so strongly endorsed that the study goes on to refute Napoleon's phrase that "the stronger conquers." The final analysis comes through quite clear. And that is that in spite of numerical weakness, it is possible to gain a battle of annihilation if one seizes a Cannae or Prague (Frederick 1757).<sup>111</sup>

The final section of Schlieffen's study included detailed maps associated with the key European conflicts in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In each of the chapters of the book, Schlieffen highlights example after example of how the principles of Cannae were either applied or misapplied to case studies of historic battles. In every case the reasoning is biased towards a

favorable application of Cannae to the circumstances at hand. In no case does Schlieffen acknowledge that Cannae might not be the best example followed. However, this is to be expected as the battle of Cannae provides the most clear cut example of how a weaker army might defeat a stronger – which is the example the Germans needed. Looking at the strategic conditions facing Germany as Schlieffen knew them – he needed to distill principles that might be applied in a variety of circumstances, always yielding success.

Cannae provided an answer to the strategic circumstances confronting Germany. It fit all the requirements – the ability to fight outnumbered and win, the path to decisive victory, provision for well led “superior” troops to prevail over masses of “lesser quality” stock. It also carried with it the romantic tradition of the underdog, winning in spite of all odds and not just eking out a victory but delivering a smashing victory over innumerable foes. All these circumstances contributed to the appeal of Cannae to the head of the Great General Staff.

This lengthy study of Cannae led to the development of the Schlieffen plan that formed the foundation of the initial German war effort in the west in the First World War. The Schlieffen plan sought to implement nearly every aspect of the knowledge gleaned from the study of Cannae. In every aspect of the planning the idea was to implement the critical elements of Hannibal’s most significant victory. The plan included a thinned center to lure the enemy forward in an initial false sense of victory. It included provision for massive attacks on one flank and the rear of the enemy army by forces seeking to surround and annihilate the masses of confused and hopeless enemy.

The plan as envisioned and as attempted was exceedingly complex. Although it can be argued that Hannibal’s plan was complex, Schlieffen’s was orders of magnitude greater. It required immense reliance on timing. It required a tremendous amount of coordination and detailed planning from the German Railroad Section. The railroads were the keys to victory in the Schlieffen plan and were to provide the means of implementation on a grand operational level what Hannibal had achieved on a much smaller tactical level.

The plan relied heavily on assumptions including the idea that an inadequate Russian mobilization system would retard the deployment of the Russian Army. The main effort required that the Dutch and Belgian rail system (the most dense rail system at that time) would be available for use by the Germans. These rail systems would be required to complete the huge turning movement to the north and west as envisioned by Schlieffen. It assumed that the British

and French would be surprised by German actions and would not be able to react in a manner to thwart the intended German advance. It also hinged on the idea that the Anglo/French Army would be destroyed in a thirty to forty day timeframe. The plan also assumed that the weakened center of his armies would be able to hold out against an ambitious French thrust until the combat power on his right flank could be brought to bear. In short, it was very ambitious and required that numerous assumptions all held true. That time was a critical component to all aspects of the plan is an understatement. Schlieffen and his planners counted on a “time advantage” over their opponents on all fronts measured in days rather than weeks.<sup>112</sup>

The detailed planning and coordination was to be delivered by the specialized officers of the Great General Staff. Schlieffen spent years developing the technical expertise in the officer corps to undertake such a huge and risky planning effort. Perhaps Schlieffen’s greatest contribution to the development of the GGS officer was the inculcation of the mindset of “annihilation” predicated on the principles of Cannae.<sup>113</sup> There were also numerous other aspects in the development of the GGS officer including mathematics, mapmaking, engineering skills, technology, and use of the case study method. Schlieffen made the determination that the only study worthy of the GGS officer was that of annihilation.<sup>114</sup> It provided the compass point to which all other efforts were oriented.

