Hannibal as spy chief

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Hannibal's abilities as a general are legendary.[1] In fact, the Carthaginian's activities in the Second Punic War made such a lasting impression on history that the conflict was branded 'Hannibal's War'.[2] Yet, in all the narratives of the war and in biographies of Hannibal, his role as spymaster has been generally ignored.[3] The Second Punic War offers numerous examples of the advantages good intelligence can give to a political and military leader, and Hannibal was both. For nearly two decades the Romans found themselves locked in deadly warfare with a spymaster whose use of intelligence was unmatched. It was a contest that severely strained all of Rome's resources – political, military, economic, and social – and yet it was Hannibal who ultimately lost the war. Hannibal, as a spymaster, can tell us much about the use of strategic and tactical intelligence, counterintelligence, and the role they played in the history, culture and international relations of the Mediterranean world in the third century BC.

Hannibal's War

Hannibal came to his command after the death of his father and Carthage's loss of the First Punic War. Losing Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica to the Romans in the recent war led the Carthaginians to seek a new province to replace the sources of revenue and co-opted manpower of which they had recently been deprived. They began building a new empire in Spain that would help pay off their sizable war indemnity, and serve as a future base of operations against the Romans. The intelligence network, which had been so valuable an asset to the Carthaginians in Sicily during the First Punic War, was now extended to Spain. Carthaginian leaders regularly sent reports to

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[1] An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the University of Warwick's Spy Chiefs Conference, Palazzo Pesaro Pappafava, Venice, May 5-7, 2014.

[2] J. Lazenby, *Hannibal's War* (Norman 1998); J. Peddie, *Hannibal's War* (Phoenix Mill 1997); D. Hoyos, *Hannibal's Dynasty* (London and New York, NY 2003) 1; S. Lancel, *Carthage: A History* (Oxford 1995) 381.

[3] For the sole exception see: R. Sheldon, 'Hannibal's Spies', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 1.3 (1987) 53-70; Idem, *Intelligence Activities in Ancient Rome* (London and New York, NY 2005) 41-67.

their Senate, and they appear to have been well-informed about the situation in Spain.[4]

When the 25-year-old Hannibal was placed in charge of the Spanish command in 221 BC, his goal was clear. He wanted to defeat Rome, take back Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica and restore the *status quo ante bellum*. In 219 BC he laid siege to Saguntum, an unconquered city on the northeast coast of Carthaginian Spain, some ninety miles south of the Ebro River, which by treaty, was the demarcation line between the Roman and Carthaginian spheres of influence.[5] By attacking the city of Saguntum, Hannibal's intentions were unmistakable; he was advancing towards Italy by land, and Saguntum was a pocket of resistance strategically situated on his line of supply and communication. He could not afford to leave this regional capital independent or in hostile hands as he moved forward to Gaul.[6]

The spy game

Since open warfare was imminent, discovering each other's master plan was the major strategic-intelligence objective of both sides. Neither power could rely on just a messenger service or diplomatic correspondence; once hostilities broke out, a clandestine war also began. Through his spies in Rome, Hannibal learned that the Romans were planning a two-pronged attack on the Carthaginian capital and their Spanish empire. The Romans were outfitting a new fleet and the consul, P. Cornelius Scipio the Elder had

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[4] Polybius 3.15.11-13 and Appian 6.2.10 and 7.1.3 both assert that Hannibal was transmitting false reports to Carthage in justification of his drive to occupy Saguntum.

[5] On the so-called Ebro River Treaty see Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 22-23; On the causes of the war see: J. Rich, 'The Origins of the Second Punic War' in: T. Cornell, B. Rankov and P. Sabin ed., *The Second Punic War: A Reappraisal* (London 1996) 1-37, Rich notes that there are at least 33 major studies of this issue; Hoyos, *Hannibal's Dynasty*, 92-93; A. Goldsworthy, *The Punic Wars* (London 2000) 143-166.

[6] On the causes of the war, see H. Beck, 'The Reasons for the War' in: D. Hoyos ed., *A Companion to the Punic Wars* (Malden, MA 2011) 225-241; On the war aims, see: D. Hoyos, *Mastering the West. Rome and Carthage at War* (Oxford and New York, NY 2015) 100-101; On Hannibal's overall strategy, see M. Fronda, 'Hannibal: Tactics, Strategy, and Geostrategy' in: D. Hoyos ed., *A Companion to the Punic Wars*, 244-259.

been assigned the province of Spain.[7] The Roman plan was to transport legions by sea via Massilia to invade the Carthaginian Empire south of the Ebro River while a second consul would be sent south to strike directly at the Carthaginian capital. Hannibal had to prevent this opening of a second front in North Africa, and invading Italy was the best way to pull back the two consular armies.

Armed with the advanced knowledge of the Roman plans, Hannibal left his brother Hasdrubal with the Spanish command at New Carthage, and in May 218 BC moved his own troops north. The Romans had no idea that Hannibal would cross the Pyrenees and then the Alps to invade Italy.[8] The Roman plan to strike at the heart of the Carthaginian Empire in the West was sound, except for the unanticipated twist that Hannibal would not be there. Hannibal's superior intelligence and the audacious attack on north Italy succeeded in neutralizing the Roman plan. Both consuls were pulled back from their original routes and Hannibal got the advantage of fighting the war where he wanted to – in Rome's backyard. Knowing the enemy's intentions while keeping his own a secret gave Hannibal an untold advantage and enabled him to achieve a remarkable strategic surprise.[9] That field security was weighing heavily on Hannibal's mind is clearly demonstrated by his dismissal of 7,000 Carpetanian infantrymen whose reliability he had reasons to suspect after 3,000 of their fellow tribesmen

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[7] Livy 21.21.1-2.

