The Historical Miniatures Gaming Society
Pacific Southwest Essay Contest
Honorable Mention

The Greek Hoplite at the Battle of Thermopylae

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Abstract

In 480 BCE the combined armies of Greece, led by Sparta, confronted the Persian Army at the pass of Thermopylae. The pass at Thermopylae was an ideal location that best suited the Greek hoplites, and the pass could have been held for a significant amount of time had the Greeks not been betrayed by Ephilates. The Greek hoplite was the primary soldier figure who was a citizen that fought in the phalanx formation. This analysis with the focus on the Greek hoplite helps place a new perspective for the conduct of ancient warfare.

Keywords: Sparta, Persia, Fifth Century BCE, Thermopylae, Greek, Hoplite, phalanx, ancient warfare, ancient tactics

El hoplita griego en la batalla de las Termópilas

Resumen

En 480 a. C., los ejércitos combinados de Grecia, liderados por Esparta, se enfrentaron al ejército persa en el paso de las Termópilas. El paso de las Termópilas era un lugar ideal que se adaptaba mejor a los hoplitas griegos, y el paso podría haberse mantenido durante una cantidad significativa de tiempo si Efilates no hubiera traicionado a los griegos. El hoplita griego era la figura principal del soldado que era un ciudadano que luchó en la formación de falange. Este análisis, que se centra en el hoplita griego, ayuda a establecer una nueva perspectiva para la conducción de la guerra antigua.

Palabras clave: Esparta, Persia, siglo V a. C., Termópilas, griego, hoplita, falange, guerra antigua, tácticas antiguas

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温泉关战役的希腊装甲步兵

摘要

公元前480年，由斯巴达带领的希腊联军在温泉关抗击波斯军。温泉关是最适合希腊装甲步兵的理想场所，并且如果希腊人没有被厄菲阿尔特背叛的话，温泉关还能坚守住相当一段时间。希腊装甲步兵是参与装甲方阵的主要士兵。本篇文章聚焦于希腊装甲步兵，帮助为古代战争组织方式提供新的分析视角。

关键词：斯巴达，波斯，公元前5世纪，温泉关，希腊，装甲步兵，方阵，古代战争，古代战术

In 480 BCE, the Spartan-led army confronted the Persian army at the pass of Thermopylae. The Athenian general Themistocles decided the defense would be focused there in order to make the best use of numbers and terrain. Additional factors also played into the planning of the defense, such as the naval blockade at Artemisium; however, the intent was to stop the massive Persian army while the Spartan army was delayed. The pass at Thermopylae was an ideal location that best suited the Greek hoplites' fighting style and could have been held for a several days had the Greeks not been betrayed by Ephialtes.

The foundations of the Battle of Thermopylae lay with the structure of the Greek city-states, the composition of the Greek army, and the immediate history preceding the Greco-Persian War. The Greek city-states exerted influence over a region larger than the city itself and were located on the Aegean peninsula. The two principal city-states relating to the Greco-Persian War were Athens and Sparta.[1] These two city-states had been switching from ally to enemy in the decades leading up to the Ionian Revolts and subsequent Persian invasion. Each state was governed and administered differently with different approaches to its respective militaries.

In the past, Spartans had helped the Athenians overthrow their tyrant but they had replaced it with an oligarchy in 510 BCE.[2] That pro-Spartan government was then overthrown in favor of democracy. Sparta saw this as undermining their authority or at the very least their power base and so they attacked Athens. However, Athens was able to repel a large assault on the city and defeat Sparta. This put the two city-states at odds with each other. Sparta on the other hand maintained its diarchy as its government with one king in charge of the administrative side of government and the other the military.

The central figures in the Greek army were the soldiers, the hoplites, and the formation in which they stood, called the phalanx. The hoplite was significantly better equipped than the Persian forces though that could be to the sheer size of the Persian army and the logistics of equipping a force of an estimated 300,000 infantry. The Greek hoplites were both citizen and soldier as they fulfilled two roles in society not unlike the modern-day military reservist.[3] The hoplites would tend to their lands in the winter seasons and return to the battlefield during the campaigning months. As many hoplites returned to work their farms, which were often a reward for military service, many military campaigns often lasted for one season.[4] Hoplites were generally free males who could afford to purchase their own equipment, such as the bronze armor.

