

— CCLXIV - CXLVIII — The Punic Wars

'[Hamilcar believed] ...that Sardinia, during the disturbances in Africa, had been treacherously taken by the Romans.'

~ Titus Livius (Livy), The History of Rome [London, 1919]

241-237 B.C.

The 'Truceless War'

During the long period of warfare that became known as the Punic Wars, the smaller conflict fought between Carthage and her erstwhile mercenary allies has often been sidelined. This bitter campaign, whilst limited in its focus, was huge in its impact and brutality. Quite far from being an unimportant distraction, the "Truceless War" had a direct effect on relations between Rome and Carthage and gives some very interesting potential wargaming scenarios. This article hopes to provide details of the war, give background to the armies involved and include some suggestions for using these forces on the tabletop. It is a fascinating war and gives a huge opportunity for some gripping skirmishes and refights.



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In 241 BC, the First Punic War (from 'Punicus', the Latin word for Carthaginian) came to an end. The Carthaginian general, Hamilcar Barca, had been successfully holding the Romans at bay on the island of Sicily since 247 B.C., the same year in which his son, Hannibal, was born. However, after the great Roman naval victory at Aegates Insulae, pressure on Carthage's presence on the island became immense. From his base

at Eryx, Hamilcar saw Carthage's garrisons slowly fall one by one, from Agrigentum and Drepanum to Panormus and Lilybaeum. Eventually, however, as part of the peace treaty, Hamilcar was ordered to return with his 20,000 strong army and leave Sicily to Rome. Hamilcar left the island, whilst command of the troops there passed to the able general Gesco, whose task it was to bring the huge army home.

The Punic Wars:

The withdrawal from Sicily was not an easy process and epitomised the problems at the very heart of Carthage's military regime. Hamilcar's veteran army was comprised of only a small cadre of Carthaginians; the rest were hired from all over the Classical world. Amongst those who fought side-by-side in its ranks were Greeks, Spanish, Italians, Gauls, Numidians and Libyans - and most of them solely for the lure of payment. The reason why Carthage used so many obviously mercenary troops, or blatantly hired tribal groupings, lay in their own serious lack of manpower. With the exception of Libyans, conscripted to serve in Carthage's armies, the number of Carthaginians of an eligible age or fitness for military duties was pitifully small. Yet, for all these manpower difficulties, Carthage was immensely rich. It had become

incredibly wealthy from its overseas trading and mercantile presence in the Mediterranean and could afford to hire entire armies of foreign troops. These men fought loyally in Carthage's name but, importantly, only for as long as the payment and wealth continued. After the loss of Sicily, the seat of political power in Carthage - the Suffete - discovered that the First Punic War (and the reparations demanded by Rome afterwards) had forced them into near bankruptcy. Worse still, the huge army in Sicily had not been paid for several years. They had been genuinely promised by Hamilcar that payment would come when their service was at an end.

Now that Carthage had lost the war, the crisis deepened and the Suffete panicked.

In an attempt to relieve pressure on the problem, Gesco's original plan had been an organised 'demob' and repatriation of all Carthaginian mercenaries in Sicily on a structured basis. Polybius maintains that



Romans Attack!

the threat of mutiny was merely a bargaining tactic used by the army in Sicily - which had no desire to openly rebel or fight Carthage. Indeed, it seems quite clear that, initially, all they wanted was their pay and to go back home. Under Gesco's plan, the phased withdrawal allowed the Suffete to pay each unit as and when it could. However, for some unknown reason, the Suffete changed its policy and recalled the entire veteran Sicilian army back to Carthage. Once there, a number of factional leaders emerged and began to ferment the simmering discontent that would soon erupt into open opposition.