[8] E. Salmon, 'The Strategy of the Second Punic War', *Greece and Rome* 7 (1960) 135, Salmon has suggested that the Romans were aware of Hannibal's intention to invade Italy by land, and that they could not have been so deficient in strategic foresight. The fact remains, however, that they took no preparatory defensive measures in anticipation of such an invasion, and indeed seem to have been altogether panicked by Hannibal's arrival. They thought the battlefields would be Spain and North Africa, where the bulk of Roman troops were being shipped; Polybius 3.61-62 and F. Walbank, *Historical Commentary on Polybius Vol. I* (Oxford 1957-79) 396; Lazenby, on page 50 of *Hannibal's War*, says: 'The Romans seem to have had no inkling of his plan'.

[9] E. Kam, *Surprise Attack* (Cambridge 1988) 7. Kam points out that in most cases the victims of a surprise attack do not ignore the presence of a threat, or the existence of a potential threat, but rather deem an imminent attack to be unlikely in actuality. Even if the Romans considered the possibility of a land invasion, the fact remains that when it did occur they were caught unprepared.

had requested, and were granted, discharge from his army once they had guessed their destination was Italy.[10]

The Romans were depending on foreign sources, i.e. their allies in Saguntum and Massilia for intelligence on the Carthaginians. What they received was very often too little and too late. Livy's account shows us that Roman intelligence, and their diplomacy based on it, were both off the mark. The Senate instructed its legates to contact various Spanish and Gallic tribes to induce them into alliance with Rome, apparently not knowing that Hannibal's agents had already been there and persuaded the Spanish tribesmen to turn the Romans away. When Roman envoys visited Gaul, they met with an even more contemptuous response; the Gauls burst into laughter. Their magistrates and elders could scarcely keep order among the younger men. To them, it seemed a stupid and impudent proposition that the Gauls should try to stop the invaders from passing into Italy. Why should they bring down the war on their own heads and have their own fields pillaged instead of Rome's?[11]

The envoys' mission thus failed miserably. Only Massilia, an established ally, responded to the Roman cause. The Massiliotes feared that a Carthaginian victory would ruin their own commercial activities, and so passed on to the Romans as much information as they had about Hannibal's plans. It was from Massilian envoys that Scipio, prior to his departure from Rome, learned that Hannibal's army had crossed the Ebro.[12] Only after Scipio's arrival at Massilia with sixty warships did he receive the news that Hannibal was already past the Pyrenees, and would soon be crossing the Rhone as well. Scipio, on the other hand, postulated that Hannibal's advance from the Pyrenees would be slowed down by hostile Gallic tribes and that there was no immediate cause for alarm. In reality, Hannibal was now less than 50 miles away, ferrying his army across the Rhone north of the delta, using smoke signals to coordinate the crossing.[13] The Romans were unaware that Hannibal had moved 50,000 men, together with cavalry, baggage and elephants, to the east bank of the river at a point so close to Massilia.

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[10] Livy 21.23.4-6; On the logistical problems of moving the men and elephants through the Alps, see: J. Shean, 'Hannibal's Mules: the Logistical Limitations of Hannibal's Army and the Battle of Cannae', *Historia* 45 (1996) 167-175.
[11] Livy 21.20.2-5.
[12] Ibidem, 21.21.1.
[13] Polybius 3.43.6; Livy 21.27.7.

Scipio discovered Hannibal's whereabouts only by chance. A Carthaginian reconnaissance patrol of 500 Numidian horsemen stumbled into 300 of Scipio's cavalry on a similar mission.[14] After a savage encounter in which the Numidian horsemen were defeated, the Romans pursued Hannibal's men back to their camp. The Roman reconnaissance group reported the size of Hannibal's encamped army to Scipio, who assumed that Hannibal was about to attack. Scipio concentrated his forces and returned to the enemy camp, only to find it abandoned. Finally, the horrifying truth dawned on him: Hannibal was not after him; Hannibal was heading for Italy. The Carthaginian was, again, one step ahead. Scipio left his brother Gnaeus in charge of the legions bound for Spain, and returned to northern Italy to meet Hannibal when he descended from the Alps.

Hannibal's legendary crossing of the Alps was a political and military gamble, but based on the intelligence he had, the venture appeared no more perilous than any other course of action.[15] It certainly was safer than trying to land a fleet on the western coast of Italy. The difficulties he faced were mostly military – hostile tribes, as well as the tactical disadvantage and logistic inconvenience of marching an army in column through narrow passes. True, he could have avoided some hardship had he crossed a month earlier when the weather was more clement, but we can only guess that resistance north of the Ebro had impeded his progress, or that wrong information about the Alpine passes caused unexpected delay. After all, even the most reliable intelligence is never perfect. Moreover, circumstances and the situation on the ground can change after the receipt of intelligence and before the commencement of operations. Native resistance may have been encountered where tribesmen had previously pledged co-operation, and some of the Alpine guides eventually proved treacherous. Our judgment of his plan should be governed by the fact that Hannibal did make every effort to obtain quantity and quality intelligence, well in advance of his march. And he did it on an impressive scale, covering virtually his entire theater of operations and adjacent areas of interest. If his intelligence

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[14] Polybius 3.44-45; N. Austin and N. Rankov, *Exploratio. Military and Political Intelligence in the Roman World from the Second Punic War to the Battle of Adrianople* (London and New York, NY 1995) 53.

[15] Although see: Hoyos, *Hannibal's Dynasty*, 111, Hoyos believes the move cost Hannibal the war. Yet he also admits that with that reduced army, Hannibal won huge victories, detached half of Italy from its allegiance to Rome, and hemmed the Romans in with enemies at home and abroad.

was imperfect, it is nonetheless safe to assume that without it he would not have been able to embark on his expedition.