Hoplite warfare developed over time up until the Eighth or Seven Century BCE when more discipline was added to the hoplite training regimen.[5] Even then the hoplites had no formal training. Their primary training occurred when being taught the phalanx formation. The phalanx formation was able to take advantage of the individual's strength for the greater purpose of the team. The hoplite was generally well-armed despite having to provide for their own equipment or the fact that there was no standard for the entirety of the Greek army. However, armor would have been passed down from family member to family member if possible due to the expense involved. The armor itself, or panoply, was made of bronze for the hoplite of the middle to upper class. Those who could not afford bronze armor opted for the shield as opposed to body armor. Those who did purchase or own armor typically had a helmet modeled after the Corinthian helmet.

The Greek shield has often been referred to as a hoplon, from which we derive the name hoplite. However, the most common name of the Greek shield was aspis and it generally a large concave shield.[6] The aspis was made of wood but usually had a thin piece of bronze over it to deflect spears and arrows. It was designed to be carried in conjunction with the Greek spear on long marches and was fitted with an inner strap for carrying either by arm or on the shoulder. The key factor about the aspis is the argive grip to the edge of the aspsis. The wearer would place their arm through the strap and hold onto the grip. By doing so, the wearer had greater control of the shield and was significantly less likely to have the shield move out of position when struck by an opponent. The design of the shield allowed the hoplite to strike the middle of his opponent while the shield protected them from strikes. The shield was often decorated with a family crest as it was likely passed from father to son. These decorations gave way to a more standardized form of national symbol such as the iconic Spartan chevron also known as a lambda.

The spear was the primary weapon of the Greek hoplite and had a varying length but was generally either eight feet long or fifteen feet long.[7] With an approximate thickness of one inch, the

spear had a spearhead on one end and a sauroter on the other. The sauroter was used to provide balance and could be used offensively if necessary. The most likely form of attack was to hold the spear with an overhead grip and strike towards the center mass of their opponent. An underhand grip could have also been used, but was more likely to be deflected by the opponent's shield or weapon. A major advantage provided by the Greek spear was that its length far exceeded that of the Persian spear. This allowed the Greeks to strike the Persians without immediate fear of reprisal strikes. The increased spear lengths also allowed for the rear ranks to provide some protection from missile or arrow attacks by holding their spears over their forward ranks.

The last weapon common among the Greek hoplite was a short sword referred to as a xiphos.[8] It was similar to but predated the more recognizable Roman Gladius. The sword was typically around two feet long, but the Spartan swords are reported to be one third smaller. The advantage of this sword was realized when two infantrymen were shield to shield or within the range of the spear. The short sword allowed for the hoplite to attack his opponent between shields in the throat or legs where a longer sword would have been useless.

While the average Greek citizen-soldier was often untrained the male Spartan citizens underwent the Agoge which was a rigorous training program. The Agoge only applied to male citizens and not free non-citizens, females, or slaves. At age seven, the males would enter the Agoge which would then last until age 30.[9] The men of the Agoge would live together in communal groups and violence was often used to illustrate a point or as an educational tool. The second half of the Agoge involved partnering up with an older Spartan warrior that he may pass on his knowledge to the next generation. Any Spartan male who failed the Agoge was denied Spartan citizenship. Once the Agoge was completed the Spartan citizen was expected to pay for their membership into their social class. Those who could not afford to begin or sustain their membership were denied citizenship.[10] The significance behind the Agoge is that the Spartan warriors, not warriors from Sparta such as perioikoi or helots, were well trained compared to their allies and their enemies. The Agoge also created a distinction from the citizen-soldiers of Athens and the Spartans who fought at Thermopylae. This distinction is one of the reasons why many believe that only 300 Spartans were holding the pass as there were only 300 fully trained and initiated Spartans present.

The training and equipment of the Greek soldiers created an individual warrior, but the organization of the phalanx provided the military machine with which Greece won it wars. The phalanx formation was rectangular comprised of heavy infantry and designed to have each member work together. The formation consisted of hoplites in rank and file similar to the modern-day squad and rank system. In this position the hoplites would have

been able to lock their shields together in order to provide maximum protection. The first few ranks of hoplites would extend their shields toward the enemy while the back ranks were able to use their spears as a makeshift overhead shield for those initial ranks. The unified front presented by the phalanx would have seemed nearly impenetrable to their opponents and it discouraged the notion of a frontal assault. The formation itself would have been easy to teach as citizen-soldiers were required to learn it quickly so as to be effective on the battlefield.