As it turned out the Schlieffen Plan as envisioned was a resounding failure. For all the planning efforts, staff rides, wargames, case studies and technical training, it did not materialize as planned. There were too many assumptions, too many unknowns that were out of the hands of the Germans to control. The initial attacks went well enough but almost immediately the time schedule was thrown off.<sup>115</sup>

The French and particularly the Belgians fought much harder than anticipated and succeeded in delaying the advance sufficiently to irredeemably throw the schedule off pace. The British mobilized much quicker than expected and although their army was fairly small, it was well equipped and gave an excellent account of itself. Of particular hindrance to the German plan was the fact that the Russians mobilized much quicker than expected as well. The Schlieffen plan assumed that the Russians would be much slower in mobilizing than actually occurred. Another key contributor was the fact that the Germans did not have sufficient manpower to strengthen the right wing of their army to achieve the goals they envisioned for it.



The end result was the gradual grinding down of the offensive. As pointed out, the Russians threatened earlier than planned, the British moved much more quickly than anticipated and the French were not surprised as intended. The plan did not work, and Schlieffen's attempt to deliver a modern Cannae did not materialize.

Of note is the commentary in the United States Army, Command and General Staff College reprint of Schlieffen's Cannae battle studies. It was reprinted in 1931, 13 years after the war, and over 17 years after the failed attempt to recreate Cannae. In the forward, General Baron Von Freytag-Loringhaven states that he believes the real reason Schlieffen's plan did not succeed was due to the fact that it was not executed as planned.<sup>116</sup> Schlieffen, who spent years developing the concept and building the means to ensure the victory, retired in 1905. He was succeeded by General Helmuth von Moltke who allegedly changed key aspects of the plan based on his notions of how the war would unfold (weakened the right wing of the main effort in the west). As a Schlieffen loyalist one must assume that Freytag-Loringhaven's comments were at least partly based on trying to shift blame for the German Army's failure to someone other than Schlieffen.

According to Freytag-Loringhaven the changes that Moltke implemented ruined the essence of the plan and hamstrung its ability to succeed. Moltke rebalanced the forces at his disposal and although the German right wing remained the main effort it did not have sufficient forces to execute the mission Schlieffen envisioned for it. Freytag-Loringhaven states that Schlieffen had exhorted those who served with him as well as those who succeeded him to ensure that the right wing remained as strong as he had originally envisioned.

Based on the comments in the introduction it should appear to us that the larger lesson was not learned by the GGS and the notion that a Cannae like victory was possible on the scale envisioned by Schlieffen survived the First World War intact and foreshadowed much of what was to come in the Second World War.<sup>117</sup> Hannibal's tactical victory at Cannae could be reproduced on a strategic scale if only done properly. Freytag-Loringhaven maintains that the failure of the Schlieffen Plan was not in concept but in execution.

If Schlieffen's Plan did not bring success on the western front, for whatever reason, events in the east against the Russians proved in many respects to be the Cannae that was envisioned. The success was only tactical and did not yield strategic success as envisioned by the GGS. The overall German plan for the war envisioned sufficient time to defeat the allies in

the west and then transport forces east in order to deal with the Russians. As it turned out this was not possible as the Russians moved much more quickly than anyone had anticipated and advanced into East Prussia.

Owing to the rapid advance of the Russians into Prussia, the Germans were forced to act in a much more decisive manner than they had anticipated. The Russians had brought up approximately 400,000 men opposed by little more than 200,000 on the German side. Additionally the Russians enjoyed an advantage in guns versus the Germans and were in a difficult situation.<sup>118</sup>

Although the situation appeared grim, the German commanders had actually several advantages which were to figure mightily in the outcome of any conflict. As a result of over 25 years of planning, wargaming, and terrain familiarization, the German officers in the East were absolutely knowledgeable of the terrain. They were also conversant in the probable actions the Russians would have to take in any invasion of Prussia. This knowledge was to prove critical to success.<sup>119</sup>