In the end, the risks he had taken paid off handsomely; the news that Hannibal had encamped his army south of the Alps panicked the Romans. The consul T. Sempronius Longus, already down in Sicily and ready to invade Carthage, now raced to northern Italy, but the first clash between Romans and Carthaginians in Italy was over before he even arrived. This initial skirmish at Ticinus left the consul Scipio severely wounded and established the superiority of Hannibal's cavalry. Hannibal pursued the fleeing Romans relentlessly. The 2,000 Celtic allies and cavalry serving as auxiliaries with the Roman army in the Po Valley defected to Hannibal's camp.[16]

Intelligence and psychological warfare

Another weapon in the arsenal of techniques that can be used by an intelligence chief is psychological warfare. Once in Italy, Hannibal used this technique to isolate Rome from its allies. Most of Italy at this time was not yet Roman territory, but a conglomeration of independent, autonomous states joined under Roman primacy. Hannibal aimed at driving a wedge between Rome and the other indigenous communities of Italy. From his first appearance on Italian soil, he announced that he had come not to fight against the peoples of the peninsula, but to liberate them from Roman domination. After every battle he released without ransom any non-Romans who had been taken prisoner, so that they would spread the word in their native regions about Hannibal's political goals and his generosity. Such gestures were instrumental in recruiting local troops and depriving Rome of potential allies. This policy appears to have been more effective in luring converts to Hannibal's cause from among non-Italian auxiliaries of Rome rather than among natives of the Italian peninsula.[17]

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[16] On the Battle of Ticinus see: Polybius 3.65-66 and Walbank, *Commentary* I, 399; Livy 21.46-48; Zonaras 8.23; Appian, *Hannibalic Wars*, 5; Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 53-54; Goldsworthy, *The Punic Wars*, 169-173; Hoyos, *Mastering the West. Rome and Carthage at War* (Oxford and New York, NY 2015) 107-110.

[17] See: Polybius 3.67.1-7, Polybius has 2,000 infantry and 200 cavalry of the Celts desert after beheading some Romans. The Cenomani, however, remained loyal to Rome, and other Celts attempted to remain neutral. In Polybius 3.68.8 the Celts

A different aspect of psychological warfare to which Hannibal gave much attention was the construction of personality profiles: learning the frame of mind of the Roman commanders, and exploiting their attitudes to his own advantage. Matching one's actions to the 'mood' of an enemy commander is a highly speculative business even when founded on accurate intelligence. Hannibal's successful application of this concept on more than one occasion speaks well for his intelligence people.[18] For example, when the consul Longus finally arrived in northern Italy with his troops, Hannibal was able, through his Celtic agents, to discover what the consul intended to do. After the recent Roman defeat, Longus was desperate for a spectacular victory to vindicate the Romans. Hannibal's Gallic spies were very productive sources, since there were Gauls in both camps. They reported that Longus was anxious to fight, and Hannibal built on his impatience by luring him into a trap at the Trebbia River.[19] Hannibal carefully selected an ambush site, and made maximum use of surprise and maneuver. The battle was fought utilizing every advantage of terrain, weather and psychology that Hannibal could bring to bear. Longus and his troops were annihilated, and the victory sent the Carthaginians on their way through the Apennines.

Meanwhile, Hannibal was preparing his next move by judiciously evaluating the information that flowed in from his agents. As usual, his decision was based upon sound appraisal of both the terrain and his opponents, and we are given another example of Hannibal's aptitude for capitalizing on the enemy commander's state of mind. The Roman citizens elected as one of the consuls for 217 BC the popular and experienced general Gaius Flaminius. His mandate was to intercept and stop Hannibal, and to do it quickly and surgically before the invader caused any serious damage.[20] Flaminius positioned himself on the west-coast road to Rome along the Tyrrhenian coast, hoping to block Hannibal's march south and

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provision Hannibal, while in Polybius 3.69.5 the Celts between Po and Trebbia are allied with Hannibal but negotiate with Rome after Hannibal's raids.

[18] See: Polybius 3.81.2, 'For there is no denying that he who thinks that there is anything more essential to a general than the knowledge of his opponent's principles and character, is both ignorant and foolish.'

[19] Livy 21.48-53; Polybius 3.70-74; Goldsworthy, *The Punic Wars*, 173-181. On the motives of Sempronius, P. Scipio and Hannibal, see: Walbank, *Commentary* I, 403-4.

[20] B. Strauss and J. Ober, *The Anatomy of Error. Ancient Military Disasters and Their Lessons for Modern Strategists* (New York, NY 1990) 145.

thereby make himself champion of the city.[21] Hannibal simply ignored Flaminius, by-passed his zone, and left the embarrassed consul behind to receive accounts of Hannibal's men descending on the rich Tuscan villages like locusts. The psychological torture of watching, but doing nothing, was too much for Flaminius. He was lured into direct combat at a location of the enemy's choosing: a trap set for him at Lake Trasimene. Nature had designed an ideal site for an ambush, and Hannibal took full advantage of that opportunity. From information brought by his cavalry scouts and, perhaps, from Etruscan peasants who knew the district, he acquired an accurate picture of the terrain. This intelligence enabled him to lure Flaminius into a narrow defile along the north shore of the lake. The slaughter was appalling. Over 15,000 Romans were killed, an equal number taken prisoner, and Hannibal now had virtual control over all of northern Italy.[22] Hannibal's planning in this campaign exemplifies his masterly coordination of topographical knowledge with profound insight into his enemy's character. News of the battle reached Rome two days later, and this disaster was by no means the end of bad tidings. Hannibal's intelligence network discovered that a Roman force of 4,000 cavalry was marching down the Via Flaminia. Neither the details nor the exact location of this second engagement are known, but Hannibal's advanced knowledge of its approach allowed him to destroy or capture the entire force.

