

# SPQR SCENARIO

## The Second Battle of Beneventum, 214 B.O .

BY DAN FOURNIE

### Historical Background

By the fifth year of the Second Punic War (214 BC), the Carthaginians had been campaigning up and down the length of Italy, and had been victorious in every significant combat action. The Second Battle of Beneventum was the first major defeat suffered by Carthage in Italy. However, the Carthaginians were not beaten by Rome's vaunted citizen legionnaires. Rather, a collection of slave levies and convicts brought Rome her first victory.

### The Volones, Slave Legions of Rome

Rome counted among her chief military assets a nearly inexhaustible supply of quality heavy infantry. But even the Romans were hard pressed to field troops after the debacle at Cannae, 216 BC. Eight legions had been shattered, on top of the catastrophic losses at Lake Trasimene and Trebia in the preceding years. A Dictator, Marcus Junius Pera, and a Master of Horse, Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus were elected to replace the slain Consul Paullus and the discredited Consul Varro. But the generals needed armies.

Only the two urban legions remained intact in Italy and these were assigned to

the dictator, Junius Pera. By calling up teenagers who would normally have been too young to serve, Rome put together another consular army. These troops were too raw for field duty, however, and were assigned to garrison the capital. The remnants of the Cannae legions were combined with a force of marines from the fleet to field a third consular army, under the Praetor Marcus Claudius Marcellus. But this force was too demoralized to face Hannibal again in battle. The senate needed another army to confront Hannibal.

What the senate did was to purchase a body of 8,000 slave volunteers, the

volones, to form two new legions. In addition, 6,000 convicts were released from Roman jails to serve in this army, after volunteering to fight as well. The slave volones were armed and equipped as legionnaires at state expense. They were trained and led by professional Roman centurions and tribunes. There was not enough equipment on hand initially to arm the convict volones, so they were given the Celtic arms and armor that adorned various trophies and temples in the city. Presumably, later they were issued standard arms. Allied Italian cavalry, and some infantry, were added to the volones to complete the army. Its total strength was about 18,000 foot and 1,800 horse.

### Tiberias Sempronius Gracchus takes Command

The volones were placed under the command of the Master of Horse. Sempronius Gracchus was a cut above the average Roman general, resourceful, innovative and open to new concepts. He readily accepted the command of slaves and convicts, where more traditional Roman nobles would surely have balked. Gracchus trained his new recruits hard. To develop cohesion in his polygot army,





Gracchus declared that all soldiers in his army, be they slave, convicts or free men, would be treated equally and endure the same discipline. His even-handed treatment soon earned him the undying devotion of his volones as well as the respect of his allied legionnaires. Gracchus' first mission in 216 BC was to bring relief to the garrison of Casilinum, under siege by Hannibal's forces. Since his army was too weak to challenge Hannibal to open battle, Gracchus hit on the stratagem of floating rations down the Voltturnus River to the beleaguered garrison under cover of darkness. In this and other actions, Gracchus' military ability was recognized.

In 215 BC Gracchus was elected Consul. Although he had his pick of any legions he wanted as consul, Gracchus retained his volones army. Gracchus discovered the location of a Carthaginian-allied Capuan army of 14,000 men, intent on ambushing a force of allies from Cumae. He forestalled their plans by committing his volones legions to a night attack. Gracchus' men overran the Capuan camp, killed 2,000 and scattered the remainder of the Capuan army. Gracchus then withdrew into Cumae, and repelled a siege assault by Hannibal's army. This successful

army and the commander. Gracchus retained his command again in 214 BC, this time as proconsul.

#### Hanno, Son of Bomilcar, and his Army

The Carthaginian general at the Second Battle of Beneventum was Hanno, son of Bomilcar. Hanno was one of Hannibal's top marshals. He had commanded the flanking force at the crossing of the Rhone River, when the Carthaginians faced a huge Celtic army barring their crossing. Hanno had led a picked force of horse and foot up river to cross secretly, and then fell on the rear of the barbarian host while Hannibal had fixed their attention with an assault crossing. In another notable command, Hanno was entrusted with the 4,000 Numidian light cavalry at Cannae (according to Polybius). After Cannae, Hannibal assigned Hanno to be his marshal in Lucania and Bruttium. With the able assistance of his subordinates, Hamilcar and his cavalry commander, Mago the Samnite, Hanno directed a brilliant campaign to seize all of Bruttium (save Rhegium) and most of Lucania, 216-214 BC.