The phalanx consisted of a formation of an eight-man deep formation when shields were locked together at a distance of about two feet.[11] This was the standard, but exceptions were made when necessary such as recorded at the Battle of Marathon. The phalanx did not march in this formation and as such opened up to a distance of about six feet between files. The nature of the phalanx allowed for the rotation of personnel from the front ranks to the back to cycle in new troops thus preventing exhaustion from overcoming the formation. The middle ranks would have been able to strike the front line of the enemy due to the length of the Greek spear. In these ways the entirety of the Greek phalanx could engage the enemy as opposed to just the front rank. However, the phalanx only worked at 100 percent effectiveness on flat terrain. The phalanx formation was less effective on rough or rocky terrain as the hoplites would not have been able to move as one unit together or lock shields.

Another weakness of the Greek phalanx was its inability to quickly counter threats to its sides or rear. The arrangement of the spears and shields within the phalanx present a united front but did not protect the sides or rear as everything was facing forward. The length of the spear would have made it difficult, even with sufficient training, to turn and protect a different angle. Even doing this would have weakened the front of the line. This is why the Greek phalanx was vulnerable to quick moving cavalry units and why the Greeks were unable to hold their position in Thermopylae once the Persians had been informed of how to approach their position from the rear.

The Persian army was not as so well armed and armored as the Greek hoplites. The Persians typically wore light armor that was made of quilted linen and their shields were made of wicker.[12] The Persian armaments were also shorter than those of their Greek counterparts. In a one versus one matchup between the Greek and Persian soldiers, the Greek soldier would typically win due to their superior equipment. Persia did have many other military strengths over the Greeks. Persians were excellent cavalry riders that would throw projectiles or missiles and then withdraw quickly. These troops and their technique were unmatched at the time but only on an open field. The mountains surrounding the hot gates prevented the use of Persian cavalry by design. Therefore, the Persians relied on superior numbers and archery in an attempt to gain a tactical advantage.

Fifth Century Greek Hoplite BCE. Artifact in Brussels, Koninklijke musea voor kunst en geschiedenis, photo by Jona Lendering. https://www.livius.org/pictures/a/greek-art/hoplite/

Leonidas at the Battle of Thermopylae engraving created at bequest of Elinor Merrell in 1815. https://www.si.edu/object/leonidas-thermopylae:chndm_1995-50-363

Hoplite fight from Athens Archaeological Museum. Photo by Grant Mitchell. https://www.flickr.com/photos/anachronism_uk/84783957/in/set-1811994/

The Greek and Persian forces had been set on a path of confrontation since the beginning of the Fifth Century BCE when the Athenians and Eretrians supported the Ionian Rebellion against Persian rule.[13] This would have been a minor inconvenience for the Persia Empire as part of the Persian Empire's ever expanding territorial boundaries and resulting conquests. Due to the Athenian support of the Ionians, however, Darius I decided to march his army past the Hellespont and towards the Greek city-states. His generals' initial campaigns were failures and demonstrated to the Greeks that the Persians were not invincible. After the Battle of Marathon, the Persian army returned home and Darius began to build a larger army in order to return to Greece. However, the Egyptians revolted which forced the Persians to turn their attention elsewhere. Darius died prior to marching on Egypt and the task fell to his son, Xerxes I, who suppressed the rebellion.

Xerxes was then able to turn his attention back towards the Greek city-states. He sent emissaries to request samples of food, land, and water in order to demonstrate their submission to Persian rule. Xerxes reportedly did not send ambassadors to Athens or to avoid tipping off his intentions. As such, many of the smaller city-states who opposed Persian rule flocked to Athens and Sparta. These two city-states put aside their differences in support of alliance with the coalition of other city-states who opposed the Persians. Their alliance united the region and their forces were referred to as the Greeks despite some

Greek regions aligning themselves with Persia. This set the stage for the beginning of the Persian invasion after winter ended in 480 BCE.

