

INTERCHANGE

by Mark Hallenbeck and John M. Young

Mr. Hallenbeck recently sent us an extensive letter dealing with the SSG Phalanx in which he raised a number of significant points. We prevailed upon John Young, who designed Phalanx to work up a few answers. What follows is the result. Mr. Hallenbeck's material is presented virtually unchanged, except for the deletion of footnotes.

MARK HALLENBECK: I am a graduate student in ancient history at the University of Massachusetts. Last winter I subscribed to your magazine and purchased your game *Phalanx*: describing tactical warfare from Marathon to Pydna. At that time I found the game clever, accurate and enjoyable. I happened to be doing research on Alexander the Great then and this led me to make some "improvements" on the game. This summer, with more free time on my hands, I have had a chance to look into the whole matter of ancient Greek warfare more closely. What follows is a result of that look. Before beginning I should say that I find it unfortunate you do not see fit to include any kind of bibliographical information with your game. I don't like to chide you, gentlemen, but your publication advertises as an historical magazine. For the last two centuries the common practice in the historical profession has been to include footnotes and bibliographies in almost all published material. These formalities insure that each succeeding generation of scholars will not have to painfully retrace the steps of its predecessors in research and reasoning. As I can find no clear pattern to my objections to your interpretation I hope you will forgive the piecemeal fashion in which they are presented.

JOHN YOUNG: Mr. Hallenbeck is quite correct in indicating that professional historical writing makes extensive use of footnotes and bibliographies. However, it should be remembered that *S&T* is primarily a magazine of popular history rather than a professional journal. Extensive footnoting would make the articles considerably longer and would require far more work from our overworked art department. Yet the return for this investment in space and time would be insignificant. After all, how many non-professionals are going to go out and check sources? (Come to think of it, how many professionals actually pursue footnotes?) Similarly, our bibliographies are actually recommended reading lists, places where people with more than passing interest in the subject, or a portion of the subject can go to look for more information. This, at least, is how we have usually attempted to construct our bibliographies.

HALLENBECK: The difference between light and heavy infantry is one recognized by both ancient and modern students of warfare. As a student of Greek history I find it inconceivable that you have neglected this distinction. No Greek would ever include oriental levies or peltasts in the same class as hoplites and Macedonian phalangites. Both of the first mentioned types of troops lacked the heavy defensive armor, closely packed formation and discipline, with some notable exceptions, considered appropriate to heavy infantry. This was important when they fought cavalry. There is no recorded instance of cavalry ever

successfully breaking a continuous line of heavy infantry in the ancient world. Yet any fairly good cavalry troop of sufficient number could expect to overrun either oriental levies (who became demoralized at the very sight of a cavalry charge) or peltasts with regularity.

YOUNG: What Mr. Hallenbeck says is quite true. There was a large qualitative difference between light and heavy infantry in this period. However this does not dispute the basic functional weapon system used by both types — the spear. The major reason that most oriental infantry levies were armed with spears was that it was the cheapest, quickest, most effective way of arming "civilians" to face cavalry. Even with the worst infantry it would be effective against all but the best cavalry. The very wide use of cavalry in the Mid-East made it necessary to arm them with spears. In most battles of the period, cavalry could barely penetrate a line of even levy infantry; it usually needed infantry support to make it stick, e.g., Arbela and Issus.

HALLENBECK: This leads directly to my next point: your description of the peltast. You state that peltasts were "trained to throw light spears, and then revert to hoplites...". You go on to say that these peltasts "combined with superior cavalry, were able to defeat the Spartans time and again, notably at Corinth and Leuctra." These statements run directly contrary to our best contemporary authority on military tactics at the time of Corinth and Leuctra — J.K. Anderson. Peltasts, like hoplites were named after their shields. They threw javelins and were native to Thessaly, where they had operated very effectively with cavalry as far back as any Greek could remember. Two Athenians, Demosthenes and later Iphicrates, took these ill-organized troops and turned them into efficient, well-trained mercenaries. When in Egypt, Iphicrates apparently introduced certain changes in traditional peltast armament. This included rounder shields, better suited for line fighting, and spears similar to those used by hoplites. These encumbrances robbed the peltast of his mobility, however, and failed to catch on in mainland Greece. After the death of Alexander the Great, Iphicratean changes were adopted by the Successors, probably due to a chronic shortage of good Macedonian heavy infantry. The battle of Corinth seems to have been won not just by peltasts and cavalry but with the support of some very good Athenian hoplites. Leuctra, as we all know, was won by massed Theban infantry, led by Pelopidas and the *Sacred Band*, striking the much thinner Spartan line at the crucial place and time.

