THE CAVALRY OF SPQR

CARThAGE

Essentially, mounted javelinists noted for their mobility. That speed and mobility was demonstrated by the effectiveness of Masinissa’s and Maharbal’s magnificent Numidian Light Cavalry.

CARTHAGE

Essentially light cavalry units trained to use a lance for attack. They have no missile capability.

HARThAGE

Cavalleria with some body armor, light shields, and, perhaps, a lance and/or swords. The Heavy cavalry of the day were descended from Alexander’s Companions – nowhere as effective.

ROMAN

The Roman cavalry was, in terms of weapons and armament, more heavy than light – they copied much from the Greek era. The Romans never really understood how to use cavalry effectively.

EQUUS: Cavalry Battles Counters

All other counters needed for EQUUS are in SPQR

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Four(4) Roman
Allied Celtic
(Cenomani) Lancer
counters – same as
SPQR Celtic LN,
except these are
brown, not green,
for the Ticius and
Umbra scenarios.

By Rodger B. MacGowan ©1999
While playing SPQR, have you ever tired of waiting for your ponderous phalanx or leg weary legion to plod its way into contact with the enemy? Do you find the thunderous clamor of horses' hooves, as your cavalry smashes into the enemy's flank, more appealing? Fortunately for those who prefer the rapidity and decisiveness of cavalry action, there were many battles and skirmishes of mounted troops during the the Second Punic War. A few of the most significant cavalry battles of the Hannibali War are offered here.

### Historical Background

Legionary infantry was paramount in the Roman military system that had developed by the latter half of the 3rd Century BC. Cavanly, once the dominant arm of the patrician aristocracy, had been progressively deemphasized over the preceding centuries. The Romans could no longer field even one horseman out of ten soldiers — each legion of 4,200 infantry had only 300 cavalry. Reliance on allied Italian cavalry rectified this shortcoming to some degree. The allies normally contributed 600-900 horsemen for every 300 Roman cavalry. Yet the total of Roman and allied horse seldom reached as high as ten percent of any Roman army. What is more, the Italian cavalry was generally inferior in quality to that of Rome's opponents, such as the Celts and Epirotes. Nevertheless, Rome still managed to win most of her battles — and all her wars.

The Carthaginian military system had evolved on an entirely different track. The infantry was based on Libyan conscript peasants, but depended even more on various mercenary contingents — including Iberians, Celts, Ligurians, etc. But Carthage relied to a much greater degree on her mounted forces — civic heavy cavalry, Numidian light cavalry, barbarian horsemen and, of course, war elephants. Carthaginian armies varied greatly in composition, but usually had anywhere from 10 to 25 percent mounted.

Of all the enemy cavalry the Roman Republic had to face, none proved more formidable than the nomadic horse warriors of Numidia led by professional Carthaginian officers. On Sicilian and African battlefields throughout the First Punic War, Numidian horsemen proved their worth by confounding Roman cavalry and harrying Rome's heavy foot soldiers. Forewarned, the Romans were, but they proved unable, or unwilling, to do anything to strengthen their weak mounted arm in the decades between the First and Second Punic Wars (241-219 B.C.).

### The Romans Meet Hannibal's Horse Soldiers

After his surprise crossing of the Alps, Hannibal entered Italy with a mere 20,000 infantry. His real strength lay in the body of 6,000 crack, veteran cavalry with his small army. The Consul Publius Cornelius Scipio, after missing Hannibal at Massilia (Marseille), sent his main army on to Spain and returned to Italy with a small escort. He took command of the praetorian army stationed in Cisalpine Gaul which included two double legions with 18,000 infantry and 1,600 cavalry. To this he added his bodyguard (extraordinaire) of about 300 cavalry and probably less than 5,000 allied Celtic auxiliaries (with perhaps 1,000 of these being mounted).

