

# HISTORICAL SCENARIOS

## The Battle of Marathon, 490 B.C.

BY MARK HERMAN

*For your pleasure and edification we throw in a rather quick-playing simulation of one of the great "hoplite" battles of history: **Marathon**. This mini-scenario takes about an hour to play (there aren't too many counters), for which you can use either counters included with Great Battles of History Module Nr.2 **War Elephant** or components from **The Great Battles of Alexander**. Balance tends to favor the Greeks, unless the Persian cavalry happens to wander in.*

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Hoplite warfare is a rather stolid affair. In most battles it's a question of whether Phalanx "a" can outpush and outsnarl Phalanx "b". This, for the most part, is why we chose *not* to begin our Great Battles of History series with something like *HOPLITE: Classical Greek Warfare*. With only a few exceptions, the scenario pickings alternate between dreary and grim. Marathon, one of the pivotal battles in classical history, is one of those exceptions.

In 490 B.C., Darius, The Great King of Persia, had pretty much had it up to his curly, oiled beard with the shenanigans of the Greek city-states - especially Athens. In the

recently concluded Ionian revolt, the Athenians had not only provided aid to the rebels but had participated in the burning of one of his provincial capitals, Sardis. Darius decided to wreak a little revenge upon the upstart Athenians by sending an army to punish the Greeks. After all, Persia was, oh, maybe 100x bigger in size and resources than the little city on the hill. How much resistance could she offer?

**Strategic View:**  
*The route of the Persian Fleet. The Persian Expedition was commanded by Datis, a professional general of Medean descent.*

To that end the Persian commanders devised a rather neat little plan, a plan which relied on the very real possibility that the "opposition" party inside Athens would react favorably to Persian intervention. The Persians probably hoped that their reputation and the effect of the eventual punitive destruction of Athens would convince the Greek city states that it was better to "offer water and dirt", the classical, traditional act of political subservience, than face certain future retribution. The more realistic Persian expectation was probably that their expedition would destroy Athens and gather intelligence for some future conquest of Greece.

The Battle of Marathon is surrounded in myth. We are led to believe that a small heroic Athenian army stood alone against the hordes of Asia. In actuality, the Persians had sent what amounts to a Reconnaissance in Force, undoubtedly of decent quality. The size of the Persian invasion army is a subject of great debate, with estimates ranging as high as 100,000 men. In fact, given the Persian strategic aims, 20,000 seems far more reasonable and supportable. If one includes the oarsmen in the estimates, then the 20,000 figure is not that far off. In any case, the size of the land army was probably not much larger than the Greek army that they fought. I have used Delbruck's figures as the basis

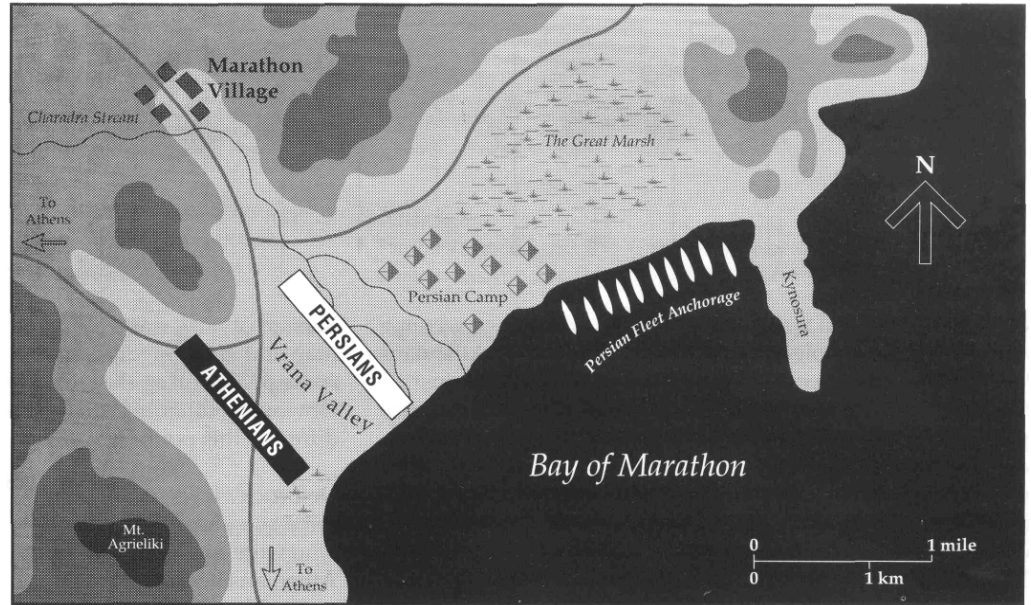
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# The Great Battles of History Series: Marathon

for my interpretation of this battle. This puts Athens at around 7000 effectives, and Persia at about 8500, including the recalcitrant cavalry. The two opponents were fairly evenly matched in both quality and quantity. However, their army composition reflected great differences in tactical doctrine. The Athenian force was composed entirely of that quintessential Greek Heavy Infantry, the Hoplite. And the hoplites were arrayed in that equally quintessential Greek formation that took the greatest advantage of the hoplites' weapons (pikes), armour (heavy) and density: the phalanx. (In the game, I have rolled the small Plataean contingent directly into the left-most Hoplite Phalanx.) The Athenian heavy infantry may have had some light forces guarding their flanks in the heights, but they played no significant part in the battle. The Greek doctrine was simple; line up in front of the opponent and launch the Hoplites straight ahead, with the issue to be decided quickly by hand-to-hand combat.