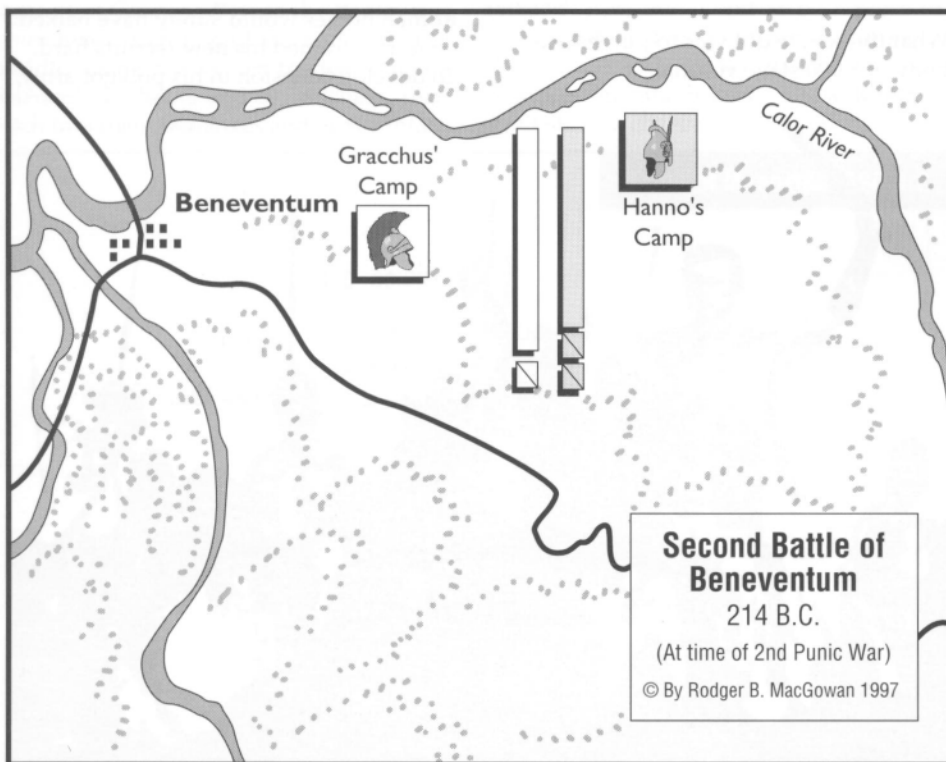
In addition to capturing these provinces, Hanno's mission was to levy and train an army of Bruttian and Lucanian reinforcements for Hannibal. With a small cadre of veterans, Hanno set about building a new

army. By 214 BC, he had built his force up to 17,000 foot and 2,000 horse. The foot were mostly Bruttians, a mix of trained soldiers and recent conscripts. Hanno had other Italians, including Lucanians and Samnites, mercenaries, and a few units of veteran Iberian and Celtic infantry. His mounted force included 1,200 crack Numidians, as well as raw Bruttian cavalry. Hanno probably had a few elephants as well.

#### The Course of the Battle

As the campaign season of 214 BC opened, Hannibal ordered Hanno to bring his army North into Campania, to join the main army. Since the Consul Marcellus was known to be at Nola, Hannibal ordered Hanno to take the route by Beneventum. Meanwhile, the Consul Fabius ordered Gracchus to occupy a blocking position at Beneventum. The armies of Hanno and Gracchus arrived nearly simultaneously. Since the town had a Roman garrison, the volones army was able to enter the city, while Hanno encamped three miles away, along the Calor River. Gracchus decided he wanted to fight, and set up a new camp only one mile from Hanno's. Meanwhile, Gracchus had previously sent a request to the Senate seeking permission to grant his volones their freedom, in light of their good service. He received a reply on the eve of this battle. The Senate, and the Consul Marcellus, authorized Gracchus to grant his troops their freedom at his own discretion.