Scipio, moving rapidly to confront the invader, considered the circumstances. He knew little of the strength of his opponent and his colleague, the Consul Sempronius Longus, was enroute from Sicily to reinforce him. These factors made delaying any engagement seem prudent. On the other hand, Hannibal's army had to be in terrible shape after crossing the snow covered Alps, and the Celtic tribes (including his own auxiliaries) might go over to the enemy en masse if they sensed Roman hesitation or weakness. For these reasons, Scipio decided to lead out all his cavalry and velites to engage the Carthaginians immediately. Hannibal had also set out with his cavalry on reconnaissance, and the two forces collided along the Ticinus River.

Scipio placed his velites, flanked by Celtic auxiliary cavalry in his first line. A second line was composed of all his Roman and allied Italian cavalry. Hannibal countered with a single line, Iberians in the center and Numidians on the flanks. Things did...
not go well for Rome from the outset. When Hannibal’s Iberian lancers charged, the velites panicked and routed straight back, throwing the Roman cavalry into confusion. The consul Scipio was wounded and only saved from capture by the resolute stand of the recovering Roman cavalry and the heroism of his teenage son, later to be known as Africanus. However, the Roman cavalry were eventually flanked by the Numidians and swept from the field with heavy losses. The debacle at Ticinus was the first of many for the Roman cavalry.

**Carthaginian Army:** Withdraws when units with TQ points totalling 46 have been eliminated.

**Roman Army:** Withdraws when units with TQ points totalling 37 have been eliminated.

**Maharbal’s Masterpiece of Mounted Combat**
Following Scipio’s defeat at the Ticinus, his army fell back and was then joined by the army of the Consul Sempronius. Hannibal met this combined army of four double legions and crushed it at the Battle of the Trebbia, 218 BC. His cavalry, brought up to a strength of over 9,000 with Celtic recruits, played the decisive role.

For the campaign of 217 BC Rome posted one consular army, under the Consul Servilius, at Arriminum to guard the Eastern approach to Italy. The second consular army, under Gaius Flaminius, was at Arretium, on the Western invasion rout. But Hannibal made a surprise crossing of the Arno marshes to turn Flaminius’ strategic flank. Flaminius dashed off in a hasty pursuit, the result being the annihilation of his army in the greatest ambush in history, at Lake Trasimene.

But another battle was brewing. Servilius had decided to force march West to join his colleague as soon as he learned of Hannibal’s first move. Appreciating that time was of the essence, Servilius sent his cavalry on ahead under command of the...
Propraetor Gaius Centenius. This force reportedly consisted of 4,000 horsemen, an unusually large number for two double legions. There were probably no more than the standard 2,400 Romans and Italians, with the remainder being provided by the only remaining loyal Celtic tribe, the Cenomani.

Immediately following the Battle at Lake Trasimene, Hannibal learned that another Roman force was approaching. Centenius, on the other hand, knew nothing of the recent disaster that had befallen Flaminius' army. Hannibal assigned the task of dealing with this threat to his trusted marshal, Maharbal. Maharbal had served as Hannibal's deputy in Spain, and was undoubtedly one of the greatest cavalry commanders of all time. He took a detachment of cavalry and Balearic slingers out to meet Centenius. With his superior Numidian scouts, Maharbal located the Romans and determined their route of approach. Setting a hasty ambush, the Carthaginians killed some 2,000 enemy horsemen in the initial clash and the pursuit that followed. The following day the remaining 2,000 horsemen were forced to surrender.

Maharbal's Victory in Umbria, 217 B.C.

Map:

Use the East Half of the Beneventum Map from SPQR. This battle was fought somewhere in the foothills of the Appenines. The Roman Army uses the East map edge as its retreat edge. The Carthaginian Army uses the West map edge.

Line Command Eligibility:

Rome:
1. Roman and Alae Sociorum Cavalry
2. Celtic Cavalry

Carthage:
1. All Cavalry

2. Balearic Slingers (may occupy every other hex)

Victory:
A player wins by forcing his opponent to withdraw.

Carthaginian Army: Withdraws when units with TQ points totalling 30 have been eliminated.

Roman Army: Withdraws when units with TQ points totalling 28 have been eliminated.