Delaying tactics

When the command of the Roman troops again changed and Q. Fabius Maximus became dictator, he avoided meeting Hannibal in pitched battle and instead began a long, tedious game of cat-and-mouse which earned him the nickname *Cunctator*, 'the Delayer'. The strategy itself was quite clever,

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[21] According to Polybius 3.77.1 the other consul, Gnaeus Servilius, took a defensive position on the Adriatic littoral at Ariminum, to intercept Hannibal's force should it move south along the east coast of the peninsula – a route Hannibal ultimately did not follow. Conversely, Livy 22.2.1 has Servilius at that time recruiting extra troops in Rome. For troop numbers, see Walbank, *Commentary* I, 410.

[22] Livy 22.7.2 following Fabius Pictor has 15,000 killed and 10,000 scattered over Etruria with 2,500 Carthaginian dead; Polybius 3.84.7: 15,000 prisoners with 1,500 Carthaginian dead; Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 67; Goldsworthy, *The Punic Wars*, 181-190.

because he was not just avoiding Hannibal, but restricting Hannibal's movements and therefore his ability to provision his army.[23] The strategy annoyed many Romans who wanted to see the honor of their legions upheld. Rumors spread that Fabius was in the pay of the Carthaginians. Hannibal used the situation for a shrewd psychological manipulation. When his scouts picked up these rumors, Hannibal deliberately avoided lands owned by Fabius while burning everything around them. That Hannibal could identify which lands belonged to Fabius was in itself an impressive feat of intelligence gathering. Not only did this scheme lend credence to the stories, but it also made Fabius so conscious of the damage to his own credibility that he signed over his lands to the state to prevent further speculation against him.[24] Such clever stratagems suggest a continuing ability to obtain intelligence on the Romans that could be used to affect the Roman troops psychologically.

Hannibal demanded accurate intelligence, and the punishment for not meeting his requirements was severe. When he asked guides to take him to Casinum, they misunderstood and led him instead to Casilinum. The terrain there was such that Hannibal was nearly trapped. He rounded up the guides and had them crucified.[25] His famous escape from that area through the pass called *Iugum Calliculae* was only one of many instances where a seeming Roman victory was snatched away. Unable to withdraw through the Casilinum road which was tightly blocked, Hannibal had to move up the mountains and cross the ridges of Callicula, knowing that the Romans might fall on his troops as they were marching through the gorges. He decided to approach the heights under cover of darkness. Before dusk the Carthaginians had tied bundles of dry wood to the horns of 2,000 head of cattle, and Hasdrubal was assigned to drive this herd by night on to the mountains, climbing above the pass held by the Romans. On a given signal, they lit the wood and the screaming cattle stampeded, igniting bushes and shrubbery along the way. When the Roman sentries saw the fires overhead, they thought they were surrounded and abandoned their posts. Hannibal brought his entire army safely through the pass, killing Romans along the

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[23] Shean, 'Hannibal's Mules', 181-182; Goldsworthy, *The Punic Wars*, 190-196.
[24] Livy 22.23. The information about the land ownership was provided by Roman deserters. The same trick was supposedly used by Coriolanus to create bad blood between the patricians and plebeians, Livy 2.39.6.
[25] Plutarch, *Fabius Maximus*, 6; Walbank, *Commentary* I, 424 considers this a 'worthless anecdote'; Livy 22.13.

way. Fabius had heard the commotion, but thought it was an ambush and kept his men close at hand, since he disliked night combat. By daybreak the Carthaginians were gone except for a contingent of Spaniards whom Hannibal had left behind to cover his rear, and these troops were better than the Romans at mountain fighting. The Romans lost several thousand men, while Hannibal sustained hardly any casualties except the poor cattle.[26]

At the end of his year as consul, Fabius handed over command of half of his forces to M. Minucius Rufus, the Master of the Horse in 217 BC. He did so with a warning to avoid a pitched battle at all costs, but Rufus represented a faction in Rome that badly wanted a victory over the Carthaginians. Hannibal's spies were able to follow the dissension between the two generals and capitalize on it to set another trap.[27] Rufus swallowed the bait and would have been annihilated if it were not for the arrival of Fabius' army to save him. Whether Hannibal received his intelligence from deserters, prisoners of war, or by merely questioning nearby residents, he managed to obtain precisely the information he needed. Over and beyond these elementary modes of collection, placing spies inside the enemy camp is at once the most profitable and most difficult undertaking in the cultivation of sources, yet it was a feat which Hannibal accomplished with remarkable success. In addition to penetrating Roman military camps, Hannibal's spies also operated in the Roman capital. One of these, according to Livy, had been active in the city of Rome for two years, but was eventually caught and his hands were cut off.[28] Other spies stayed undetected and reported back to Hannibal about a dispute within the Roman leadership over the conduct of war. Hannibal hoped to exploit this disagreement to stage one last impressive victory on the battlefield and finally to convince Rome's remaining allies to come over to him.

Hannibal found his victory on the plains of Cannae in 216 BC. He met the Romans in battle and used a double envelopment maneuver that

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[26] Livy 22.15-17; Plutarch, *Fabius Maximus* 6; Polybius 3.93-94, Walbank, *Commentary I,* 429-30; Sililius Italicus, *Punica* 7.311ff; Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 70; On this and other strange phenomena in Hannibal's engagements, see: A. Dawson, 'Hannibal and Chemical Warfare', *The Classical Journal* 63.3 (1967) 117-125. On Hannibal's need to move in order to feed his army, see: Shean, 'Hannibal's Mules', 181-185.

[27] Livy 22.28.1 mentions that, besides Hannibal's spies, this information was brought to him by deserters. Plutarch, on page 11 of *Fabius Maximus*, simply says 'Hannibal kept a watchful eye on everything'.

