Hannibal, the son of [Hamilcar Barca](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamilcar_Barca), was born in 248 BC. His father commanded the [Carthaginian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carthage) land forces during the later stages of the [First Punic War](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ROMpunic.htm).

He kept his army intact and led a successful guerrilla war against the Romans in [Sicily](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sicily). As soon as he was old enough, Hannibal joined his father's army in the invasion of [Hispania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hispania).

[Hamilcar Barca](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamilcar_Barca) died in battle in 228 BC. Hannibal's brother-in-law [Hasdrubal the Fair](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasdrubal_the_Fair) succeeded to his command of the army with Hannibal serving as an officer under him.

Hasdrubal signed a treaty with the Romans where Carthage promised not to expand north of the [Ebro River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebro). Hasdrubal also endeavored to consolidate Carthaginian power through diplomatic relationships with native tribes. This included arranging the marriage between Hannibal and an Iberian princess named Imilce.

[Hasdrubal the Fair](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasdrubal_the_Fair) was assassinated by a [Celtic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celt) assassin in 221 BC. Hannibal was now proclaimed commander-in-chief by the army.

In 218 BC Carthage decided to hit back. Defeated at sea, the Carthaginians decided this time to attack Italy by land from their base in [Hispania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hispania). Hannibal led an army made up of 30,000 Spanish infantrymen, 9,000 African cavalry and a team of elephants. To attack [Rome](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ROMrome.htm) from Hispania meant that Hannibal had to take his soldiers and animals over the snow-covered [Alps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alps).

The Romans did not believe it was possible and were taken by surprise. However, the journey had taken its toll and by the time Hannibal reached [Italy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy), he only had 26,000 men left alive.

The first battle between the two sides took place at [Trebia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Trebia). Although they had many more men, the Romans were heavily defeated by the Carthaginians. One of the reasons for this was that the Romans had trouble coping with Hannibal's elephants. The elephants were used at the front of the Carthaginian forces (similar to the way [tanks](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWtankdevelop.htm) were used in the [First World War](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWW.htm)). Because of the elephants' size and trumpeting, the Romans had great difficulty in persuading their horses to charge Hannibal's forces.

The Romans tried several different tactics against elephants. They were extremely difficult to kill, so the main aim was to make them panic and run amok amongst the [Carthaginians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carthage). They tried to do this by killing their driver or by stabbing them with javelins in the soft skin under the tail. The Romans also discovered that elephants were frightened of the sound of squealing pigs. Therefore pigs were covered in tar, set alight and let loose amongst the elephants. The Carthaginians attempted to counteract this tactic by giving wine to the elephants before battle and stabling them with pigs so that they would get used to the squealing.

Although Hannibal's elephants survived the [Battle of Trebia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Trebia), most of them died soon afterwards from the cold weather. However, the lack of elephants did not stop Hannibal inflicting a series of defeats on the Romans. The most important of these was at [Cannae](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Cannae) where over 50,000 Roman soldiers were killed and a further 19,000 were captured. Hannibal, on the other hand, lost less than 6,000 men.

Even though they suffered these losses, the Romans refused to surrender. As Hannibal was never strong enough to attack Rome itself, he failed to obtain a total victory over the enemy.

The [Roman Senate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Senate) responded to these military reverses by ordering an attack on [Carthaginian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carthage) held Spain. This was a success, and [Scipio Africanus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scipio_Africanus), who organised the campaign, became a national hero. Scipio now started to plan an attack on Carthage, and Hannibal was forced to abandon the territory he controlled in [Italy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy) in order to defend his homeland.

Scipio and his troops landed in [Africa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa) in 204 BC. Instead of attacking [Carthage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carthage), Scipio visited King [Masinissa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masinissa) of [Numidia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Numidia), whose cavalry had played such an important part in Hannibal's victories over the Romans. In exchange for promises of Carthaginian territory, King Masinissa agreed to join forces with Scipio.

The [Battle of Zama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Zama) took place in 202 BC. Hannibal had 40,000 men and 80 elephants while Scipio had 25,000 Romans and 11,000 Numidians. Hannibal started the battle by ordering an elephant charge. However, the Romans had learnt by bitter experience how to deal with elephants. Instead of pigs they now used men blowing trumpets. The noise frightened the elephants and many of them turned and stampeded, trampling to death large numbers of Carthaginians. Hannibal's troops were scattered and they were gradually hunted down by the Numidian cavalry.

The Romans were extremely harsh on the defeated [Carthaginians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carthage). All but ten of their ships were destroyed, vast amounts of money had to be handed over and all overseas territories had to be abandoned. Carthage also had to promise that in future it would gain permission from [Rome](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ROMrome.htm) before forming alliances or going to war with other countries.

Hannibal now decided to become a politician and he was elected as [suffete](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shofet), or chief magistrate. He reformed the way [Carthage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carthage) was governed, stipulating that membership of the [Hundred and Four](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hundred_and_Four) be chosen by direct election rather than co-option. He also changed the term of office from life to a year with a term limit of two years.

The Romans became concerned by Hannibal's growing power and in 195 BC they demanded he retired from office. Hannibal moved to Ephesus, where he met [Antiochus III](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antiochus_III) of [Syria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria) and later became his military adviser.

In 190 BC Hannibal was placed in command of a [Seleucid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seleucid) fleet but was defeated in a battle off the [Eurymedon River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurymedon_River). He fled to [Crete](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crete), before seeking refuge with King [Prusias I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prusias_I_of_Bithynia) of [Bithynia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bithynia), who was engaged in warfare with Rome's ally, King [Eumenes II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eumenes_II) of [Pergamon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pergamon). Hannibal went on to serve the Bithynians in this war.

The Romans became concerned about Hannibal's naval victories and demanded that [Prusias I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prusias_I_of_Bithynia) hand him over. Hannibal was determined not to fall into his enemies' hands and at [Libyssa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libyssa) he took poison.