The Roman Cavalry's Inferiority Complex, 216-203 BC

The next major cavalry confrontation occurred at Cannae. Ten thousand Carthaginian cavalry, commanded by Maharbal and Hasdrubal, inflicted a crushing defeat on Rome's 6,000 horse. This led to the envelopment and near annihilation of eight double legions. The fact that Rome could only raise 6,000 cavalry to support 80,000 infantry is telling. The cavalry losses in Rome's first four confrontations in Italy had been catastrophic: Ticinus — over 1,000; Trebbia — perhaps 2,500; Trasimene — as much as 2,500; and Umbria — 4,000; a total of no less than 10,000 mounted casualties! Cannae added another 4,200 losses. Not only was Rome unable to continue raising even one in ten of its soldiers mounted, but the horsemen that were raised were psychologically traumatized. In fact, although Rome continued to fight against Hannibal for thirteen more years in Italy with steadily increasing fortune, her mounted troops never recovered their nerve in that theater. Not surprisingly, the Romans
EQUUS: Cavalry Battles of the Second Punic War

ventured no major cavalry battles for the remainder of the war in Italy.

A Legion’s March Through a Gauntlet of Cavalry

As the Second Punic War progressed, it became every Roman commander’s nightmare to be caught in the open by the ubiquitous Numidians. And that is exactly what happened to the unfortunate Proconsul Publius C. Scipio in Spain, near Castrum Album (the White Fort — famous as the site of Hamilcar Barca’s death in battle in 228 BC).

After watching his colleague Sempronius get trounced by Hannibal at Trebia, Scipio recovered from his wound and joined his brother Gnaeus in Spain in 217 BC. The Scipio brothers fought a very successful campaign against Hannibal’s brother, Hasdrubal Barca, culminating in the decisive Battle of Dertosa, 215 BC (featured in C3i #4). At Dertosa, for the first time, the Romans were able to win in spite of the Carthaginian superiority in cavalry. Carthage responded to this defeat by dispatching Mago Barca with a new army to Spain. The Barca brothers opened the campaign of 214 BC by ravaging the territory of some of the Scipio’s Iberian allies. Publius rushed up with one legion to succor his allies, while Gnaeus remained behind with the remainder of the army.

Publius found his force of 9,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry facing a combined force of as much as 20,000 foot and 4,000 horse. So after making a demonstration in support of his allies, P. Scipio wisely decided to beat a hasty retreat back to his brother's camp. The withdrawing Romans evaded the main Carthaginian infantry forces. But they were caught in the open by the Punic cavalry, elephants and skirmishers. After a prolonged running fight, the Roman column managed to cut its way back to camp. But Publius Scipio’s command suffered losses of 2,000 killed and many wounded.

The precise site of this battle is unknown. The Roman camp and mixed terrain on the Beneventum Map provide an appropriate setting. The Carthaginian Army uses the South map edge. Carthaginian units may not enter the Roman camp.

Map:
Use the Beneventum Map from SPQR. The Carthaginian Army uses the East map edge or units may retreat into the Roman camp. The Carthaginian Army uses the South map edge. Carthaginian units may not enter the Roman camp.
The Great Battles of History Series: SPQR

Line Command
Eligibility
Carthage:
1. All Cavalry
2. Numidian LI, Balearic SK and<br>Elephants (may occupy every other hex)

Rome: Same as Beneventum.

Victory:
The Carthaginian player wins by forcing the Roman Army to withdraw.
The Roman player wins by:
1. forcing the Carthaginian Army to withdraw; OR
2. entering Roman camp with at least 24 units (including routed units).

Carthaginian Army: Withdraws when units with TQ points totalling 45 have been eliminated.

Roman Army: Withdraws when units with TQ points totaling 63 have been eliminated.

Cavalry Battles in Africa, Spain and Sicily
It was in Africa that the greatest cavalry battles of the war were fought. Numidian armies often included upwards of 5,000 cavalry. King Syphax of the Masaesyles Numidians (modern Western Algeria and Eastern Morocco) rebelled against Carthage in 213 BC. He had been prodded by the Scipio brothers in Spain, who sent him some citizen cavalry as advisors. Carthage responded by rallying King Gaia of the rival Massyles Numidians (modern Western Tunisia and Eastern Algeria) to their cause. Gaia sent an army under his 27 year old son, Masinissa, after Syphax. Masinissa defeated Syphax in their first encounter, but Syphax fled to Mauretania (Western Morocco) and raised a new army. Masinissa defeated this force as well, ending the rebellion in 212 BC.