The Greeks had been preparing for an eventual second Persian invasion and built a fleet of triremes at the advice of Themistocles. However, the Greek city-states did not have a free-standing army that could be called upon at a moment's notice. An army would require the individual city-states of Greece to contribute the troops and said troops were often citizen-soldiers as opposed to professional military. Themistocles, an Athenian politician and general, would lead the strategic planning of the defense of the Aegean. Delegations were sent to discuss the war plans and the Thessalians suggested that the defense should focus on the Vale of Tempe. An initial force was sent to secure the Vale, but the Vale had a fatal flaw. Alexander I of Macedonia, informed the troops that there was a pass that would have completely routed the defenders. Upon hearing this news, the Greek hoplites withdrew shortly before they received the news that the Persians were able to cross the Hellespont.

The Persian army was able to make its way across the Hellespont by building two pontoon bridges at Abydos. In this manner Xerxes was able to have his army and navy travel together. It is said that Xerxes had the waters whipped out of rage because they were not cooperating with his plans. The fact that the Persian army and navy traveled together created a unique challenge for the Greeks and it was further complicated by Xerxes' decision to time his arrival in Greece with the Olympic Games. The Spartans considered it to be sacrilegious to make war during the Olympics as well as during the Carneia Festival which is also why they were delayed at the Battle of Marathon.[14] Themistocles had to devise a plan that would stop both the Persian army and the navy at relatively the same location without the aid of the main Spartan army. Themistocles then decided that it was best to stop the Persian's southern advance by stopping them at the "Hot Gates" of Thermopylae.

The decision to block the Persians at Thermopylae came with secondary consideration such as simultaneously blocking the Persian navy at Artemisium. Themistocles knew that the Greek hoplite in the phalanx formation could hold the pass and remove the Persian advantage of significant numbers. However, the Spartan issue could not be avoided despite them being the military leaders of the alliance. Instead of the entire army marching on Persia, the Spartans sent one of their kings, Leonidas I, with his personal bodyguard of 300 Spartans as an advance guard.

The number of troops on either side of the battle has been greatly exaggerated history and the correct number may never be known. However, Herodotus gives an accounting of the troops on the Greek side that can be broken down into various categories.[15] The first myth to be dispelled is that only 300 Spartans held the pass at Thermopylae. This number is only a reflection of the Spartan hoplites that accompa-

nied Leonidas and not the full Spartan contingent. In addition, there were approximately 900 free but non-citizen Lacedaemonians who accompanied an additional approximate 2,000 troops from across the Peloponnesian peninsula. The Thespians reportedly sent a contingent of 700 while the Thebans and Phocians dispatched 400 and 1,000 men respectively. Herodotus also reported that the Locrians sent all the men they had available along with seven ships to contribute to the naval fleet.

The size of the Persian army has been a subject of debate by historians for centuries which usually list it as one million infantry. The size of the Persian army may also never fully be known, but some general assumptions can be made about its size. Herodotus asserts that there as many as 2.6 million troops on the Persian side, but that number far exceeds troop sizes of other reported battles before and after the Greco-Persian War.[16] It is also possible that Xerxes left a garrison at each of the major cities he conquered along the way. It is fair to assume that the number of Persian troops far exceeded the number of troops at Thermopylae and the number was still greater than the Greek alliance had available. It would also be a fair assumption that, without the pass limiting the Persian numerical advantage, the Greeks would have been unable to defeat the Persians on an open battlefield. Themistocles was able to mitigate the Persian superior numbers by the use of terrain in opposition against the Greek phalanx.

The terrain was advantageous to the Greeks as the surrounding mountains prevented the use of the powerful Persian cavalry. However, there was also one pass outside of Thermopylae that would allow the Persians to rout the Greeks. This pass was mountainous and therefore not compatible with mounted infantry. It was, however, ideally suited to the lightly armored Persian infantry who had experience in mountain warfare. The Persians arrived outside of Thermopylae and sent an emissary to seek the surrender of the Greek troops. The Spartan-led army declined the offer of surrender and, five days after arriving, the Persians attacked the Greek position. The first form attack came in the form of an archery barrage. The barrage was ineffective due to the phalanx's formation ability to counter incoming projectiles with the interlocking shield formation and overhead shield of spears. Those arrows that did get through would then have had to penetrate the Greek armor and was likely deflected. Xerxes then dispatched his first wave of troops of approximately 10,000 Medes but that too was defeated. The Persians then began to launch successive assaults in waves of approximately 10,000 infantrymen on the Greek formations. However, the length of the Greek spear would have overpowered the Persians who were unable to approach the front of the Greek line with significantly smaller swords and spears.