[28] Livy 22.33.1.

has become famous among military historians.[29] In just over five hours of battle he killed more than 50,000 Roman troops, his most triumphant engagement on Italian soil.[30] The consequences of Cannae were momentous. For the first time, Roman allies showed signs of disloyalty; defections now began.[31] Italy's second largest city, Capua, was the first to defect, followed by Tarentum. Even the Gauls responded: one of the consuls designate was ambushed near Mutina and his army destroyed. His head decorated the sacred sanctuary of the Boii.[32] Almost half of Rome's allies in Italy had been won over by Hannibal; but these defections mark the high point of Hannibal's campaign. He has been criticized for not attacking Rome itself. His own cavalry commander supposedly told him 'you know how to gain a victory (...) [but] you know not how to use one'.[33] Rome, however, was a large, densely-populated, and walled city. His army had failed in assaults on even small forts. He had neither the manpower, the artillery, nor the financial resources for a protracted siege of a metropolis the size of Rome and besides, that had never been his intention. Plus his strategy had very frequently relied on the element of surprise; this time, the Romans were expecting him.[34]

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[29] Polybius 3.111ff; Livy 22.47-49; R. Dupuy and T. Dupuy, *The Encyclopedia of Military History* (New York, NY 1986) 66, say it provided military theorists with 'a symbol of tactical perfection.'; See: Walbank, *Commentary* I, 435-449; Goldsworthy, *The Punic Wars*, 197-221; G. Daly, *Cannae* (London and New York, NY 2002).

[30] The rings from the upper class Romans were said to have filled three bushels. Livy 23.12.1; For the casualty figures see Polybius 3.117.4; Livy 22.49, 22.59.5, 60.14, 25.6.13; Eutropius 3.10; Appian, *Hannibalic War* 7.4.25; Plutarch, *Fabius Maximus* 16; Quintilian 8.6.26. On the discrepancies in the numbers, see: P. Brunt, *Italian Manpower* (Oxford 1971) 419; B. Foster ed., *Livy* (Loeb edition) 362-363; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War* I, 325-331; Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 84-85.

[31] Arpi, Salapia, Aecae and Herdonea went over immediately after Cannae. Most of the Samnites except the Pentri also threw in their lot with Hannibal; Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 89; Peddie, *Hannibal's War*, 105-6; A. Goldsworthy, *Cannae* (London 2001) 162-163.

[32] Livy 23.24.11-13.

[33] Ibidem, 22.51.4.

[34] J. Lazenby, 'Was Maharbal Right?' in: T. Cornell, B. Rankov and P. Sabin ed., *The Second Punic War: A Reappraisal* (London 1996) 41. There are many historians who still think it was possible; See: Shean, 'Hannibal's Mules', 159, 184-185 who believes this is a historical tradition perhaps started by Livy himself. Contra Hoyos, *Hannibal's Dynasty*, 119-120; On the logistical considerations, see: P. Barceló, 'Punic

The road to defeat

After Cannae the tide slowly began to turn against Hannibal, owing in part to disagreement between Hannibal and the Senate at Carthage regarding the conduct of the war. [35] He may have been his own spy chief, but he worked for the Carthaginian government. Hannibal wanted all available reinforcements sent to him in Italy, and to have his brother join him from Spain. The Carthaginian Senate, on the other hand, allowed him only a few thousand men, while the bulk of additional reserves were apportioned to Spain and Sardinia. [36] Without these reinforcements, Hannibal could not permanently hold what he had gained by fighting. Without a permanent base of supply, Hannibal was also severely restricted in his freedom of action. No system of supply by plunder would work in southern Italy for an army as large as Hannibal's. Meanwhile, the obvious need for reliable communications had to be addressed. Hannibal sought a seaport through which he could be resupplied from the East or from Africa, and which could also serve as a communication link. [37] He attempted to capture Naples, only 350 miles from Carthage, but the Romans had the city too well garrisoned. This was the same problem Hannibal faced throughout southern Italy. Although he was undisputed master of the land and could ravage it at will, he nevertheless commanded an army of conquest, not of occupation. He developed no siege-warfare capabilities – no towers, no battering rams, no catapults, all of which were essential for reducing strongly-garrisoned cities. Under these circumstances he could conquer, but not consolidate. Even with a long-range intelligence effort it would have been extremely hard for Hannibal to predict with certainty whether Italian

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Politics, Economy, and Alliances 218-201' in: D. Hoyos ed., *A Companion to the Punic Wars* (Malden MA, 2011) 365-366.

[35] D. Hoyos, *Mastering the West. Rome and Carthage at War* (Oxford and New York, NY 2015) 172-197.

[36] There has always been a controversy over whether Hannibal was sabotaged by a hostile government at home. For the two sides, see: Peddie, *Hannibal's War*, 191-192 contra D. Hoyos, 'Hannibal: What Kind of Genius?', *Greece and Rome* 30.2 (1983) 171-180.

[37] On whether or not Hannibal underestimated the importance of sea power, see: D. Proctor, *Hannibal's March on History* (Oxford 1971) 49-51 and Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 89; B. Rankov, 'The Second Punic War at Sea' in: T. Cornell, B. Rankov and P. Sabin ed., *The Second Punic War: A Reappraisal* (1996) 49-56; Shean, 'Hannibal's Mules', 166-167.

communities would desert Rome and join his cause prior to Hannibal's arrival at the regions in question. If he had a contingency plan prepared in the event that the Italian cities did not realign themselves with him, we are not aware of it.