YOUNG: Again all of Mr. Hallenbeck's points are valid. Note however that it is debatable whether the sole reason for the Theban victory at Leuctra was the massed infantry, or some sharp peltast and cavalry attacks on the Spartan flank before the charge.

HALLENBECK: Phalangites and hypaspists, by the nature of their armament, should probably be considered a special class apart from hoplites. Though

there is considerable disagreement over the exact length, we know that the phalangite's spear was considerably longer than the standard hoplite spear. Because of its increased length, and weight, the phalangite held his *sarissa* with two hands and slung his shield over his forearm. The Greek phalanx was a shield wall; the Macedonian phalanx a bristling hedge of spear points. Because of this the Macedonians were particularly vulnerable on the flank, a fact Philip Amyntou appreciated when he created the Companion cavalry. Further an "internal Flank" would be created any time the Macedonian line attempted to turn an exterior angle. Into this gap any enemy cavalry commander worth his saddle would, and did, charge. Your Manipular Legion Rule takes this fact into account, but unfortunately goes on to apply it to all *Class I* units. It seems to me that concerning phalangites and hypaspists the rule needs to be generalized to *Class III* opponents as well, while it should not be applied to ordinary hoplites in the defensive situation.

YOUNG: I must take issue. Although the character of defense did change slightly from hoplite to phalanx formations, it was still basically the spear that defended. It should be noted that the manipular legion was even more successful at breaking up Pyrrhus' Epirus' hoplite formation than his phalangites. It was the basic rigidity of a spear formation (whether eight or eighteen feet in length) that was flawed, not the lack of shields.

HALLENBECK: The intricacies of the hoplite formation are difficult for the student of modern military tactics to understand. Even today it is not easy for a unit to change its front on the battle field. Hoplites, other than the best trained and most practiced at drill (meaning Spartans), found this maneuver next to impossible. Thus once facing is established for hoplites, excepting Spartans, it should not be changed other than by forward movement.

One of the most frustrating problems that occurs in the actual playing of the game concerns the grain of the hex paper. No long-time wargame player like myself would ever suggest going back to square-ruled paper, but the wobbly line of battle that results when one is aligned perpendicular to the grain is patently ridiculous. Thus all battle scenarios should be determined so that the battle lines run parallel to the grain.

YOUNG: I don't find it difficult to transfer from the abstraction of the hex to the reality of straight lines, but if you do, do what you suggest.

HALLENBECK: The first thing a hoplite did when overcome by panic in battle was to jettison his heavy armor. There is a little ditty by Archilochus on this point that I can't resist quoting:
My shield I left beside a bush, because I must. It's not the poor thing's fault — Some Saian now has joy of it, but I have saved my life. What care I for the shield? A parting

curse on it. Another day I'll buy one, just as good.

Instead of reducing a unit's movement allowance as the result of panic I would expect it, at least in the case of heavy infantry, to be increased. Further, such units, once they had strayed from the space where they discarded their armor, could never be effectively rallied.

YOUNG: In the long run, this is true enough. However, on 10–20 minute Game-Turns with 100 meter hexes, there is a great deal of chance to rally before things get out of hand. There are innumerable cases of armies being initially defeated who retreat and then cut up the erstwhile winners as they pursued. Also, it is true from ancient times right up to the present that men breaking formation to scatter are slower than they were in formation. It seems to be in the nature of the beast.

HALLENBECK: A professional historian would never be satisfied with the sort of capsule summary you give to ancient warfare under the heading of *Designer's Notes*. Realizing that your space was limited and some sort of historical backdrop is necessary I won't quibble further with any of your interpretations. It seems, though, that in this section and under the battles listed you omitted one of the most interesting periods in the history of warfare: the early Hellenistic era, 322 through about 220 BC. This time saw generals equalled perhaps only by the *condottieri* for brilliance and ruthlessness. Every possible type of weapon and soldier, from the elephant to the crossbowman, was used. Cavalry, not infantry was the queen of battles in this period. It was with his horse Companions, after all, that Alexander won his great battles against the Persians. Although these cavalymen *par excellence* were split up after his death, the Successors continued to employ cavalry as their mentor had done. They rode with the horsemen on the flanks, and generally won, or lost, their battles with the cavalry arm. Only when the Hellenistic monarchies became moribund did they fall back upon the phalanx as their main arm. By this time the Parthians were developing new cavalry units that were to revolutionize ancient warfare and usher in the Middle Ages. One of their improvements was increasing use of the horse-archer. I suspect that these troops appeared less frequently and in fewer numbers than you have allowed.