Acting in a decisive manner with the forces at his disposal, the newly arrived commander of German forces in the East, Paul von Hindenburg, elected to use terrain and bold decision-making to his advantage in hopes of delivering an unexpected, but crushing blow to the attacking Russian forces. A product of the GGS, General Hindenburg used intuition, the canalizing effects of the terrain, and in the greatest traditions of Hannibal took advantage of enemy personalities to achieve victory. The Russians had advanced in two main bodies, widely separated. The Russian commanders were barely on speaking terms and were coordinating their efforts in only the most rudimentary fashion. This error was to prove their undoing. The army in the North delayed after a meeting engagement with the Germans. The army in the South advanced based on bad intelligence and faulty assumptions.<sup>120</sup>

Hindenburg acted deliberately and decisively by accepting risk in the North, stripping his forces almost bare and concentrating his main effort against the Southern wing of the Russian advance. Hindenburg's actions provide one of the greatest examples of the influence of Hannibal and Cannae successfully executed. The lessons he had learned under the tutelage of Moltke and Schlieffen were in full play. In the spirit of Cannae, he advanced a thin center against the main Russian force. He ensured that these troops would bend but not break by using native Prussians. These soldiers would put up the kind of resistance called for by the situation.

Even if they gave ground they would not quit the field. This was all the better as they would in effect pull the mass of the Russian army into the jaws of a double envelopment by the rest of the German army.<sup>121</sup>

With time of the essence, Hindenburg displayed a remarkable sense of timing. The overarching goal in his mind was the destruction of the Russians in a short period of time. Everything hinged on his ability to destroy the Russians rapidly. His allies, the Austrians were also fighting for their lives against the Russians in Poland and Austro-Hungary and he needed to be able to move to their aid if necessary.

His victory could not have been more complete. In what has come to be known as the “Cannae of the East,” Hindenburg achieved his battle of annihilation. He encircled and destroyed three Russian Corps. The Russians lost over 125,000 men including making prisoners of some 90,000 troops. The Germans captured over 500 field artillery pieces as well. The scope of the victory was staggering, although the results did not change the eventual outcome of the war. The Russian commander of the Southern forces (Alexander Samsonov) committed suicide. The victory freed hundreds of thousands of German troops for use elsewhere, and gave the victory of Tannenberg the same significance as that of Cannae.<sup>122</sup> The lesson for the Great General Staff was that these type victories were still possible if pursued and executed properly. In hindsight it is clear that the Germans were greatly aided by Russian bumbling as much as tactical brilliance on the part of Hindenburg and his staff.<sup>123</sup> Similar to Cannae, the Russians provided the “Terentius Varro” to help make this victory possible for the Germans.

## **CHAPTER 7 - 20th Century to the Present**

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century there has been a steady stream of books and articles relevant to study of the Second Punic War and more specifically Hannibal's influence on the art of war. In spite of its age this period and its actors continue to influence military thinkers as well as those still fascinated by a good story.

The nature of the influence during this timeframe generally falls into three categories. The first category deals almost exclusively on the tactical aspects of Hannibal's battles and more specifically on the battle of Cannae. The second category consists of those writings that focus generally on the historical record, and the final category deals with those writings that focus on Hannibal's influence on strategic thinking.

### **Tactical Aspects**

Even today, the influence of the disaster of Cannae is still relevant to almost any discussion of warfighting. It continues to be written about, discussed and dissected some two thousand years after its occurrence. It is even discussed in the realm of "What If?" pertaining to the American Civil War. In a collection of essays by the same name, one of the articles speculates as to how General Lee might have wrought a Cannae early in the war in 1862, and used it as a springboard for a Confederate victory in the war. The idea is pure conjecture but illustrates the use of Cannae as the benchmark of success in battle that should have been leveraged into success in the broader war.<sup>124</sup> It is difficult to escape the lingering influence of that singular event.

If the Great General Staff of the German Army became the biggest proponent of the battle of annihilation in thought and doctrine, there has also been a steady stream of others who have continued to study and emulate the outcome of Hannibal's greatest victory. The First World War provided a great foundation and springboard for many desiring to implement the tactical aspects of Cannae. Although that war did not turn out as the Germans intended, the foundation of trying to achieve battles of annihilation did not die out upon conclusion of that conflict. There was an entire generation of German senior commanders steeped in the teachings

of Schlieffen and others who were imbued with the notions and necessity of achieving Cannae-like battles.

