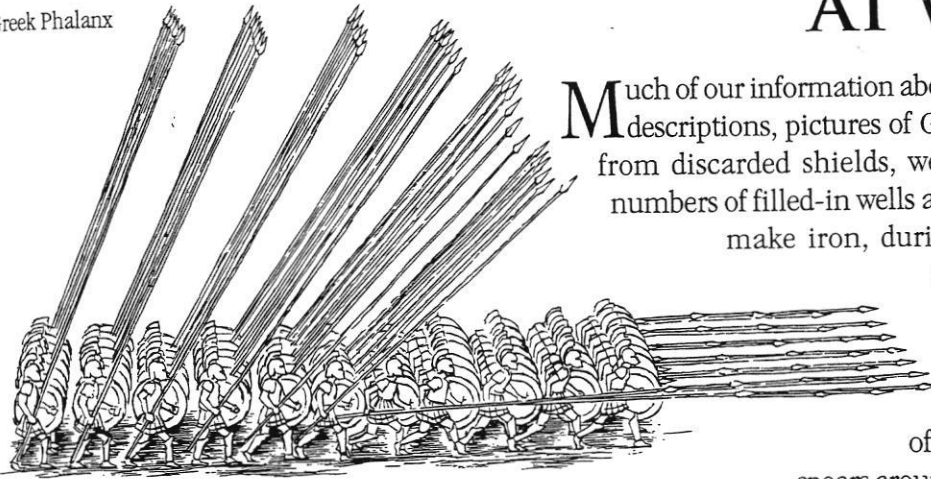


AT WAR



Much of our information about Greek soldiers comes from written descriptions, pictures of Greeks at war on painted pottery and from discarded shields, weapons and armor found in large numbers of filled-in wells at Olympia. Though the Greeks could make iron, during the Peloponnesian wars many shields, weapons and breastplates were still being made of bronze.

The main attacking formation was the phalanx, a square arrangement of foot soldiers (hoplites) armed with spears around 3 to 4 meters in length. The leading

troops would hold their spears horizontally to present a moving front of spear points to the enemy, while the rear rows held their spears up to deflect enemy missiles. This formation was very effective in blocking a road or narrow mountain pass.

Cavalry was sometimes used to protect an army's flanks or pursue fleeing enemy troops, but the mountainous terrain in Greece was not suitable for chariots when the city-states fought each other.



A Corinthian helmet from the city-state of Corinth. Each region had a helmet of a different shape.

When soldiers were needed for battle, ordinary citizens made up the armies, which were led by aristocrats from wealthy families. Poor farmers or craftsmen used slings or bows while men who could afford armor became hoplites. Though the custom changed in later years, battles were usually fought in the summer months, the "fighting season," and during the 2nd Peloponnesian War fighting became more savage, with the whole populations of cities being slain or forced into slavery. Between the ages of 18 and 20, citizens became "ephebes" and could be made to do military service for their city-state. Slaves weren't citizens but often served as additional troops called "skirmishers," who protected the flanks of the phalanx with slings for hurling stones or with bows and arrows.



Red-figured vase painting of a warrior leaving his family to fight.

Activity box

1. Why wasn't cavalry very effective in Greek battles?

2. What were Greek foot soldiers called?

3. People who may have to serve in the army or navy were called _____.
4. What do you think the vase shield decoration is?

5. What thoughts would run through your head if you were facing a phalanx?