We know that Hannibal's intelligence remained reliable because he continued to surprise the Romans even while he was pinned down in southern Italy and when Roman communications, by runners or other means, should have provided adequate forewarning. When Hannibal tried to draw the Romans away from their siege of Capua, by an attack on Rome itself, he managed to startle and panic the city in spite of the fact that a messenger from Fregellae had alerted the Romans in advance of his arrival.[38] Hannibal himself stealthily reconnoitered the city with a bodyguard of three men and observed the scarcity of Roman forces and the confusion. By suddenly materializing at the city walls of Rome, Hannibal maintained a psychological edge and damaged Roman morale, though scoring no victories on the battlefield. Hannibal's indirect tactics also included frequent harassment of Roman personnel; Numidian scouts more often than not were successful in capturing Romans who wandered too far from camp, and in assailing targets of opportunity. The consul Marcellus was killed in just such an ambush.[39]

A good spy chief needs counterintelligence to be sure the enemy does not discover his plans. Hannibal took pains to avert security leaks in his own army. The ability to carry out clandestine operations was of the utmost importance when taking walled cities without siege equipment. Polybius' account of how Hannibal conferred with his sympathizers in Tarentum in 212 BC, when it was occupied by the Romans, again illustrates how he could communicate with his confederates and take cities without striking a blow. He positioned himself within striking distance of the city, but employed a screening force of Numidians to prevent any news of his approach from escaping. The conspirators inside the city set a day for its betrayal. At midnight on the appointed date, fire signals were exchanged between the conspirators and Hannibal, who was standing by at the tomb of Apollo Hyacinthus three-quarters of a mile away. After a well-ordered

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[38] According to Livy 26.9.6, the messenger from Fregellae rode to Rome (a distance of 60 miles) in a day and a night. Also see: Polybius 9.6.1-3 on the suddenness and unexpectedness of Hannibal's appearance outside Rome; Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 122.

[39] Livy 27.27.3.

series of signals, the gates were opened and the Roman garrison was lured into the streets. By morning the city was in Carthaginian hands. The success of this venture encouraged Metapontum to throw off its allegiance to Rome and join Hannibal.[40]

A spy chief can also use a bit of luck. Captured documents revealing actions or intentions that require a strategic response do not occur frequently in the sources, but Livy relates at least one incident in which the Romans seem almost to stumble across vital information. The ambassadors of Philip V of Macedon, on their way to Hannibal's camp carrying a proposal of alliance, were intercepted by a Roman patrol near Capua and brought before the Roman praetor Valerius Laevinus. They were able to convince him their intention was to make an alliance not with Carthage, but with Rome. Laevinus was fooled by the story and provided them with not only food, but also the exact location of Hannibal's camp. The ambassadors went directly to Hannibal with Philip's offer of alliance.[41] The envoys had no such luck on their return trip: the presence of Carthaginian ambassadors aboard their ship did little to impress a Roman naval boarding party that these Macedonians were allies of Rome. When the ship was searched, the agreement and a letter from Hannibal to Philip were confiscated by the Romans; the ambassadors were taken prisoner and transported to the Roman Senate.[42]

Among his many tradecraft skills, Hannibal had an expertise in forging documents. He used these skills to forge a letter to Fabius, and made it look as if it had come from the leading citizens of Metapontum. It assured Fabius that they would surrender the city to him personally, and were only awaiting his arrival there. Had it not been for unfavorable auspices that induced the Romans to postpone their march, they would have walked straight into Hannibal's ambush outside the city walls. Plutarch is clear: the Romans were saved by the gods, not by their good intelligence.[43]

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[40] Polybius 8.24-33; Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 111; F. Walbank, *Historical Commentary on Polybius Volume II* (Oxford 1957-1979) 105-106.

[41] Polybius 7.9 gives the treaty agreement; Walbank, *Commentary II*, 42ff; Livy 23.33; Appian, *Macedonian Affairs* 1.

[42] Livy 23.33; Appian, *Macedonian Affairs* 1.2-3; Zonaras 9.4.2-3; Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 159.

[43] Plutarch, *Fabius Maximus* 19; Livy 27.16.12-16; Polybius 10.33.8 and Walbank, *Commentary II*, 244-245; Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 176.

Perhaps the greatest compliment a spy chief can get is when the enemy begins to copy him, and eventually, the Romans began to copy Hannibal's tactics. The first indication we have of a Roman signaling system is from the battle of Arpi in Apulia in 213 BC where they operated their own network of relays to transmit military information.[44] Other incidents also suggest that they were learning how to counter some of Hannibal's ploys. When Hannibal defeated and killed the consul Marcellus, he immediately took the consul's ring. The Romans, remembering Hannibal's skill at forging correspondence, acted swiftly and broadcast to neighboring city-states that Marcellus had died, that his ring was in enemy hands, and that henceforth no letters ostensibly written by him should be trusted. Just such a letter reached the city of Salapia, carried by a Roman deserter pretending to be the late consul's messenger. The dispatch, sealed with the consul's ring, asked the Salapians to be ready for Marcellus' arrival. When a phony 'advance guard' turned up, in reality a unit of Roman deserters, it was welcomed into the city; the Salapians then closed the gates, set upon the deserters and killed them. Salapia was thus spared, thanks to prompt dissemination of the warning about Marcellus' captured seal.[45]

The rise of Scipio

It seems obvious that the Romans direly needed a competent leader who could be left in command for the duration of the war and could act as a central coordinator and chief of intelligence; someone who would not be too squeamish about adopting the very methods that had afforded Hannibal such success. They found their man in P. Cornelius Scipio the Younger, a formidable commander who would soon launch an aggressive campaign against the Carthaginians, one who was willing to imitate Hannibal's *modus operandi* and turn it to Rome's benefit. Conservatism and constitutional niceties had to be laid aside; the Romans were desperate.[46] For the first time they now had a military strategist who was a match for the enemy. Blending

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[44] A system of trumpet signals: Livy 24.46.3:

[45] Livy 27.28; Plutarch, *Marcellus* 9.4; Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 179.

