In the ancient Greek world, warfare was seen as a necessary evil of the human condition. Whether it be small frontier skirmishes between neighboring city-states, lengthy city-sieges, civil wars or large-scale battles between multi-alliance blocks on land and sea, the vast rewards of war were thought to outweigh the costs in material and lives. While there were lengthy periods of peace, the desire for new territory, war booty or revenge meant the Greeks were regularly engaged in warfare both at home and abroad.

**Toward professional warfare**

The Greeks did not always have professional soldiers. Warfare started out as the business of private individuals. Armed bands led by warrior leaders, city militias of part-time soldiers provided their own equipment and may have included all the citizens of the city-state. Eventually, the conduct of warfare started to move away from private individuals and into the realm of the state.
In the early stages of Greek warfare in the Archaic period, training was haphazard. There were no uniforms or insignia and as soon as the conflict was over the soldiers would return to their farms. By the fifth century B.C, the military might of Sparta provided a model for all other states to follow. With their well-trained full-time army, the Spartans showed what professionalism in warfare could achieve. Many city-states such as Athens, Argos, Thebes and Syracuse began to maintain a small professional force, which could be helped by the main citizen body if necessary.

Armies started to include people of different backgrounds, such as resident foreigners, slaves, mercenaries and even people from neighboring city-states. Warfare itself soon moved away from one-off battles fought in a few hours to long drawn-out conflicts that could last for years. War became more professional, more innovative and more deadly.

The most important wars in ancient Greece were the Persian Wars, which lasted throughout the first half of the fifth century B.C, the Peloponnesian Wars, fought from 459-446 B.C. and 431-404 B.C., and the Corinthian Wars, from 394-386 B.C.

**Armies, soldiers and weapons**

The core of any Greek army was the hoplite. He carried a long spear, a short sword and a circular bronze shield, and was further protected by a bronze helmet, bronze breastplate, greaves for the legs and, finally, ankle guards. Fighting was at close-quarters, bloody and very deadly.

The peltast warrior, armed with short javelins and more lightly armored than the hoplite, became a mobile and dangerous threat to the slower-moving hoplites. Other lighter-armed troops also came to challenge the hoplite dominance of the battlefield. Over time, hoplites began to wear lighter leather armor, in order to achieve greater mobility in battle.

Javelin throwers, archers, and slingers using stones and lead bullets could harass the enemy with attacks and retreats. Cavalry, forces of soldiers on horseback, was also deployed, but it was limited due to the difficult terrain of Greece. Athens had the largest cavalry force during the Peloponnesian Wars, with about 1,000 mounted troops.

Over time, armies became more structured. They were spilt into separate units with a clear chain of command. The lochoi was the basic unit of the phalanx — a line of well-armed and well-armored hoplite soldiers usually eight to 12 men deep — which attacked as a tight group. In Athens, the lochos was led by a captain, and groups of lochoi combined to form one of ten regiments, or taxeis. A similar organization applied to the armies of Corinth, Argos and Megara.

In fifth-century Sparta, the basic element was the enomotiai, or platoon of 32 men. Four of these made up a pentekostys, or a company of 128 men. Four of these made up a lochos, or a regiment of 512 men. A Spartan army usually consisted of five lochoi with separate units of non-citizen militia called perioikoi. Units might also be divided by age or speciality in weaponry. As warfare became more strategic, these units would operate more independently, responding to trumpet calls or other such signals mid-battle.
Naval warfare

Some states such as Athens, Aegina, Corinth and Rhodes amassed fleets of warships, most commonly the trireme. The warships allowed these city-states to forge lucrative trading partnerships and deposit troops on foreign territory, establishing and protecting new colonies. The biggest fleet was at Athens, which could amass up to 200 triremes at its peak.

The trireme was a light wooden ship fitted with a bronze battering ram at the bow that could disable enemy vessels. Over 120 feet long, the trireme was propelled by some 170 rowers, who could propel the ship up to a speed of 9 knots, a little over 10 miles per hour. A small number of hoplites and archers were also onboard, but the principal tactic in naval warfare was ramming, not boarding. Able commanders arranged their fleets in a long front to make it impossible for enemy ships to break through.

However, the trireme had disadvantages in that there was no room for sleeping quarters. This meant that the ships had to be docked near land each night. They also had to be docked using a special kind of platform known as a dry dock to keep the boat out of the water to prevent the wood from getting damaged.

Moreover, the trireme was incredibly expensive to produce and maintain. It shows how warfare had become an expensive concern of the state, even if rich private citizens were made to fund most of the expense.

Strategies

The first strategy was actually employed before any fighting took place at all. Religion and ritual were important features of Greek life, and before embarking on an attack, the will of the gods had to be determined. This was done through the consultation of oracles such as that of Apollo at Delphi and through animal sacrifices where a professional diviner read omens. Any unfavorable signs could certainly delay the battle. Also, at least for some city-states like Sparta, fighting could be prohibited on certain occasions such as religious festivals and for all states during the great Panhellenic games.

When all of these rituals were out of the way, fighting could commence, but even then it was routine to patiently wait for the enemy to assemble on a suitable plain nearby. Songs were sung to the gods and both sides would advance to meet each other.

