

Near the village of Cannae Hannibal had taken up a position facing away from the prevailing wind from the hills, which drives clouds of dust over that stretch of parched and level ground. This was a great convenience to his men in camp, and it would be especially advantageous once the action began, as his own men would be fighting with their backs to the wind against an enemy blinded by the flying dust.

44. In their pursuit of the Carthaginians the consuls spared no pains in reconnoitring the route. Arrived at Cannae, where they had the Carthaginian position full in view, they fortified two separate camps about the same distance apart as at Geronium, dividing the forces as before. The river Aufidus, flowing between the two camps, could be reached by watering-parties, as opportunity arose, though not without opposition; but parties from the smaller camp, on the further (or southern) side of the river, could water more freely, as the bank on that side was not guarded. Hannibal hoped that the consuls would offer to engage him on ground peculiarly suited to cavalry, the arm in which he was invincible; and with this in view he formed his line and sent his Numidian horse to provoke the enemy by small-scale, rapid charges. At this, the old trouble broke out again in the Roman lines: the men threatened mutiny; the consuls were at loggerheads. Paullus faced Varro with the reckless conduct of Sempronius and Flaminius; Varro replied by holding up Fabius as a specious example for commanders who wanted to conceal their own timidity and lack of spirit. Varro called gods and men to witness that it was no fault of his that Hannibal now owned Italy by right of possession – his hands had been tied by his colleague; his angry men, spoiling for a fight, were being robbed of their swords. Paullus, in his turn, declared that if the legions were recklessly betrayed into an ill-advised and imprudent battle and suffered a reverse, he would himself be free of all blame for the disaster, though he would share its consequences. It was up to Varro, he added, to see that their readiness to use bold words was matched, when it came to action, by the vigour of their hands.

45. Thus in the Roman camp the time was passed in altercation rather than in planning for the coming fight. Meanwhile Hannibal began to withdraw the main body of his men from

the battle-positions they had occupied during the greater part of the day, and at the same time sent his Numidians across the river to attack the Roman watering-parties from the smaller of their two camps. The watering-parties were mere unorganized groups, and the Numidians sent them flying in much noise and confusion almost before they were over the river, and then continued their advance to a guard-post in front of the Roman defences, carrying on almost to the very gates of the camp. That their camp should be threatened by what was only a small skirmishing force of auxiliary troops was felt by the Romans as an insult; and the only thing that prevented them from immediately crossing the river in force and offering battle was the fact that it was Paullus's day of command. Varro's turn was on the day following, and he used it as was to be expected: without in any way consulting his colleague he gave the order for battle, marshalled the troops, and led them across the river. Paullus followed, for he could not but lend his aid, deeply though he disapproved of what was done.

Once over the river, they joined up with the troops in the smaller camp, forming their line with the Roman cavalry on the right wing, nearer the river, and the Roman legionaries on their left; on the other wing were stationed, first – on the extreme flank – the allied cavalry, then the allied foot extending inwards till they joined the legionaries in the centre. The javelins and other light auxiliaries formed the front line. The consuls commanded the wings, Varro the left, Paullus the right. The task of controlling the centre was assigned to Servilius.

46. At dawn Hannibal first sent his light contingents, including the Balears, across the river, then followed with his main force, drawing up in their battle positions the various contingents as they reached the other side. On his left, near the river bank, were the Gallic and Spanish horse, facing their Roman counterparts; on his right were the Numidians, and his centre was strongly held by infantry, so disposed as to have Gauls and Spaniards in the centre and African troops on each flank. To look at them, one might have thought the Africans were Roman soldiers – their arms were largely Roman, having been part of the spoils at Trasimene, and some, too, at the

Trebia. The Gallic and Spanish contingents carried shields of similar shape, but their swords were of different pattern, those of the Gauls being very long and not pointed, those of the Spaniards, who were accustomed to use them for piercing rather than cutting; being handily short and sharply pointed. One must admit, too, that the rest of the turn-out of these peoples, combined with their general appearance and great stature, made an awesome spectacle: the Gauls naked from the navel upwards; the Spaniards ranged in line in their dazzling white linen tunics bordered with purple. The total number of infantry in the battle-line was 40,000; of cavalry 10,000. The left wing was commanded by Hasdrubal, the right by Maharbal; Hannibal in person, supported by his brother Mago, held the centre. The Roman line faced south, the Carthaginian north; and luckily for both the early morning sun (whether they had taken up their positions by accident or design) shone obliquely on each of them; but a wind which had got up – called locally the Voltumnus – was a disadvantage to the Romans as it carried clouds of dust into their eyes and obscured their vision.