These attitudes carried over into the Second World War and numerous commanders in the German Army displayed the characteristics and were often quite vocal in their attitudes towards achieving a “modern” Cannae. Perhaps chief among these was General Erwin Rommel during his conduct of campaigns in North Africa.

There was hardly an area or force more conducive to the conduct of mobile warfare than that of Rommel’s Afrika Corps and the North African Theater of Operations. Rommel’s army was highly mobile, and the terrain lent itself to the practice of maneuver warfare on a large scale. His practice of the art and the tools at his disposal were very analogous to those of Hannibal. Rommel’s main striking force was a highly mobile and powerful armored force used in the same manner as Hannibal’s cavalry. Rommel’s writings indicate that he was influenced by the tactics of Hannibal. During his campaign to recapture Cyrenaica in North Africa, Rommel wrote to his wife: “It’s going to be a Cannae, modern style.”<sup>125</sup>

Another example of Hannibal’s persistent influence is found in the writings of Dwight Eisenhower. His biographer describes how one of the singular events in the life of Eisenhower occurred when a childhood friend gave him a copy of a book entitled *Hannibal and the Second Punic War*. Not only was Eisenhower an avid reader and student of military history, but he states in his own words that that childhood gift was what put him on a course to enter the military and become a student of the art of war. He writes that many years later, as the commander of all allied forces in Europe, he was obsessed with the idea of achieving a Cannae against the German Army, “Every ground commander seeks the battle of annihilation; so far as conditions permit, he tries to duplicate in modern war the classic example of Cannae.”<sup>126</sup>

Eisenhower’s interest in Hannibal was kindled at an early age and he credits his study of ancient history with greatly influencing his thinking on the art of war. Perhaps his own circumstances during the Second World War caused him to identify himself with the “underdog” Hannibal. He described it, “Hannibal always seemed to be the underdog, neglected by his government and fighting during the most of his active years in the territory of his deadly and powerful enemy.”<sup>127</sup> Eisenhower’s comments coupled with the level of his command, suggests that much like the GGS from the First World War, he too was trying to recreate a Cannae at the strategic level. Carlo D’Este writes in context of the final allied invasion of Germany, “Once

across the Rhine, the armies of Hodges and Simpson would encircle the Ruhr and crush Model's Army Group B in the jaws of a huge Allied pincer: Eisenhower's Cannae."<sup>128</sup>

A more recent example comes from the Persian Gulf War in 1991. As commander of the coalition armies, General Schwarzkopf was charged with ejecting the Iraqi army from the nation of Kuwait where it had spent the better part of six months pillaging and digging in after invading its oil-rich neighbor. Ignoring numerous pleas to pull his forces out of Kuwait, Saddam Hussein's army was forcibly removed and Kuwait restored to the Kuwaitis.

In developing the operations plan to put all forces at his disposal to use, Schwarzkopf chose as his model, Hannibal's battle of Cannae. He remarked to a newspaper reporter that his intent was to fix the Iraqis in place in the center of the line, and then conduct an envelopment in order to cut off and destroy the Iraqi forces that were still in place after a six-week air campaign.<sup>129</sup> Using deception to mask the movement of the bulk of his highly mobile armored forces, Schwarzkopf conducted a flanking movement to the west, facilitated by a shore-based Marine Corps fixing attack in the center of the line. Following the Cannae example, another threatened but never executed flanking attack from the east was accomplished with operationally mobile ship-based Marine and Naval forces in the Persian Gulf.

In many respects the campaign orchestrated by Schwarzkopf resembled Hannibal's victory at Cannae as well as the lack of long-term resolution to a festering problem. The coalition won a spectacular victory over a well-armed force destroying a large portion of the Iraqi Army and much of its most prized equipment. The Iraqis were also expelled from Kuwait. However in the larger picture - much as Cannae failed to produce an ultimate victory in the war for Hannibal, Schwarzkopf's victory failed to produce any long-lasting consequences in the region and the United States and a small coalition went to war again over a decade later to achieve results which might have been secured during the Persian Gulf Campaign.