The Greeks were able to use the terrain and adjacent Phocian wall to use as few troops as possible as well as limited the front rank of the enemy formation. The nature of the phalanx formation allowed the Greeks to rotated front-line personnel onto and off of the

battlefield thereby preventing exhausting the formation. By lining the pass shoulder-to-shoulder, the Greeks also eliminated the threat of being routed by cavalry troops along their flanks. It is known that the Greeks were able to rotate troops out of battle while holding this front line which also means that the Greek alliance had more troops than were necessary to hold the front line. Some reports state that the initial skirmishes results in total defeat of the Persians at the cost of two or three Spartan fatalities.

Xerxes believed that the day's fighting had worn on the Greek defenders and so ordered the infamous Persian Immortal unit to attack the Greek position. This unit fared no better than the previous Persian troops. This can be attested to the fact that the Greeks were able to rotate into and out of battle. Herodotus estimated that at least 20,000 Persians were killed but the casualty rate may have been significantly higher given the effectiveness of the Greek phalanx. The second day of battle saw similar actions as the first day. Xerxes continued his assault on the Greek position by launching waves of Persian light infantry. It is reported that Xerxes believed the toll of the first day's attacks would have worn out the Greeks. However, the alliance stood firm as a result of the training and defensive position they held. It is also possible that the Greeks knew that they were defending more than a pass. The Persians had come to conquer the Greek peninsula and the Greek alliance had resisted them. The likelihood of the Persians granting mercy to their families was remote and the major cities near Thermopylae had already been evacuated in advance of the Persian army.

Toward the end of the second day, Xerxes withdrew his troops and began to contemplate on how to proceed. It was at this moment that a local resident named Ephialtes arrived with information regarding the pass around the Greek defensive position. Ephialtes offered to guide the Persians through this pass in exchange for monetary gain. Xerxes dispatched one of his commanders to investigate the path with a force of approximately 20,000 troops which may have contained elements from the Immortals.

It was at dawn that the Phocians, who were guarding the pass, discovered the approaching Persians. The Phocians retreated to a nearby hill under the assumption that the Persians had come for them specifically. The Persians were only interested in routing the Spartans and continued towards the rear of the Greek formation. A runner had been dispatched to war the Greeks of their impending encirclement and Leonidas subsequently called for a council of war. Leonidas decided to stay and continue to defend the pass with as many troops that were willing to stay. This included the remaining Spartan soldiers as well as up to two thousand allied troops. There is some debate as to the motivations of Leonidas' decision to remain behind.[17] Some believed the decision was the result of upholding Spartan law to never retreat or surrender. However, it is equally as possible that this belief stemmed from Leonidas' decision to

remain. Spartan forces would also go on to surrender during the Peloponnesian Wars thereby undermining the belief that Spartans never surrendered. It is more likely that the decision to remain was a tactical one that provided time for fleeing troops to successfully retreat as a mass exodus would have negated the phalanx's ability to prevent cavalry attacks.

The remaining force of Spartan led troops advanced to meet the Persians in an attempt to decimate the Persian formations.[18] The Spartans and its remaining allies would have been unable to hold their former position facing two fronts as the phalanx is strongest when facing only one direction. It is also unlikely that they had enough remaining personnel to defend on two fronts. It is reported that the Spartans and Thespians fought until every spear was shattered. Leonidas died in the assault and, once his body was recovered, the remaining troops retreated to a nearby hill for their last stand. Xerxes then ordered arrow barrages until the remaining defenders were dead although a large contingent of Thebans did surrender prior to the last stand. As a result of the failure to hold the pass at Thermopylae the naval blockade at Artemisium was no longer necessary and the Greek navy withdrew. Xerxes went on to sack several Greek cities until his navy was decimated at the Battle of Salamis. Xerxes feared being trapped in Greece and retreated with the bulk of his army back to the Hellespont. His general was subsequently defeated at the Battle of Plataea in 479 BCE.[19]

These were the events recorded by the various historians of the time and thereafter. There are some additional hypothetical questions that will help illustrate the nature of the Greek hoplite as well as the phalanx formation. All of these hypothetical situations will take into account the first two days of fighting before the betrayal of Ephialtes. These scenarios will also follow that the naval blockade at Artemisium held against the Persian navy since the blockade was only canceled due to a lack of necessity. Lastly, the scenarios will assume that Ephialtes or anyone else betrayed the pass to the Persians.