[46] Scipio had never held any office higher than *curule aedile*. He was given *imperium proconsule* in Spain while he was technically a private citizen. Normally such authority was only granted to an outgoing consul or praetor. See: Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 132-133.

the efficient use of advanced intelligence with vigorous offensive operations produced quick results. Scipio deserves credit for one of the most daring exploits in the Hannibalic war, a dash and surprise attack on the Carthaginian base at New Carthage.[47] The city had an excellent harbor, and served as a logistic center where the Carthaginians kept the bulk of their money and war materiel for the Spanish theater, as well as hostages taken in Spain. Scipio's reconnaissance was meticulous. He studied the plan of the city, and also observed that the level of water in the lagoon fell each evening. He took advantage of this natural phenomenon in timing his action: 500 men with ladders scaled the walls in a frontal assault at a moment when they were least expected, and the city was taken. The following year, 208 BC, his prowess showed again at the battle of Baecula, where he defeated Hannibal's brother Hasdrubal and destroyed most of his cavalry. The battle marked the 'coming of age of Roman military tactics'.[48] After Hasdrubal's flight from Baecula, Scipio continued the Roman offensive in Spain, routing two Carthaginian armies at Ilipa in 206 BC. Even Polybius admits that Scipio was emulating Hannibal's tactics in holding the enemy forces while his cavalry wings outflanked them.[49]

Meanwhile Hasdrubal had broken out of Spain and made his way to Italy in an endeavor to bolster Hannibal's war effort there. Counterintelligence would provide the key to a Roman victory. Hannibal, trapped in southern Italy, sent messengers north to look for his brother and urge Hasdrubal to bring him reinforcements. His brother wrote back describing his route along the Adriatic. They agreed to meet in Umbria near the sea, and together march on Rome. The bearers of this letter, four Gallic horsemen and two Numidians, crossed the entire peninsula without being detected. When they lost their way in southern Italy, however, they were captured by a Roman detachment near Tarentum and tortured.[50] Intercepting the message enabled the Romans to locate Hasdrubal at the Metaurus River. Hannibal learned of his brother's defeat and capture when

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[47] Polybius 10.2ff; Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 134-136.

[48] Livy 26.45-47; H. Scullard, *Scipio Africanus: Soldier and Politician* (Ithaca 1970) 74; Goldsworthy, *The Punic Wars*, 277-279.

[49] Polybius 11.23-24; Goldsworthy, *The Punic Wars*, 279-285.

[50] Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 183 suggests the letter contained disinformation that was actually intended to mislead the Romans. If so, the messengers did not know the contents or the intent of the letter or they would have not let themselves be tortured; Livy 27.43.1-4 accepts the message at face value.

C. Claudius Nero, the Roman victor, threw Hasdrubal's severed head into Hannibal's camp. Without doubt, Hannibal now realized his last hope of reinforcement had perished.[51]

Scipio moved to Africa and after several successful operations there, Hannibal was recalled from Italy to respond to the invasion. He set up his winter camp, reorganized his troops, and recruited additional soldiers and horsemen. By spring of 202 BC, the antagonists were ready to face each other in their ultimate showdown. Hannibal brought his force to Hadrumentum and lost no time in deploying his spies to collect the intelligence he needed. Reports confirmed that all the territory surrounding Carthage was occupied by the Romans. Hannibal had to ascertain the size and location of the Roman forces, especially the strength of Scipio's cavalry, since his own was still very weak. Spies sent to reconnoiter the Roman camp were caught, and, according to Polybius, were shown around the site, entertained, and then released and sent back to Hannibal.[52] The story has often been doubted because similar incidents elsewhere are recounted by Herodotus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus and historians suspect a borrowing of the tactic for effect.[53] But it is not at all improbable that the ruse may have been used more than once when one considers the psychological effect this ploy would have had on the Carthaginians. Scipio wanted his enemy to know he was supremely confident, and that Massinissa had not yet arrived with his 6,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry. The decisive encounter at Zama was the first time Hannibal was ever out-generaled in a pitched battle. Copying Hannibal's tactics at Cannae, Scipio performed the double-envelopment maneuver and routed the Carthaginian army in this final engagement of the sixteen-year war.[54]

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[51] Goldsworthy, *The Punic Wars*, 238-243.

[52] Polybius 15.5.1-11; cf. Livy 30.29.3; Appian, *The Punic Wars,* 39.

[53] Polybius 15.5.4-7, the story is often dismissed because of its resemblance to the actions of Xerxes (Herodotus 7.146.7) and Laevinus (Dionysius of Halicarnassus 19.11), who treated spies in the same manner. But, as Walbank, *Commentary II*, 450 points out, Scipio may have known about those previous case histories and decided to use similar tactics. Cf. Zonaras 8.3.6; Eutropius 2.11; Frontinus 4.7.7; Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 219 accepts the story. Livy 30.29.4, on the other hand, says the captured spies did report Massinissa's arrival.

[54] On Zama, see: Goldsworthy, *The Punic Wars*, 300-309; Hoyos, *Hannibal's Dynasty*, 176-178.

Winning the battles but losing the war

Hannibal's talent as a general is self-evident and this was due, in no small part, to his effective utilization of all the intelligence resources at his disposal. He raised tactical maneuver on the battlefield to new heights, while also adding the element of surprise. No other army commander in antiquity combined these two factors as cleverly as Hannibal, and yet he lost the war. [55] This unique blend is regarded as his trademark and the most distinctive feature of his generalship.[56] Without sound intelligence, none of it would have been possible. Granted, intelligence collection was a rudimentary affair in the third century BC, but what Hannibal lacked in technology he made up for in originality and guile. His victories, which brought Rome to the brink of physical, economic, political and moral collapse, were products of timely information gathered on his enemy's location, intentions, and capabilities. With no Punic documents surviving, we are unable to tell exactly how his intelligence network was organized, but Roman records show that it served him well on several levels. His signaling and relay systems provided contact between his field headquarters and the capital. Secret signs and signals were skillfully used for clandestine communication, and he frequently misled the enemy with forged seals and documents. Hannibal's counterintelligence was also superb. He kept the Romans in the dark about his own movements, and could trick them into believing he was somewhere he was not. He continually practiced psychological warfare, and his stratagems left the enemy baffled.