## **Historical Aspects**

The second common example of how Hannibal and his actions continue to influence events is in the study of history. No new evidence has been uncovered in many years, and one would assume that all that can be written and said about the Second Punic War has already been done. However, this is not the case and several examples lead to the conclusion that the topic

remains a fascinating one and successive generations of historians continue to seek to glean new insights and conclusions from studying the available material.

In what is one of the most detailed and informative studies, Archer Jones traces the evolution of the art of war in the West. Numerous pages are devoted to an examination of the competition between the Roman system as it had evolved during the time of the Punic Wars and that of the Carthaginians. The Carthaginian system was descended from Macedon and the Greeks, although modified in many ways by Hannibal and his generals.

In Jones' book the clash of the two systems is set in historical context both before and after the Punic Wars. We see that the competing systems were highly dependent upon the competence of those directing the armies, providing an example of professional generalship besting well-trained troops with adequate leadership. Using an example of generalship similar to Hannibal's, Jones details Pyrrhus of Epirus' ability to defeat the Romans through skillful command vice superior troops.<sup>130</sup>

Historian Hans Delbruck traces the Carthaginian style of warfare back to that of Pyrrhus and Alexander.<sup>131</sup> Hannibal and his father improved upon the system until it was virtually unbeatable when directed by Hannibal. Although the Romans remain formidable and capable of inflicting great casualties, the tools (high quality cavalry in large numbers, and a keen understanding of his opponents among other things) at the disposal of Hannibal and the way he employed them were superior in just about every context.

What is relevant to this paper is the evolution of the practice of warfare by the Romans as modified by their experiences against Hannibal. Jones highlights that the Romans eventually got generals who were the equal of Hannibal but in doing so they greatly changed how they appointed and maintained their generals. More importantly though, they displayed the flexibility and propensity to adapt and incorporate the best aspects of their opponents' systems into their own. These modifications coupled with the excellent building blocks of the Roman military proved highly lethal to Rome's enemies. In the final battle of the Second Punic War, Hannibal is decisively defeated by Roman arms but one of the key instruments of his defeat is the same cavalry, now employed by the Romans, which had brought Hannibal victory in so many battles.<sup>132</sup> This example being just one of many to illustrate the thesis of Jones' book – to show the evolution of Western arms, based in large part on flexibility and willingness to adapt new

concepts. In this context Hannibal and his campaigns are viewed as having a significant shaping effect and helped mold the flexibility characteristic of Western success in arms.

In the same vein, Colonel Trevor Dupuy writes that Hannibal's contribution to the art of war was his ability to improvise and come up with new ideas. Dupuy states that Hannibal's main contribution to thinking on the art of war is in the area of "imagination." He did not have superior trained or better-equipped forces. But what he did have was a focus on maneuver and an unparalleled creativity that allowed him to continually best his opponents.<sup>133</sup> This provides a clear link to the evolution of military thinking away from rigid prescription to "mission" type orders and the desire for commanders and leaders to adapt quickly to changing situations to achieve victory.

## **Strategic Insights**

The final area that continues to provide additional areas for research and comparison is that of national strategy. This is not purely confined to military thinking and for obvious reasons the Second Punic War provides fertile ground for discussion on how a nation ought to go to war, and how it should tend to its affairs once it has made the decision to do so.

In his signal work *The Influence of Seapower Upon History*, Alfred T. Mahan cites the Second Punic War as a particularly relevant example of how sea power (or the lack) is instrumental in the conduct of war. According to Mahan, the leverage afforded the Romans by virtue of holding supremacy at sea was decisive. Hannibal's efforts in the war were severely hamstrung by his lack of reliable "communications" with any resource base.<sup>134</sup> This fact seems to tie in with the general lack of assistance from the Carthaginian government. Hannibal's problems were compounded in light of the fact that Carthage made no attempt to wrest control of the seas from the Romans after the First Punic War. It is possible to debate the level of involvement in the war effort of the Carthaginian government but supporting Hannibal by sea was never really a feasible course of action.