With the absence of Ephialtes betrayal, the first question is whether or not Xerxes would have continued his attack? It is highly likely that he would have continued to press on the Greek position for many days as it would have overextended his logistics to try to go around the pass at Thermopylae. A full retreat would have been unlikely at this point as well as Xerxes had already expended many resources in arriving at Thermopylae. It is likely he would have continued to press the attack. It is also likely that his scouts would have eventually found the pass around the Greek line but, for the sake of this scenario, not for several days. Herodotus places the total Persian dead at 20,000, but that somewhat counters his claim that the Persian waves were decimated upon Spartan shields. It is likely that 20,000 died on the first day and that wounded were not counted among those numbers. The initial Spartan casualties were listed as two or three, but this could have been a form of propaganda. It is

likely that the Spartan casualties were indeed very low but other non-Spartan casualties were also incurred.

The third day of battle would have continued the same as the first two, as the Spartan lines of supply were still open. The advantages of the phalanx would have remained intact as the terrain prevented the use of cavalry flanking maneuvers. The phalanx would have also allowed for the rotation of troops to prevent front line exhaustion or the collapse of the front line. The reports of the spears shattering on the final day of the charge would have likely been the result of extensive use in open terrain. The Spartan defenders would have been able to replace spears within the phalanx as long as the supply lines were open. It is also reported that the varying lengths of the hoplite's spear can be attested to the hoplites ability to create a spear in the field. It is therefore likely equipment shortages would not be a problem for either side as the Persian rear would have access to the same types of materials.

The constant fighting with minimal gains resulted in the degradation of Persian morale. Many Persian infantrymen would have remained on the battlefield out of fear of execution by their commanders. Many of the Persian-allied Greeks would have also remained as surrendering to the Greek neighbors would have likely resulted in execution as well. Conversely, the Greek forces would have been encouraged by their continued success and were motivated to protect their homes as free men. The Greek forces were unlikely to attempt retreat for several days. However, the toll would have eventually taken effect on the Greek forces as the casualty rate would have become exponential as fewer troops would be available to rotate into battle.

The Persians would have had a sufficient reserve of personnel to continue the battle for a prolonged period of time. Herodotus estimated the strength of the Persians to over two million and the casualties inflicted by the Greeks were minimal compared to this number. Additionally, the Persians were able to sack several city-states after the fall of Thermopylae so they would have had the numbers to continue their assault. Reinforcements from Sparta were unlikely as the Spartan army would have been delayed until the end of the month.

The Persian numbers were irrelevant as they could only send so many troops into battle due to the narrow pass. However, after a total of five or six days, the Spartan line would have been unmanageable due to continuous combat and ever-increasing casualties. The hoplite and phalanx itself would be able to resist indefinitely in this situation but the sheer volume of enemy troops would have resulted in rout regardless of Ephialtes betrayal.

Additional scenarios result in similar results. The coordinated withdrawal of all Greeks would have left the Greeks exposed to Persian cavalry while retreating. These troops would have then been eliminated from being able to assist with the Battle of Plataea. A full defeat of all Greek defenders would have handed Xerxes a psychological

victory and rallied the Persian troops. The Greek troops could not have held the line after Ephialtes betrayal as the phalanx does not support fighting on two fronts. If the Spartans had enough troops for an additional line, it would still have been unlikely for them to hold any longer as they would have been cut off from their supplies. This would have resulted in spears not being able to be replenished once they broke. Any failure of the fleet at Artemisium would have resulted in the immediate withdraw of Greek forces, which would have been decimated upon retreat. Only the reinforcement with troops of the Greek line at Thermopylae would have prevented the Persians from advancing on the Greek Peninsula.

The various aspects of the pass at Thermopylae were the most ideal situation for the Greek soldiers to make their stand. The terrain and their formation were their greatest advantage. The narrow pass prevented the Persians from using their significant numerical advantage against the Greek defenders. The relatively flat terrain between the mountainside and water was stable enough for the Greeks to maintain their shields locked together. The phalanx formation managed to keep a unified front against the Persians and the interlocked shields, as well as the rear file's spears, protected the Greeks from missile attack. The narrowness of the pass protected the Greek flank and rear from cavalry attack thus eliminating another of Xerxes advantages. The corresponding naval blockade at Artemisium made for no better location for Leonidas to make his final stand.

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