47. The battle-cry rang out; the auxiliaries leapt forward, and with the light troops the action began. Soon the Gallic and Spanish horse on the Carthaginian left were engaged with the Roman right. Lack of space made it an unusual cavalry encounter: the antagonists were compelled to charge head-on, front to front; there was no room for outflanking manoeuvres, as the river on one side and the massed infantry on the other pinned them in, leaving them no option but to go straight ahead. The horses soon found themselves brought to a halt, jammed close together in the inadequate space, and the riders set about dragging their opponents from the saddle, turning the contest more or less into an infantry battle. It was fierce while it lasted, but that was not for long; the Romans were forced to yield and hurriedly withdrew. Towards the end of this preliminary skirmish, the regular infantry became engaged; for a time it was an equal struggle, but at last the Romans, after repeated efforts, maintaining close formation on a broad front, drove in the opposing Gallic and Spanish troops, which were in wedge formation, projecting from the main body, and too

thin to be strong enough to withstand the pressure. As these hurriedly withdrew, the Romans continued their forward thrust, carrying straight on through the broken column of the enemy now flying for their lives, until they reached the Carthaginian centre, after which, with little or no resistance, they penetrated to the position held by the African auxiliaries. These troops held the two Carthaginian wings, drawn back a little, while the centre, held by the Gauls and Spaniards, projected somewhat forward. The forcing back of the projecting wedge soon levelled the Carthaginian front; then, as under increasing pressure the beaten troops still further retired, the front assumed a concave shape, leaving the Africans on, as it were, the two projecting ends of the crescent. Recklessly the Romans charged straight into it, and the Africans on each side closed in. In another minute they had further extended their wings and closed the trap in the Roman rear.

The brief Roman success had been in vain. Now, leaving the Gauls and Spaniards on whom they had done much execution as they fled, they turned to face the Africans. This time the fight was by no means on equal terms: the Romans were surrounded, and – which was worse – they were tired men matched against a fresh and vigorous enemy.

48. Meanwhile the Roman left, where the allied horse confronted the Numidians, was also engaged. For a while things went slowly, owing to a Carthaginian ruse right at the outset. About 500 Numidians pretended to desert: in addition to their regular weapons they concealed swords under their tunics and rode up to the Roman line with their shields slung behind their backs. Suddenly dismounting, and flinging their shields and javelins on the ground, they were taken into the line by the Romans, and then conducted to the rear, where they were ordered to remain. While the general action was developing, they kept quiet enough; but as soon as no one in their vicinity had eyes or thoughts for anything but the progress of the battle, they picked up their shields from where they lay scattered around amongst the heaps of dead, and attacked the Roman line in the rear, striking at the soldiers' backs, hamstringing them, and causing terrible destruction, and even more panic and disorder.

It was at this juncture, when in one part of the field the Romans had little left but to try to save their skins, while in another, though hope was almost gone, they continued to fight with dogged determination, that Hasdrubal withdrew the Numidians from the centre, where they were not being used to much advantage, and sent them in pursuit of the scattered fugitives, at the same time ordering the Spaniards and Gauls to move to the support of the Africans, who by now were almost exhausted by what might be called butchery rather than battle.

49. Paullus, on the other wing, had been severely wounded by a sling-stone right at the start of the fight; none the less, at the head of his men in close order, he continued to make a number of attempts to get at Hannibal, and in several places succeeded in pulling things together. He had with him a guard of Roman cavalry, but the time came when Paullus was too weak even to control his horse, and they were obliged to dismount. Someone, it is said, told Hannibal that the consul had ordered his cavalry to dismount, and Hannibal, knowing they were therefore done for, replied that he might as well have delivered them up to him in chains.

The enemy's victory was now assured, and the dismounted cavalry fought in the full knowledge of defeat; they made no attempt to escape, preferring to die where they stood; and their refusal to budge, by delaying total victory even for a moment, further incensed the triumphant enemy, who unable to drive them from their ground, mercilessly cut them down. Some few survivors did indeed turn and run, wounded and worn out though they were.

The whole force was now broken and dispersed. Those who could, recovered their horses, hoping to escape. Lentulus, the military tribune, as he rode by saw the consul Paullus sitting on a stone and bleeding profusely. 'Lucius Aemilius,' he said, 'you only, in the sight of heaven, are guiltless of this day's disaster; take my horse, while you still have some strength left, and I am here to lift you up and protect you. Do not add to the darkness of our calamity by a consul's death. Without that, we have cause enough for tears.' 'God bless your courage,' Paullus answered, 'but you have little time to escape; do not waste it in useless pity - get you gone, and tell the Senate to look to

Rome and fortify it with strong defences before the victorious enemy can come. And take a personal message too: tell Quintus Fabius that while I lived I did not forget his counsel, and that I remember it still in the hour of death. As for me, let me die here amongst my dead soldiers: I would not a second time stand trial after my consulship, nor would I accuse my colleague, to protect myself by incriminating another.' The two men were still speaking when a crowd of fugitives swept by. The Numidians were close on their heels. Paullus fell under a shower of spears, his killers not even knowing whom they killed. In the confusion Lentulus's horse bolted, and carried him off.