In an even more insightful example, Mahan states that the alliance between Macedonia and Carthage produced nothing due to the lack of a war fleet on the part of the Macedonians. The lesson learned for the strategist is that the lack of communications across the sea kept Carthage and Macedonia from consummating their alliance in any meaningful way and ensured that Hannibal remained short of resources throughout the war.<sup>135</sup> According to Livy, even the



initial deputation sent from Philip of Macedon to Hannibal was unable to successfully complete its mission owing to Roman command of the seas.<sup>136</sup>

In another study, *Men in Arms, A History of Warfare and its Interrelationships with Western Society*, the resiliency of the Roman form of government is extolled. In this examination by Richard Preston and Sydney Wise, the relationship between Rome and the subject people of Italy is examined in light of events of the Second Punic War. In this context it is interesting to note that despite the significant victories Hannibal obtained against Rome and her allies, he was never able to obtain truly significant aid from most of the Roman allies. Preston and Wise develop a thesis similar to Machiavelli's that the Roman system of governance and raising citizen armies was inherently superior to that of Carthage. The Romans treated military service as a right and obligation for all, not just a select few.

The reason for this becomes clear when one examines how the two antagonists treated their subjects. In spite of Hannibal's declaration that he was coming to free the Latin cities from the yoke and oppression of Rome, no significant city save Capua took him up on the offer.<sup>137</sup> Even during the darkest days of the Republic in 216 B.C.E., immediately after Cannae the bulk of the Latins remained loyal and refused to treat with Hannibal. According to Preston and Wise this should be directly attributed to the style of governance of Rome as contrasted with the lack of appeal of the governance of Carthage.

The people of the various constituencies were allowed a great deal of autonomy, were given the right of citizenship, and apparently felt a great deal of loyalty towards the Roman confederation. One of Hannibal's apparent assumptions and a pillar of his strategy appear to have rested on the idea that the Latins would abandon Rome in large numbers if given the opportunity. That it never happened is at least partial testament to the Roman form of government and the loyalty it inspired.<sup>138</sup> This book also provides clear insights into the perceived merits of one system over the other and the value of placing a premium on citizenship and loyalty in the populace. The prospect of falling under the sway of Carthage was not enough to entice significant numbers of converts to Hannibal's side. Hannibal's apparent strategy provides an example of how the culture and institutions of *both* sides should be considered by the strategist (and not just the military strategist).

In another supporting argument along the lines of culture, institutions, and ideology, Victor Davis Hanson argues that the political system of Rome ensured that Carthage would never

win the confrontation. He believes that although Carthage with its long history in the Mediterranean and its affiliation with the Greek city states had achieved a veneer of Western-looking culture, it was still quite hobbled by its closer resemblance to Eastern cultures and oppressive forms of government. He seems to be correct based on the response of “liberated” areas of Italy to Hannibal. According to Hanson, Carthage did not extend the privileges of citizenship to many of its subjects. This policy did not hold much promise for the Latins.

In practical terms it meant that despite substandard leadership of its armies at times, directly resulting in horrendous losses in battle, the Romans were always able to replace those losses. The reason for this is that the Roman system tended to inspire loyalty and an outright desire to serve. Despite having populations that were approximately the same size in numbers, Carthage was never able to muster equivalent numbers of troops for its armies. Hanson points out that even with the huge losses the Romans suffered during the first two years of the war, they were still able to not only replace those losses but increase the size of its army in a relatively short period of time. The Carthaginian army was never larger than it was when it debouched from the Alps into northern Italy. Hanson writes,

This idea of a vast nation-in-arms – by the outbreak of the war in 218 B.C.E. there were more than 325,000 adult male Roman citizens scattered throughout Italy, nearly a quarter million of them eligible for frontline military service - was incomprehensible to the Carthaginians, who restricted citizenship to a small group of Punic-speakers in and around Carthage. Worse still in a military sense, citizenship to Carthaginians never fully embraced the Hellenic tradition of civic levies- citizens who enjoy rights are required to fight for their maintenance.<sup>139</sup>

Hanson’s study of Carthage and Hannibal provides additional evidence of their continued impact on the study of war. In consonance with the observations of Preston and Wise, Hanson’s comments provide additional support to the notion that politicians and strategists must consider aspects of culture and institutions that were previously ignored or given very little attention.