The most successful strategy on the ancient battlefield was using hoplites in a tight formation called the phalanx. Each man protected both himself and partially his neighbor with his large circular shield, carried on his left arm. Moving in unison the phalanx could push and attack the enemy while minimizing each man's exposure. Usually eight to 12 men deep and providing the maximum front possible to minimize the risk of being outflanked, the phalanx became a regular feature of the better-trained armies, particularly the Spartans.

Early battles featured heavily armored hoplites neatly arranged in two files and slashing away at each other in a fixed battle. Over time, more mobile and multi-weapon warfare became the norm.
Cavalry and soldiers who could throw missiles might not win battles outright, but they could dramatically affect the outcome of a battle, and without them, the hoplites could become hopelessly exposed.

**Sieges**

From an early stage, most Greek city-states had a fortified acropolis, which is an elevated area at the center of the city. The acropolis was meant to protect the most important religious and civic buildings and provide refuge from attack. As warfare became more mobile and moved away from the traditional hoplite battle, cities sought to protect themselves with fortification walls. Lookout towers, forts and walls sprang up in response to the increased risk of attacks.

Sieges were the principal tactic used against such fortified cities. They were usually long drawn-out affairs with the principal strategy being to starve the enemy into submission. Offensive strategies using battering rams and ramps at first proved largely unsuccessful. However, from the fourth century B.C., technical innovations gave the attackers more advantages. Wheeled siege towers, bolt-throwing artillery, stone-throwing apparatuses and even flame-throwers came into use. Naturally, defenders responded to these new weapons with thicker and stronger walls.

**Logistics**

The short duration of conflicts in the Greek world was often because of the poor logistics for supplying and maintaining the army in the field. Soldiers were usually expected to provide their own food, and the standard for Athens was three-days' worth. Most hoplites would have been accompanied by a slave acting as a baggage porter carrying the rations in a basket along with bedding and a cooking pot. Slaves also acted as attendants to the wounded as only the Spartan army had a dedicated medical officer.

**The aftermath of victory**

War booty, although not always the primary motive for conflict, was certainly a much-needed benefit for the victor, which allowed him to pay his troops and justify the expense of the military campaign. Booty could come in the form of territory, money, precious materials, weapons and armor. The losers, if they lived, could expect to be sold into slavery, the normal fate of the women and children of the losing side. It was typical for 10 percent of the booty (a dekaten) to be dedicated in thanks to the gods at one of the great religious sanctuaries such as Delphi or Olympia.

Important ceremonies had to be performed following a victory, including the recovery of the dead and the setting up of a victory trophy. The trophy could consist of a mound of captured weapons and armor, or it could be an image of the god Zeus. On occasion, memorials to the fallen were also set up. Speeches, festivals, sacrifices and even games could also be held following a victory in the field.

**Conclusion**

Overall, war in ancient Greece became more professional, more innovative and more deadly over time. It reached a peak with the Macedonian leaders Philip and Alexander. Learning from the earlier Greek strategies and weapons innovations, they employed better hand weapons, used better artillery, successfully organized different troop units with specialized arms and fully
exploited cavalry. They backed all this up with far superior logistics to dominate the battlefield not only in Greece but across vast portions of Asia and set the pattern for warfare through Hellenistic and into Roman times.
1 Read the following paragraph from the section "Strategies."

*Early battles featured heavily armored hoplites neatly arranged in two files and slashing away at each other in a fixed battle. Over time, more mobile and multi-weapon warfare became the norm. Cavalry and soldiers who could throw missiles might not win battles outright, but they could dramatically affect the outcome of a battle, and without them, the hoplites could become hopelessly exposed.*

Which idea is BEST supported by the paragraph above?
(A) Cavalry and archers cannot defeat hoplites in battle.
(B) The strongest ancient Greek armies used cavalry to defeat their enemies' phalanxes.
(C) As war became more professional, the best forces used various types of soldiers.
(D) Cavalry and archers can usually defeat slower hoplites in battle.

2 Read the following statement.

*Warfare in ancient Greece relied heavily on religious ceremonies and offerings.*

Which sentence from the article BEST supports the statement above?
(A) When all of these rituals were out of the way, fighting could commence, but even then it was routine to patiently wait for the enemy to assemble on a suitable plain nearby.
(B) The acropolis was meant to protect the most important religious and civic buildings and provide refuge from attack.
(C) It was typical for 10 percent of the booty (a dekaten) to be dedicated in thanks to the gods at one of the great religious sanctuaries such as Delphi or Olympia.
(D) Speeches, festivals, sacrifices and even games could also be held following a victory in the field.

3 Read the following sentence.

*Whether it be small frontier skirmishes between neighboring city-states, lengthy city-sieges, civil wars or large-scale battles between multi-alliance blocks on land and sea, the vast rewards of war were thought to outweigh the costs in material and lives.*

Which words or phrases from the article help explain what "skirmishes" means?
(A) city-sieges; battles
(B) large-scale; costs
(C) frontier; multi-alliance
(D) lengthy; civil wars
When all of these rituals were out of the way, fighting could commence, but even then it was routine to patiently wait for the enemy to assemble on a suitable plain nearby.

Which sentence uses "plain" in the SAME way as the sentence above?

(A) To everyone at the party, it was plain to see that she had forgotten a gift.
(B) The soldier's spear had little decoration and was very plain.
(C) Despite being considered plain, Cinderella married Prince Charming.
(D) The hunters tracked the animals across the plain.