The Persian force was composed of light infantry and light cavalry from all over the empire. The Persian main battle line deployed archers in ordered ranks, plus a large contingent armed with spears or swords but whose armor was very light, consisting almost entirely of a wicker shield. The Persian doctrine was to defeat their opponents using archery, a doctrine that appeared to be driven by a burning desire to avoid shock combat. Once they had driven off the enemy cavalry, the light cavalry was to harass the flanks of the enemy main battleline. Even at its best, the Persian system of speed and harassment (Float Like a Phrygian, Sting



Like a Mede) was rather uninspired, and much of their success could be attributed to the quality of their cavalry and the massive incompetence of their opponents.

There is no doubt that the Persians were competently led. Theoretically, the expedition was commanded by Artaphernes, the son of the satrap of Sardis. In actuality, Datis, a professional general of Medean descent, was in charge of operations. Athens, though, was fortunate to have better - even extraordinary - leadership in Miltiades, Themistocles, Aristides, and Callimachus.

The campaign unfolded with the Persian expeditionary force advancing toward Greece, attacking various Greek city states (e.g., they levelled Eretria) that had assisted the Athenians in their support of the Ionian rebels along the way. The Persians were being advised by the former tyrant of Athens, Hippias, who after his exile resided in the Persian court. Undoubtedly, his knowledge of the political situation in Athens led him to inform his new employers that there was

a contingent of oligarches who would betray the city to the Persians during a siege. Based on his advice, the Persians decided on a rather ingenious stratagem. Instead of marching directly to attack Athens, they landed on the Marathon plain 19 miles northeast of the city. Their scheme was to draw the Athenian army away from the city so that the fifth-columnists could take control on behalf of the Persians.

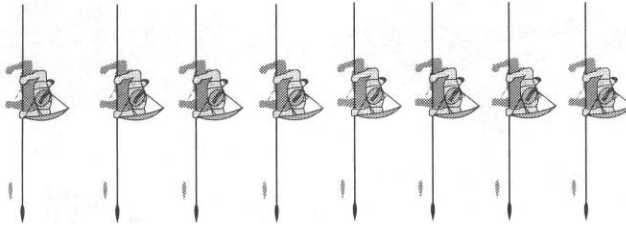
The Athenian generals swallowed the bait. Upon learning that the Persians were landing, the Athenian army immediately set out to intercept their landing, but arrived too late. The Persians were already ashore. The Athenians now placed themselves in a narrow valley, Vrana, that flanked the Persian route of advance to the city. The valley also offered the Athenians protection against the Persian cavalry. Since the valley was wider than the battleline, they used wooden abatis to extend their defensive positions. If the Persians tried to march overland toward Athens the Athenians would fall on their flank. If the Persians tried to

**Operational View:**  
*The Battle of Marathon, September 490 B.C. - Persians land in Attica but are repulsed by an Athenian army under Miltiades in the Vrana Valley.*

re-embark and advance by sea the Athenians could fall on their rear when they attempted to withdraw. The Persians were left with only two options: fight or wait for the city to be betrayed to them.

The Athenians also had two basic choices: attack at the first good opportunity, or wait for possible Spartan reinforcements. The Persians may have felt that time was on their side. If Hippias' supporters in Athens and within the Athenian force could betray them to the Persians, a bloodless victory could be won. As an Athenian navy had not yet been built, the Persians, with 600 ships, had absolute naval supremacy and the ability to logistically support themselves for an indefinite time.

# Marathon: The Great Battles of History Series



And those additional Spartan hoplites would not solve the Persian superiority in cavalry, the one "light" tactical system against which a Hoplite force would be vulnerable. (The superiority of light cavalry to unprotected heavy infantry was a lesson that M. Publius Crassus learned almost 450 years later, at Carrhae.) Although Callimachus was nominally the head general, Miltiades was the Athenians' natural leader. Based on his former position within the Persian empire, Miltiades knew and understood the strengths and weaknesses of the Persian military system and felt that he had the right type of force to defeat them - if the cavalry could be nullified. Miltiades' initial deployment, featuring deep wings, at the expense of thinning out his center, was designed to neutralize cavalry attacks on his flanks. Good leadership would also have waited for an opportunity to even the odds even more.