A key lesson learned in terms of this thesis is the apparent failure of Hannibal and his Carthaginian masters to fully comprehend the larger strategic landscape. As much a genius as Hannibal was in many aspects of warfighting, he seems to remain blind to the larger picture. During the first two years of his campaign against Rome and his series of incredible victories that killed hundreds of thousands of troops, he still underestimated the effect those losses would

have on the outcome of the war. Although impossible to know for certain, it does not appear that Hannibal fully considered whether his offer of life under Carthaginian rule would provide a real incentive for the peoples of the Italian Peninsula.

In spite of slaughtering 50,000 Romans at Cannae, Hanson states that the outcome of the war was not changed one iota.<sup>140</sup> According to this interpretation of Hannibal's legacy, the real lesson to be learned is not that of the blueprint for the classic battle of envelopment and annihilation. The real lessons are those of the superiority of the political and cultural institutions of the West over all others. These institutions underpin the militaries of the West and directly contribute towards making them the most efficient and resilient killers in history. While one cannot predict the future, it seems that Hanson is correct – Western armies have raised the standard of professionalism and combined arms fighting to a level that no others can currently match.

Though they are quite capable of suffering setbacks, and do so on a regular basis, the societal and cultural undergirding of Western armies ensures that they have been able to adapt, and learn from their failures in a manner no other system has been able to equal. During this period of increasing threat to the West's institutions and military from Middle Eastern and Asian cultures, Hanson seems to be using Hannibal to demonstrate that regardless of the challenges – the West will triumph owing to its fundamental institutions.

## CHAPTER 8 - Summary

This paper has demonstrated in a chronological manner the long-term influence of Hannibal of Carthage on the art of war. Despite the passing of over two thousand years since he lived, Hannibal continues to fascinate and inspire those interested in the military arts. From ancient history through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century he has been an object of study, criticism, and emulation. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century he remains a frequent topic of discussion and continued scrutiny.

For those who study Hannibal, lessons learned from his campaigns fall into two broad categories. The first category is that of the strategist. For them Hannibal's actions in the Second Punic War are fraught with missteps interspersed with moments of genius. The conception of the war, to be fought offensively on land in Italy rather than defensively at sea or on the soil of Carthage was a well-conceived idea and characterized as genius.

Moving the base of operations from Carthage to the Iberian Peninsula, and using Spain rather than North Africa as the springboard for a war with Rome illustrates a well-planned and far-reaching concept of operations. Marching overland from Spain with a large army and appearing on the doorstep of Rome is considered a masterstroke. For a variety of reasons, Hannibal has rightly earned the title "father of strategy."<sup>141</sup>

But if the title "father of strategy" is correct, one should be able to question just how good a father? As outlined in this thesis, there are many authors that view Hannibal in light of his strategic failures. For all the elements of brilliance in conception and execution of Hannibal's plan for the war, the fact remains that he lost. After a huge war almost equivalent to World War II in modern times, Carthage was led to ruin. On one scale he was successful enough to ensure that the Romans feared him and Carthage for all time. However, in spite of his numerous successes on a variety of levels, Hannibal was not able to achieve ultimate victory against the Romans.

Viewed in this light, the example provided to us by Hannibal is not a favorable one. He becomes yet another Lee or Rommel – great men, endowed with tremendous talents and gifts of intuition, decisiveness, and constitution. Yet, he is still one of those who failed to achieve the ultimate end-state against his opponents. Much as the United States won every battle of

consequence during the Vietnam War, yet failed to achieve strategic victory, Hannibal's campaigns against the Romans created the blueprint for success in battle without ultimate victory in war.