Before deploying for battle, Gracchus announced to his volones legions that they could win their freedom if they each brought in an enemy head. Gracchus then placed his forces in standard Roman formation, with one flank covered by the river. Hanno responded with a battle formation in two lines, light infantry in the van and mixed heavy and medium foot in the main line. The two armies clashed and bitter fighting ensued. The promise of freedom spurred the volones to prodigious efforts, slaying Bruttians and taking their heads. The Bruttians, horrified by this atrocity, responded with equal ferocity. However, eventually the volones realized that enemy heads could not be distinguished from friendly heads, and fell to cutting off heads of slain foe and friend alike. The most valiant volones were all encumbered by holding a head while they fought (try holding a



## SPQR Scenario: Second Battle of Beneventum

shield and a head and swinging a sword, and you'll see it's not easy).

Gracchus then gave the order to drop the heads and promised freedom to all, but only if they won the battle. The revitalized volones legions stormed against the Bruttian battle line. The Carthaginian line wavered and then broke. Hanno's conscripts had finally had more than they could take. The Carthaginian army was routed. The volones pursued the fugitives back to their camp. Without hesitating, the slaves and convicts then stormed the ramparts and seized the camp. Livy claims that only 2,000 men of the Carthaginian army escaped death or capture, but such losses are clearly exaggerated. Hanno's Numidians would have been able to cover the withdrawal and save some of the army. Roman losses are given as 2,000 killed and many wounded. Hanno probably lost as much as half his infantry.

### Aftermath

Gracchus followed up his victory with an invasion of Lucania. But Hanno still had fight in him, and cut up the lead Roman cohorts before withdrawing into Bruttium. Gracchus parlayed his victory into an election to a second consulship in 213 BC, and continued to lead his beloved volones legions in action. Hanno, Mago and Hamilcar built another army, and faithfully kept up the struggle for Hannibal. In 212 BC, Gracchus again retained his command as a proconsul. In that year, Hanno and Mago the Samnite were finally able to take vengeance for the defeat at Beneventum.

Mago's Numidian cavalry ambushed and slew Gracchus in 212 BC. There are three versions of his death: either he was lured to his death by a treacherous Lucanian, caught by surprise while bathing in the River Calor, or ambushed while performing a religious ritual a half mile from his camp at Beneventum. All versions agree it was Mago's cavalry that did him in. As a bonus for the Carthaginians, not only had they eliminated a great enemy general, but the volones legions were destroyed as well. It seems that the volones, who had served under no commander other than Gracchus, took his death as the equivalent of a discharge and promptly deserted. The volones army just disintegrated. This was a lesson the Roman nobles would have done well to

master. The volones had in fact reacted just as later, professional legions would. Legions that owed their allegiance, not to

the Senate and People of Rome (SPQR), but instead to a great general, would no longer be reliable defenders of liberty.

### THE SECOND BATTLE OF BENEVENTUM, 214 BC

**MAP** – Use the **Cannae** Map from **SPQR**. Although this battle took place near the site of Pyrrhus's (First) Battle of Beneventum (featured in **SPQR**), it was fought out in the open on a plain. The Aufidas is now the Calor River. The Roman Army uses the Northeast map edge as its retreat edge. The Carthaginian Army uses the Southwest map edge.

**CARTHAGINIAN COMMAND:**  
Hanno, son of Bomilcar is the Carthaginian OC. Hanno has a strategy rating of '5'.




**ROMAN COMMAND:**  
The Proconsul Tiberias Sempronius Gracchus is the Roman OC (use Dentatus).

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#### Initial Deployment

Carthaginian/Bruttian Army of Hanno	
Unit(s)	Hex(es)
Hanno, Bomilcar's son[OC]	Anywhere
Mago the Samnite	with any cavalry
Hamilcar	with any HI or MI
Bostar	with any LI or EL
<b>• THE VAN</b> (EoH = every other hex)	
Bruttian (Illyrian) LI (1-4)	1803-1809 (EoH)
Lucanian (Thracian) LI (1-4)	1811-1817 (EoH)
Iberian LI (1-3)	1819-1823 (EoH)
Cretan LI (1)	1825
African Elephants (1)	1827
<b>• THE MAIN LINE</b>	
Bruttian HI (1-12)	1501-06, 1520-25
Bruttian MI (1-2)	1507-1508
Lucanian MI (1-2)	1509, 1511
Celtic MI (1-4)	1510, 1512, 1514, 1516
Italian MI (1-2)	1513, 1515
Samnite MI (1-2)	1517-1518
* or Samnite HI from <b>Africanus</b>	
Greek Merc. Hoplite HI (1)	1519
<b>• THE CAVALRY</b>	
Numidian LC (1-3)	(all cavalry within 1 hex of 1528)
Bruttian (Grk Merc) LC (1-2)	1 hex of 1528
* or Bruttian LC from <b>C3i Nr.2 (Pyrrhic Victory)</b>	
** or Bruttian RC from <b>Africanus</b>	