After that, there was nothing but men flying for their lives. 7,000 got away into the smaller camp, 10,000 into the larger; about 2,000 sought refuge in Cannae, but the village had no sort of defences and they were immediately surrounded by Carthalo and his cavalry. Varro, whether by chance or design, managed to keep clear of the fugitives and reached Venusia alive, with some seventy horsemen. The total number of casualties is said to have been 45,500 infantrymen and 2,700 cavalrymen killed<sup>1</sup> - about equally divided between citizens and allies. Amongst the dead were the consuls' two quaestors, Lucius Atilius and Lucius Furius Bibaculus, twenty-nine military tribunes, a number of ex-consuls and of men who had the rank of praetor or aedile - amongst them are numbered Gnaeus Servilius Geminus and Marcus Minucius (who had been master of Horse the previous year and consul some years earlier) - eighty distinguished men who were either members of the Senate, or had held offices which qualified for membership, and had, on this occasion, volunteered for service in the legions. The number of prisoners amounted to 3,000 infantry and 1,500 cavalry.

50. Such is the story of Cannae, a defeat no less famous than the defeat on the Allia;<sup>2</sup> for the enormous losses involved, it was the more dreadful of the two, though less serious in its results, as Hannibal did not follow up his victory. The rout at

1. On p. 300 Livy gives the round figure as 50,000 killed and so do Appian and Plutarch. Quintilian puts it at 60,000 and Polybius at 70,000.

2. The victory of the Gauls over the Romans in 390 B.C.

the Allia lost Rome, but it left the army still in existence; at Cannae hardly seventy men got away with Varro, and almost the whole army shared the fate of Paullus.

In the two camps the men were now leaderless, and most of their weapons were gone. Those in the larger camp sent a message to their comrades in the smaller, asking them to join them, and suggesting that they could probably get across during the night while the enemy troops were asleep after their exertions in the battle and the subsequent feasting and rejoicing over their victory. They could then go in a body to Canusium. By some, however, the message was very ill received: why (it was asked) didn't they come themselves, which would be just as good a way of effecting a junction? Obviously, because the intervening ground was full of enemy troops, and the senders of the message preferred to risk other people's lives to risking their own. Others approved the plan but lacked heart to carry it out. It was a military tribune named Publius Sempronius Tuditanus who roused them to act: 'So,' he cried, 'you would rather be taken prisoner by a brutal and avaricious enemy - have a price put on your heads - be asked if you are a Roman citizen or a member of the Latin Confederacy and have the ransom demanded accordingly, than another may be exalted by your misery and shame! No, no! Not at least if you belong to the same country as the consul Paullus who preferred a noble death to a life of dishonour, or as all those brave men whose bodies lie heaped around him. Come then: before daylight is upon us and more of the enemy troops block our way, let us get out - and quickly - and fight our way through that howling and undisciplined mob around our gates. However dense an enemy's line, boldness and a good sword can find a way to pierce it; as for that loose and disorderly mob, you can drive through it as easily as if there were nothing to stop you. Come with me then - if you want to save yourselves, and your country.'

With these words he drew his sword and led his comrades, in wedge formation, straight through what opposition there was. Some Numidians on their right, and exposed, flank discharged their javelins at them, but they shifted their shields over and forced their way, some 600 of them, to the larger

camp. From there, without further delay and with a great accession of numbers, they reached Canusium in safety. This was in no sense a planned action; nobody gave orders or took command; it arose, amongst this remnant of a beaten army, from sheer impulse dictated by the individual temperaments, such as they happened to be, of the men concerned.

51. Meanwhile the victorious Hannibal was surrounded by his officers offering their congratulations and urging him to take some rest during the remainder of the day and the ensuing night, and to allow his tired troops to do the same; Maharbal, however, the commander of his cavalry, was convinced that there was not a moment to be lost. 'Sir,' he said, 'if you want to know the true significance of this battle, let me tell you that within five days you will take your dinner, in triumph, on the Capitol. I will go first with my horsemen. The first knowledge of our coming will be the sight of us at the gates of Rome. You have but to follow.'