Masinissa was then dispatched to Spain, where his Numidian allies had the decisive role in annihilating two Roman armies at the twin battles of Castulo (C3I #5) and Ilorca, 211 BC. But Rome finally found a commander who appreciated cavalry when Publius Scipio Africanus was given the Spanish command in 210 BC. Africanus consistently recruited among his Iberian allies to ensure that he had near parity with the Carthaginians in mounted strength. This enabled him to win a victory at Baceula, 208 BC (Africanus Module). However, even Scipio Africanus was stymied during the campaign of 207 BC, when Masinissa was given a roving commission and command of 3,000 Numidian and Iberian cavalry.
Fortunately for Rome, the Carthaginians offered battle in 206 BC at Ilipa (Africanus Module), and Scipio won a decisive victory, despite being outnumbered 4,500 to 3,500 in cavalry.

Meanwhile, in Sicily, a band of Numidians under the command of the Liby-Phoenician officer Muttines foiled Roman attempts to reconquer the island from 212-210 BC. However, the Carthaginian general Hanno became jealous of Muttines and stripped him of his command. The result was the defection of Muttines, the desertion of the Numidian cavalry and the final Roman reconquest of Sicily.

Scipio Carries the War into Africa
After completing his conquest of Punic Spain in 206 BC, Africanus secured alliances with both King Syphax and Prince Masinissa (who had defected from the Carthaginians) in preparation for his invasion of Africa. Africanus knew all too well that the support of the Numidians would be crucial to his success in Africa. He had only to remember the fate of Regulus during the First Punic War, at the Bagradas Plains (SPQR Scenario 11.2).

Africanus spent the year of 205 BC preparing his invasion force in Sicily. He paid particular attention to training his mounted force, which numbered about 2,500 cavalry. However, the Numidian support Africanus was counting on began to unravel. The beautiful Sophonisba, daughter of Hasdrubal Gisgo, married Syphax and convinced him to abandon his alliance with Africanus. Meanwhile, King Gaia had died and his son Masinissa became embroiled in a succession struggle. Syphax intervened and chased Masinissa out of his kingdom. When Africanus landed in Africa in 204 BC, Masinissa joined him with his entire remaining army — 200 horsemen.

Roman vs. Carthaginian
Cavalry in Africa
In response to the invasion, Hasdrubal Gisgo and King Syphax were ordered by the Carthaginian home government to recruit armies. Meanwhile, the Carthaginian leaders mobilized their citizen cavalry, some...
EQUUS: Cavalry Battles of the Second Punic War

2,000 well equipped heavy cavalry. To this force they added 2,000 light cavalry recruited from Numidian tribes. Hanno (a son of Hamilcar, who may have been another of Hannibal’s brothers) was given command of the 4,000 horsemen and directed to screen the Roman army. Hanno occupied the city of Salaeca, then quartered his force within its walls. Africanus was incredulous at the inactivity of this Punic mounted force. While the Carthaginian cavalrymen enjoyed the soft life inside the city, Scipio and Masinissa surveyed the surrounding area to find a suitable ambush site.

Early one morning, Masinissa rode up to the city walls to provoke the Carthaginians. Hanno took the bait and led out his entire command to pursue the small band of Numidians. Masinissa led him a lively chase along a series of hills where Scipio and Laelius lay in wait, near the watch tower of Agathocles (named for the early Greek invader of Africa). The Roman cavalry caught the Punic column in the flank and routed Hanno’s force. Some 1,000 were slain in the ambush and 2,000 more were killed or captured during the pursuit that followed. Hanno was among the prisoners.

Victory
A player wins by forcing the enemy Army to withdraw.

Carthaginian Army: Withdraws when units with TQ points totalling 27 have been eliminated.

Roman Army: Withdraws when units with TQ points totaling 28 have been eliminated.