Roman Slave Army of Proconsul Gracchus	
Unit(s)	Hex(es)
Proconsul S. Gracchus [OC]	anywhere
Tribunes (2)	with any HA/PR
Praefects Soc (2)	with any CO/VE
Praefect Equit	with any RC
<b>XIV Legion (Slave Volones)</b>	
Velites (a-c)	3208, 3210, 3212
Hastati (a-d)	3510, 3512 (2 per hex)
Principes (a-d)	3709, 3711 (2 per hex)
Triarii (a-c)	4010-4012
<b>XIV Alae Sociorum (Convict Volones)</b>	
Velites (a-b)	3204, 3206
Cohorts (a-i)	3506, 3508, 3705, 3707 (2 per hex), 3504 (1)
<b>XV Legion (Slave Volones)</b>	
Velites (a-c)	3214, 3216, 3218
Hastati (a-d)	3514, 3515 (2 per hex)
Principes (a-d)	3713, 3715 (2 per hex)
Triarii (a-c)	4013-4015
<b>XV Alae Sociorum (Convict Volones)</b>	
Velites (a-b)	3220, 3222
Cohorts (a-i)	3518, 3520, 3717, 3719 (2 per hex), 3721 (1)
<b>Allied Italians</b>	
AS VII Triarii (a-b)	4008-4009
AS XIX Triarii (a-b)	4016-4017
AS VII Cohort extra	3522
AS XIX Cohort extra	3523
AS VII Cavalry RC (a,b,ex)	(all cavalry within 1 hex of 3626)
AS XIX Cavalry RC (a,b,c)	1 hex of 3626

		
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\* May form lines occupying every other hex

(NOTE: All SPQR 2nd Edition rules are in effect)

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**Victory Conditions**  
A player wins by forcing his opponent to withdraw.

**Army Withdrawal Levels**

- **Carthaginian Army:** Withdraws when units with TQ points totalling 100 have been eliminated.
- **Roman Army:** Withdraws when units with TQ points totalling 110 have been eliminated.

Army Size and TQ Levels				
Army	Size	TQ Points	Rout Ratio	Quality Ratio
Carthage	193	247	40%	1.36
Romans	183	313	35%	1.55



## The Second Battle of Beneventum, 214 BC

### Special Rule:

#### **The Emancipation Proclamation**

Before the Battle of Beneventum, Gracchus announced to his volones that they could win their freedom if they each brought in an enemy head. At first all was well, but the heads soon became a nuisance. Gracchus then gave the order to drop the heads and promised freedom to all, but only if they won the battle. Here's how it works in the game: The Roman player may issue his Emancipation Proclamation at any time, and immediately remove up to two (2) cohesion hits from every *Volones* unit. **Note:** This rule does not apply to allied Italian units (AS triarii, extraordinaires and cavalry).

### New Counters Needed

Second Beneventum can be played using only **SPQR** counters. A few counters from **Africanus** and **C3i Nr.2, Pyrrhic Victory** (as specified in the scenario) are nice to have.

This list is all the *new* counters that would be *nice to have*, they may be published later as part of a **C3i** magazine insert sheet.

### Units

> *Carthaginian*

- Samnite HI (same as from **Africanus**) (12)

- Bruttian LC (same as from **C3i Nr.2, Pyrrhic Vic.**) (1-2)

### Play Balance

These two armies are fairly evenly matched, with maybe a slight edge to the Carthaginians. That's where the *Emancipation Proclamation* should even things out. But it may be too great an advantage for the Roman player. It can be cut to a one (1) cohesion point reduction, if necessary you could explore.