Commanders depend on intelligence, first and foremost, to minimize the risk of being surprised while maximizing the impact of surprise upon the enemy. The other major role of intelligence is to provide for the optimum employment of one's forces by evaluating the enemy's strengths, weaknesses, and objectives. Hannibal's successes testify to his subtle understanding of these concepts. His intelligence information enabled him to determine when and where he could most profitably pursue his campaign against a numerically superior opponent, inside the opponent's own territory. In all his Italian battles Hannibal was outnumbered, sometimes by

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[55] Strauss and Ober, *The Anatomy of Error,* 133-161; See: D. Hoyos, *Hannibal. Rome's Greatest Enemy* (Exeter 2008) 142-150 on whether Hannibal could have won.

[56] G. de Beer, *Hannibal* (New York, NY 1969) 199; E. May, G. Stadler and J. Votaw ed., *Ancient and Medieval Warfare* (Wayne, TX 1984) 56; Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 257.

ten to one. He relied on cavalry scouts to identify new sources of manpower for his mercenary army, as well as to seek battlegrounds that would afford him topographic advantage. Hannibal makes the planning of the ambush like that at Lake Trasimene look so simple, we tend to forget how unique an ambush on such a scale is in warfare. Even Cannae, which was executed in full view of the enemy, was little more than a large trap.[57] Hannibal relied on speed, maintained the initiative, and mobilized a variety of intelligence expedients in support of limited goals. The Romans, on the other hand, had to cope with the military paradox of being strategically on the defensive, while tactically on a perpetual search for Hannibal's elusive army. Even if their intelligence capabilities had been been comparable, Hannibal would still have had an operative advantage reminiscent of that held by guerrilla groups over regular armed forces, ancient and modern. However, guerrillas do not ordinarily win wars unless the regular army they are fighting against makes egregious mistakes, or loses its political base.

Hannibal's positive attitude toward intelligence was as much a function of his own genius as it was a reflection of a Carthaginian system. His personality traits, more than anything else, gave the Second Punic War its epic quality. 'The adequacy of the intelligence that a commander has available is in direct proportion to his interest in intelligence and his use of it'.[58] He had an extraordinary capacity for leadership while commanding a mercenary army amid danger and defeat. It is not surprising that he complemented his mercenary army with an outstanding intelligence apparatus. It took another individualist like Scipio to take heed of Hannibal's example and put it into practice for the Romans. What the Romans learned from Hannibal was that an experienced and responsible general simply does not move into a region about which he knows next to nothing without having first obtained thoroughly detailed geographical, political and military intelligence.[59] Hannibal never allowed the enemy to pin him down for long, never squandered his men in useless engagements, never tried crudely to batter his way through a check or a difficulty, but always kept his options open.

If Hannibal was such a good intelligence chief, why then did he lose the war? He failed because the political and strategic advantages were intrinsically in Rome's favor. Hannibal lost and lost badly on the strategic

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[57] J. Lazenby, 'Was Maharbal Right?' 40.
[58] I. Heymont, *Combat Intelligence in Modern Warfare* (Harrisburg, PA 1960) 2-3.
[59] Austin and Rankov, *Exploratio*, 13; Polybius 3.48; Vegetius 3.6.

level. Skills such as tactical brilliance, competent leadership, and effective intelligence gathering were not enough to beat the Romans. What Hannibal did not have was better strategic intelligence or control of the war. Hannibal's idea of invading Italy directly was a valid plan of action, but it could not neutralize the Roman superiority at sea and in manpower, the loyalty of Rome's allies, their ability to bar reinforcements from reaching Hannibal, and finally, Scipio's counteroffensive. Few of these developments could have been predicted in advance, even with the best of intelligence. When the wider objectives of Hannibal's original invasion plan were obviously not being accomplished, and the subsequent attempts at opening new fronts to encircle Rome had failed, he was stalled. Hannibal lost the strategic advantage when the scene of action moved to Spain and Sicily.[60] Carthage, as a whole, lacked any clearly thought-out political aim in the war except recovering the *status quo ante bellum*. Hannibal was fighting not to occupy Italy but to win a peace that would restore Sicily, Spain, Sardinia, and Corsica to Carthaginian control. A vital ingredient of Hannibal's strategy was to drive a wedge between Rome and her allies, but he offered nothing to the allies in Rome's place, beside 'liberation'.[61]

Hannibal's death would also cheat Rome of satisfaction. In 183 BC, nineteen years after Zama, the Roman Senate decreed that Hannibal should no longer remain at large. Roman agents tracked him down in Bithynia and surrounded his villa. Their intention was either to kill him or transport him alive to Rome where he would be a central figure in a triumph procession. That the Romans would take the trouble to hunt down a 64-year-old man, at an obscure town by the Sea of Marmara, indicates that he still was a valuable symbol if not indeed an actual threat. They would never rest as long as Hannibal was alive. His last words reportedly were: 'Let us release

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[60] It is generally believed that Hannibal regarded Spain as a means to an end, a forward base by which to conquer Italy, while the Punic Senate saw Spain as its ultimate goal. This disagreement over strategic objectives, rather than plain jealousy of the Barca family, is thought to be at the root of the fatal split which cost Carthage the war. See: Lazenby, *Hannibal's War*, 88: D. Hoyos, 'Hannibal. What Kind of Genius?', 171-180, in a dissenting view, finds no evidence that Hannibal's efforts were sabotaged by a hostile government at home, and holds him solely responsible for the choice of strategy.

[61] Livy 30.30.25; Livy 23.5.13 has Varro himself trying to persuade the Capuans to remain loyal to Rome rather than see Italy become 'a province of Numidians and Moors.' See also the comments of: J. Boardman e.a, *The Oxford History of the Classical World* (New York, NY 1986) 408.

the Romans from their long anxiety since they think it too long to wait for the death of an old man'.[62] When the Romans soldiers entered the villa they found him dead, a suicide; once again, and for the last time, he was one step ahead of his enemies.

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[62] Livy 39.51.9.