To Hannibal this seemed too sanguine a hope, a project too great to be, in the circumstances, wholly conceivable. 'I commend your zeal,' he said to Maharbal; 'but I need time to weigh the plan which you propose.' 'Assuredly,' Maharbal replied, 'no one man has been blessed with all God's gifts. You know, Hannibal, how to win a fight; you do not know how to use your victory.'

It is generally believed that that day's delay was the salvation of the City and of the Empire.

At dawn next morning the Carthaginians applied themselves to collecting the spoils and viewing the carnage, which even to an enemy's eyes was a shocking spectacle. All over the field Roman soldiers lay dead in their thousands, horse and foot mingled, as the shifting phases of the battle, or the attempt to escape, had brought them together. Here and there wounded men, covered with blood, who had been roused to consciousness by the morning cold, were dispatched by a quick blow as they struggled to rise from amongst the corpses; others were found still alive with the sinews in their thighs and behind their knees sliced through, baring their throats and necks and begging who would to spill what little blood they had left. Some had their heads buried in the ground, having apparently dug

themselves holes and by smothering their faces with earth had choked themselves to death. Most strange of all was a Numidian soldier, still living, and lying, with nose and ears horribly lacerated, underneath the body of a Roman who, when his useless hands had no longer been able to grasp his sword, had died in the act of tearing his enemy, in bestial fury, with his teeth.

52. Much of the day was spent in collecting the spoils. Hannibal then moved against the smaller camp and, preparatory to an assault, constructed a barrier-wall to cut it off from access to the river. However, the place was surrendered sooner than he expected, as all the men in it were either wounded or worn out through lack of sleep and the hardships they had undergone. By the terms of surrender they were to hand over their horses and weapons; the ransom for Romans was to be fixed at 300 *denarii* a head, for allies at 200, for slaves at 100; and when the money was paid they were to be allowed to go free with not more than a single garment apiece.<sup>1</sup> The terms settled, the gates were opened to the enemy. Every man was delivered into custody, Roman and allied troops being kept separate.

Meanwhile all the men in the larger camp who had strength or heart for the undertaking – in all about 4,000, together with 200 cavalymen – escaped to Canusium, some marching in column, others, which was no more dangerous, making their way individually over the countryside. The camp itself was surrendered by the wounded or faint-hearted who remained, on the same conditions as the other.

An enormous quantity of valuable material was taken: Hannibal's men were given the free run of all of it with the exception of horses, men, and what silver there was – most of it was in the trappings of the horses, for the Romans used very little silver plate for their tables, especially on active service.

Hannibal then gave orders for the bodies of his men to be collected for burial. There are said to have been about 8,000, all from his best troops. According to some writers Paullus's body, too, was searched for and given burial.

The fugitives who went to Canusium were given protection by the people of the town and the shelter of a roof, but no more. But a wealthy Apulian woman of good family, named Busa,

further provided them with food, clothing, and money for the road, a munificent act for which she was formally honoured by the Senate after the war.

53. With the fugitives were four military tribunes: Fabius Maximus, son of the dictator, of the First Legion, Lucius Publicius Bibulus and Publius Cornelius Scipio of the Second, and Appius Claudius Pulcher who had lately held the office of aedile of the Third. By universal consent command was offered to Appius Claudius and Scipio, who was still a very young man.<sup>1</sup> The four tribunes were discussing with a few friends what measures to adopt, when Philus, the son of an ex-consul, broke in upon them with startling news: to cherish hope was useless, for all was lost – the future had nothing to offer but misery and despair. A number of men of patrician blood, led by Lucius Caecilius Metellus, were turning their eyes to the sea and planning to abandon Italy and find refuge with some foreign prince. This news, dreadful enough in itself and coming as a new sort of horror on top of all their previous calamities, struck them into a kind of numbed stupor of incredulity. Those who had been listening to the tribunes' discussion proposed to call a general conference, but young Scipio – the man who was destined to command the Roman armies in this war – said that this was no matter for debate: the crisis had come, and what was needed was not words, but bold action. 'Come with me,' he cried, 'instantly, sword in hand, if you wish to save our country. The enemy's camp is nowhere more truly than in the place where such thoughts can rise!' With a few followers he went straight to where Metellus was staying. Assembled in the house were the men of whom Philus had spoken, still discussing their plans. Scipio burst in, and holding his bared sword over their heads, 'I swear,' he cried, 'with all the passion of my heart that I shall never desert our country, or permit any other citizen of Rome to leave her in the lurch. If I wilfully break my oath, may Jupiter, Greatest and Best, bring me to a shameful death, with my house, my family and all I possess! Swear the same oath, Caecilius; and, all the rest of you, swear it too. If anyone refuse, against him this sword is drawn.' They could not have been more scared had they been looking in the

1. He was about nineteen.