# Ancient Greek Warfare

The Ancient Greek city-states often fought each other. Sometimes groups of city-states would unite to fight other groups of city-states in large wars. Rarely, the Greek city-states would unite together to fight a common enemy such as the Persians in the Persian Wars.


*A Greek Hoplite*

**Who were the soldiers?**

All the men living in a Greek city-state were expected to fight in the army. In most cases, these weren't full time soldiers, but men who owned land or businesses who were fighting to defend their property.

**What weapons and armour did they have?**

Each Greek warrior had to provide his own armour and weapons. Typically, the wealthier the soldier the better armour and weapons he had. A full set of armour included a shield, a bronze breastplate, a helmet, and greaves that protected the shins. Most soldiers carried a long spear called a doru and a short sword called a xiphos.

A full set of armour and weapons could be very heavy and weigh well over 60 pounds. The shield alone could weigh 30 pounds. The shield was considered the most important part of a soldier's armour. It was considered a disgrace to lose your shield in battle. Legend has it that Spartan mothers told their sons to return home from battle "with their shield or on it." By "on it" they meant dead because dead soldiers were often carried on their shields.

**Hoplites**

The main Greek soldier was the foot soldier called a "hoplite." Hoplites carried large shields and long spears. The name "hoplite" comes from their shield which they called the "hoplon."


*A Greek Phalanx*
Source: United States Government

**Phalanx**

The hoplites fought in a battle formation called the "phalanx." In the phalanx, soldiers would stand side by side overlapping their shields to make a wall of protection. Then they would march forward using their spears to attack their opponents. There were generally several rows of soldiers. The soldiers in the back rows would brace the soldiers in front of them and also keep them moving forward.

**The Army of Sparta**

The most famous and fiercest warriors of Ancient Greece were the Spartans. The Spartans were a warrior society. Every man trained to be a soldier from the time he was a boy. Each soldier went through a rigorous boot camp training. Spartan men were expected to train as soldiers and fight until they were sixty years old.

**Fighting at Sea**

Living along the coast of the Aegean Sea, the Greeks became experts at building ships. One of the main ships used for battle was called the trireme. The trireme had three banks of oars on each side allowing up to 170 rowers to power the ship. This made the trireme very fast in battle.

The main weapon on a Greek ship was a bronze prow at the front of the ship. It was used like a battering ram. Sailors would ram the prow into the side of an enemy ship causing it to sink.

**Interesting Facts About the Soldiers and War of Ancient Greece**

* Greek soldiers sometimes decorated their shields. A common symbol put on the shields of the soldiers of Athens was a little owl which represented the goddess Athena.
* The Greeks also used archers and javelin throwers (called "peltasts").
* When two phalanxes came together in battle, the goal was to break up the enemy's phalanx. The battle became somewhat of a pushing match where the first phalanx to break generally lost the battle.
* Philip II of Macedon introduced a longer spear called the "sarissa." It was up to 20 feet long and weighed around 14 pounds.

Task - Using paper or your workbook, trace or draw a picture of a Greek warrior and colour it in. Then label him, showing the different parts of his armour and weaponry.

Write a short paragraph about Greek warfare, full of interesting information!