

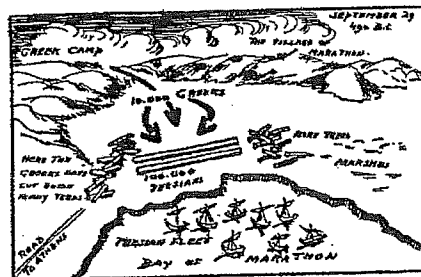
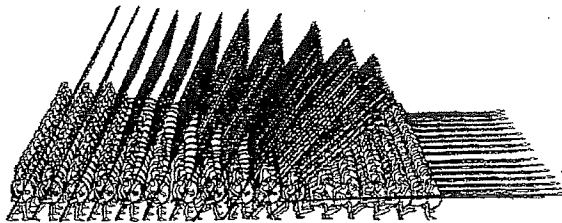
# THE PERSIAN WARS

## The Battle of Marathon

As the Greeks spread throughout the Mediterranean, they eventually came into contact with the Persian Empire to the East. Several Greek cities in Asia Minor had fallen subject to Persian rule. From 499-493 B.C., with the help of the Athenian navy, these Greek cities revolted against Persian rule. The revolt was unsuccessful, but it still left the Persian ruler Darius hungry for revenge.

In 490 B.C. the Persians landed on the plain of Marathon, only 26 miles from Athens. Responding to the impending crisis, Athens raised an army of around 10,000 Greeks from nearby city-states. Encamping on the edge of the Plain of Marathon, the Greeks faced a Persian force numbering between 20-60,000. There, an outnumbered Athenian army attacked and defeated the Persian army with expert use of the hoplite phalanx. Casualties for the Battle of Marathon are generally listed as 203 Greek dead and 6,400 for the Persians. The Persians left and did not return for the next 10 years because of internal difficulties in the Persian Empire.

According to legend, news of Persia's defeat was brought by an Athenian runner named Pheidippides, who had raced 26 miles from Marathon to Athens to bring news of the victory. With his last breathe, he announced "Nike!" (which means victory) before dying of exhaustion. Today's marathon is based on this heroic story.



## Battle of Thermopylae

After Darius died in 486 B.C., Xerxes became the new Persian king. Xerxes vowed revenge and planned to invade Greece. In 480 B.C., the new Persian king sent a much larger expedition under his personal command into Greece. In preparation for the attack, the Athenians began rebuilding their navy. By the time the Persians invaded, the Athenians had a fleet of about 200 vessels called triremes.

Xerxes led a massive invasion force into Greece, with estimates ranging between 200,000 to over 2 million men. This included thousands of warships and supply vessels. The Athenians sent word to the Spartans for help, but the Spartans were in the middle of a religious festival that they refused to interrupt for fear of angering the gods. The Spartans did manage to round up 300 men and send them along with one of their kings, Leonidas, to help the Greek army. It was in the narrow mountain pass called Thermopylae that the two armies met. There, 300 Spartans and 7000 other Greeks stopped the Persian advance for three days. On the third day of battle a Greek traitor named Ephialtes informed the Persians of a secret path around the pass. Realizing that they would not be able to hold off the Persians after they had discovered the secret path, Leonidas sent the remaining 4,700 Greeks away along with 1 Spartan who was dismissed to tell the main Spartan army about the battle. Only 300 Spartans and a handful of other Greeks stayed to hold off