A Cavalry Battle Royale: Laelius and Masinissa vs. King Syphax
Scipio followed up his success at Agathocles’ Tower by besieging Utica. But, for once, the great Africanus failed. Hasdrubal Gisco and Syphax moved up with two large armies and forced him to lift the siege. Scipio faked peace talks, then destroyed the Carthaginian armies by burning their camps in a night attack. Scipio returned to the siege of Utica, but Hasdrubal and Syphax rallied to form a new army. Scipio marched to the Great Plains (C3i #4) and crushed this raw force. The Great Plains is probably the first Roman battle in history that opened with the rout of both enemy cavalry wings.

The Battle of Cirta, 203 B.C.

Map:
Use the Zama Map from SPQR. The

Line Command Eligibility
Rome:
All Cavalry

Carthage:
1. Carthaginian Heavy Cavalry
2. Numidian Light Cavalry

sent Laelius and Masinissa with most of his cavalry and velites to pursue Syphax. The Romans caught up with Syphax somewhere on the way to Cirta, his capitol. Syphax had raised a large force of excellent cavalry, and some infantry levies. The impetuous Masinissa advanced ahead with his Massyles Numidian horsemen and began an immediate assault on the rival Masaesyles. Syphax initially had the best of this cavalry fight, with superior numbers and infantry support. Then Laelius arrived and brought up the Roman cavalry and velites to support Masinissa’s faltering attack. Syphax’s army continued to fight for awhile, but then buckled, routed and fled.
exact site of this battle is unknown, but one dusty, featureless African plain is pretty much like another. The Numidian Army uses the Southeast map edge as its retreat edge. The Roman Army uses the Northwest map edge.

**Line Command Eligibility**

**Numidian:**
1. Numidian Light Cavalry
2. Numidian Medium and Light Infantry
3. Numidian Light Cavalry

**Roman:**
1. Roman and Alae Sociorum Cavalry
2. Velites (may occupy every other hex)
3. Numidian Light Cavalry

**Victory**
A player wins by forcing the enemy army to withdraw.

**Numidian Army:** Withdraws when units with TQ points totaling 54 have been eliminated.

**Roman Army:** Withdraws when units with TQ points totaling 57 have been eliminated.

**Zama, 202 BC:**
**The Final Showdown**
At the battle of Cirta, Masinissa captured Syphax and reclaimed his crown. More importantly for Scipio Africanus, it allowed Masinissa to raise some 4,000 cavalry for use against Hannibal, who returned from Italy in late 203 BC. Although Syphax had been captured, the Western portions of his kingdom remained loyal to Carthage. His kinsmen Tychaeus and his son Vermina began raising cavalry from the Masaesyles to support Hannibal, while Masinissa was consolidating control of his Massyles Kingdom.

When Hannibal and Scipio began maneuvering for the final campaign in the fall of 202 BC, a primary consideration for both commanders was linking up with their Numidian support. Tychaeus joined Hannibal first, with 2,000 crack horsemen. Hannibal sought to provoke a battle with Scipio before Masinissa could return, but the Numidian king arrived with his 4,000 cavalry, just in time. His advantage in cavalry, 6,500 to 3,000, is generally considered to have been the decisive factor enabling Scipio to defeat Hannibal at Zama (SPQR Scenario 11.4). Cavalry, so long neglected by Rome, had won her greatest battle.

Interestingly, even as Zama was being fought, more Numidian aid was on the way to Hannibal. Syphax’s son, Vermina, arrived about six weeks after Zama with an additional cavalry army. But by then it was too late. Scipio routed this contingent in the last combat action of the Second Punic War on 17 December, 202 BC. But this battle was merely a footnote in history. Had Vermina only arrived a little sooner, Hannibal might very well have triumphed at Zama.

**Scenario Notes & Information:**
All SPQR 2nd edition rules apply to all scenarios. Counters and maps are taken from SPQR, The Great Battles of History, Volume II, except as noted.

- For an analysis of proper Cavalry Tactics in SPQR, refer to the SPQR Player's Guide article, Masinissa's Corner by James Burton.