The principle lesson for the strategist is to ensure that all the actions in war are tied to the ultimate goal, which is to win the war. Writers continue to emphasize that developing and executing a winning strategy is hard. As Colin Gray points out in the Joint Force Quarterly, winning the battles is the relatively easy part, producing a cohesive strategy and harnessing disparate elements of national power to produce a well-defined end result is difficult. His article cites examples ranging from Hannibal and the Second Punic War, to the Germans in World War II, and the United States in Indochina.<sup>142</sup>

It is difficult in war to weave together all the required elements to ensure triumph. Victory often requires a level of control of resources that is frequently beyond the grasp of the military leader. In the case of Hannibal, it appears that he had great autonomy to pursue the war as he saw fit. It does not appear that he and the Carthaginian government's efforts were completely synchronized. It also seems that many of Hannibal's assumptions were incorrect as to the probable course of the war. The entire episode of the Second Punic War provides an object lesson for current military and civilian planners alike as to ensuring the validity of assumptions and the synchronization of efforts.

Regardless of the speculation into what might have been, in the strategic arena, Hannibal falls short. Those who view Hannibal's achievements through the lens of a strategist rightly point out his overall failure in the war as the paramount lesson. For all the flashes of brilliance as a strategist, that aspect of warfare was not his greatest strength.

In the realm of the tactical, Hannibal enjoys much greater acclaim when viewed critically. As the author of the original "blueprint" for the battle of encirclement and annihilation, his actions are still studied, copied, and held up as the benchmark for success. Many historians and students of the military arts regard Cannae as the exemplar of this type of battle.

Hannibal's conception and execution of operations at the tactical level are the true success stories of his career. No author has impugned Hannibal's conduct of battles. In this regard he is without peer, taking the battles in isolation from the larger strategic picture.

Hannibal's ability to forge an army from so many different materials and wield it successfully for so long against many different opponents is a remarkable achievement by any standard.

Additionally, one cannot ignore the other factors that set Hannibal apart from his peers and successors over time. His ability to focus and synchronize the efforts of such a polyglot force proved outstanding. Few leaders have managed to build a cohesive fighting force out of so many disparate elements. Considering the difficulty modern generals encounter synchronizing coalitions of troops from nations with varying capabilities, Hannibal's achievements are exemplary.

It is difficult to imagine a more diverse group of peoples being led to a record of achievement to eclipse that of Hannibal's armies. The key components of his leadership ability - personal example, genius, and the ability to inspire are manifested throughout the conduct of his battles.<sup>143</sup> These qualities allowed Hannibal to overcome (for awhile) a great disparity in resources, considering that he faced in Rome the equivalent of a budding superpower.

Although some have attributed that label to Carthage as well, the comparison is not exact. Carthage was a powerful maritime nation and an economic superpower. Rome manifested the capabilities of a superpower across a variety of categories, including the military. This contrast provides more reason to value the tactical and strategic achievements of Hannibal.

In the final accounting, it is difficult to measure exactly how much Hannibal has influenced the study of war. It is safe to say that he has been a benchmark of one sort or another in discussions on the art of war. From ancient history to the present, his name occurs regularly in books, periodicals, and in the programs of instruction in military service schools.

The direction of Hannibal's influence over time is even more difficult to determine. It appears to depend on what aspect of war is considered. If the discussion is on matters of strategy, national policy, or other high-level concerns, then Hannibal's influence is on the negative side. The failure to win the ultimate victory for whatever reason militates in favor of Hannibal's influence being negative. It is hard after all, to extol the virtues of the loser when so much was lost.

If the discussion remains at the tactical level, then Hannibal provides an excellent model. He sets the standard in any comparison based on a general's ability to win battles, to create conditions unfavorable for the enemy, to out-think his opponents, and perhaps most importantly, to get the very best from his men. The examples of creative thinking, inspired by genius, are

manifest everywhere in his operations. As long as the discussion remains at levels of war other than strategic, then Hannibal is an exemplar of the soldier practicing his craft.

There is one certainty regarding Hannibal; he will continue to be a source of study and learning in one respect or another. Whether the lesson is for good or ill, contemplating Hannibal, his campaigns, and his battles will remain a worthwhile investment for any student or practitioner of the military arts.

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