Why did you include in your scenarios almost entirely battles that pit one type of weapon system against another? Though these battles may be historically more significant their conclusions were frequently foregone.

YOUNG: The *Designer's Notes* were intended to be brief. For a more complete presentation of my views on the subject of warfare in this period see *S&T #27*. As for the scenarios, they were chosen primarily on the basis of interest and unpredictability. Many of the Successors' battles, interesting in their own right, are too formalized and rigid in the composition of the armies. The purpose of the game is to describe the salient differences of the various military systems, how they evolved and clashed. The scenarios are set up to encompass the greatest possible number of military systems and their grades in evolution. The more identical in appearance to any other, the less likely it was to appear.

HALLENBECK: My final argument concerns that delightful beast, the elephant. Elephants

did not always go berserk after their first ten to twenty minutes of exposure to the enemy. There are instances, such as the battle of the Hydaspes, when the elephants appear to have remained in good enough order during the battle to cover the retreat of the defeated army. The proper tactic, of course, against elephants was to employ missile troops in loose formation that could pick off the mahouts and then avoid the riderless animals when they went berserk. When elephants did go berserk, I suspect, they did not remain in formation, but dispersed randomly over the battlefield.

YOUNG: It would be difficult to break up the elephant counters into little pieces. The elephants in the period *did* give me a headache. I finally tailored the rules on the basis of their most common state (hostile) and the situations in the given scenarios. There could be normal exceptions of any shape you like. Experiment! The given rules may not be adequate, but I feel that you (in common with Hannibal) have fallen for the old elephant story. Rather, they are just large grey horses with overactive appetites.

HALLENBECK: The effect of elephants was directly dependent upon the familiarity of the opposition with the beasts. Horses that were unfamiliar with their smell simply could not be made to go anywhere near them. The decline of the morale of Alexander's troops has been traced by some to their encounter with Porus' elephants. Though Porus was defeated it is evident that the hard-bitten Macedonians did not relish the thought of facing any more of the massive, trumpeting monsters. The effect produced by Pyrrhus' elephants at Heraclea on the Romans seems to have driven them as close to panic as was possible with those stolid soldiers. The sight of the "Lucanian cows" produced something closer akin to horror than terror in the Romans.

YOUNG: I disagree strongly. It is much more likely that the serious losses in original manpower since 335 BC, the low quality of replacements, the growing insanity of Alexander, and the exhaustion of the officer corps caused the mutiny on the Beas.

The Romans are often mentioned as panicking because of elephants. As near as I can see from their performance, this is a gross exaggeration on both sides. The Greeks are trumpeting their ingenuity on the offensive, and the Romans are bragging about their bravery and excusing their defeats. The Romans had relatively little trouble with elephants, especially after the first encounter.

HALLENBECK: This is the end of my quibbles, quarrels and growls. I shall be interested to know what you think of them. I hope you will find them useful, or at least amusing. Keep up the good work.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Most ancient historians wrote at least partially about warfare. Thus it is difficult to know where to stop when listing ancient sources. I shall be content to mention only the best and most popular, with the protest that their accuracy concerning such things as sizes of armies and battle plans varies greatly. Thucydides is undoubtedly the best and most trustworthy for events he did not witness himself. All are available in Penguin paperback.

Herodotus, *Histories*

Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*

Xenophon, *Anabasis* and *Hellenica*

Arrian, *The Anabasis of Alexander*

I have only included those secondary works devoted to military theory, though as with the ancient sources, most historians of ancient history deal with warfare. It should be noted that the best current work in this, as in many other areas of history, is coming out of the University of California at Berkeley.

Anderson, J.K., *Military Theory and Practice in the age of Xenophon*, University of California Press (Berkeley, 1970)

Adcock, F.E., *The Greek and Macedonian Art of War*, University of California Press (Berkeley, 1957)

Pritchett, W. Kendrick, *Ancient Greek Military Practices, Part I*, University of California Press (Berkeley, 1971)

Tarn, W.W., *Hellenistic Military and Naval Developments*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, 1930)

YOUNG: These sources are all good, and all recommended. Most were used in designing *Phalanx*.

P.S.: Mr. Hallenbeck is kind enough not to bring up the rather large number of technical errors in putting the game together; things like number of units, etc. I hope to clear these all up in a future issue of *Moves*. ●●

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