Herodotus says the Greeks, upon noticing the absence of the Persian cavalry, charged swiftly and limited the Persian opportunities to employ their archery tactics. However, the Persian center was composed of high quality, Persian regulars, who were probably better armored than the majority of the Persian infantry, and they managed to defeat the thinned out Athenian center during the battle. (To simulate this I have denoted the Persian center forces as

Hoplites, which they weren't, mostly to deny the Athenians Attack Superiority against them and capture the essence of what seems to have occurred.) The Athenian wings succeeded where the center had failed: they destroyed the flanks of the Persian army and then reformed to destroy the Persian center. The victory was complete. The Persian withdrawal to their ships was probably accomplished without Greek pursuit because of the protection afforded by the now-retained cavalry, a feat attested to by the fact that the victorious Athenians managed to capture only 7 ships.

That the Persian cavalry did not play a prominent role in the battle was, most likely, because they were out foraging, an assignment which (arguably) did much to change the course of history in this area. Due to the problems in transporting horses by sea, it is doubtful whether the Persian cavalry numbered more than 800 to 1000. The Athenian formation with its deep wings at the cost of a weak center is partially due to the anticipated presence of a small cavalry force. The scenario speculates that the cavalry were not present when the battle started. This rationale rests on the fact that the opposing armies had occupied their positions for 3 days, by which time the Persians would have depleted the available forage. Based on this premise the

Persian cavalry starts off the map and appears randomly at some point during the battle. Obviously, other historians differ on this point.

Delbruck views the Persian force as a swarm of archers who were forced to attack the Athenians because of their untenable position. He feels it absurd to believe the historical accounts, because the Athenians would not have initiated the battle prior to the Spartans joining them. His description of the battle has the Persians initiating an attack by advancing upon the Athenian position in the Vrana valley. As the arrow volleys grew in volume and accuracy Miltiades ordered a charge which shattered the Persian force. He feels that it was missile fire and not shock combat that broke the Athenian center.

The problem I have with this interpretation is several fold. Delbruck assumes that the Athenians were in no hurry to have a battle since they should have been waiting for the promised Spartan reinforcements. I think this is inaccurate. Miltiades, Themistocles, and Aristides were suspicious that oligarchic traitors would betray the city to the Persians. Hippias had been deposed only 20 years earlier, and the strength of the fledgling democracy was uncertain at best. Besides, the Spartan reinforcements were not to arrive for a fortnight - a rather long time to wait with an army de-

**The Phalanx:**  
A formation of hoplites lined up in files, often eight deep. These files stood side by side in ranks, each file occupying a 6 to 8 foot frontage.

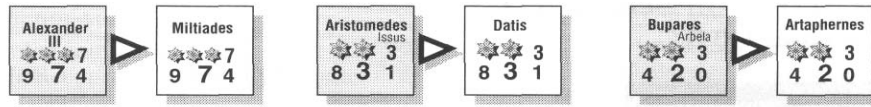
ployed in front of you.

Delbruck has also overlooked another good reason why the Athenians couldn't wait. Miltiades was a former Prince of the Chersonese (Gallipoli peninsula) and also a former vassal of Darius. He had fled back to Athens after his attempted betrayal of Darius was exposed, during the latter's retreat from the failed Scythian campaign. To make matters worse, Miltiades had helped to overthrow the same Hippias who was advising the Persian leadership. These were motivated and desperate men who led the Athenian forces. They were not about to sit around and allow matters to be settled without their direct input.

Whatever the tactical and strategic arguments, the Athenian victory at Marathon was followed by a quick counter-march back to Athens to stymie the efforts (or the lack thereof) of the Pro-Persia Party. The latter, it appears, had all gotten a collective case of cold feet, and the return of the army confirmed that pediatric diagnosis. Strategically, Marathon led to a long term enmity between the Persians and the Greeks (Darius was back in force only 10 years later), an enmity which was not resolved until Alexander conquered the Persian empire.



# The Great Battles of History Series: Marathon



NOTE: Both the Herman and Berg Scenario versions share a common set of Special Rules; see the following two pages for a breakdown of these rules from Off-Map Persian Forces to Victory Conditions.

## The Battle of Marathon Scenario September 490 B.C.

### Herman version

This deployment and use of counters represents the theories represented in the historical article, above.

#### Components:

This battle uses components from *The Great Battles of Alexander*, with the noted modifications. Use the Greek City-State counters from *Chaeronea*, plus the Alexander III counter from the Macedonian counter mix to represent Miltiades. For Datis, use the Aristomedes counter (from *Issus*); for Artaphernes, use the Bupares (*Granicus*) leader.

#### Map:

The *Issus* map actually bears a startling resemblance to the Varna Valley-Marathon Plain position. For Marathon purposes, Issus North is Marathon South (i.e., the sea is now to the east (Issus west). The Persian fleet is off the Marathon-north edge of the map on the coastline. Off the Marathon-south edge of the map, along the coastline where the Issus Level-1 hexes are, is a swamp, the presence of which is forcing the Persians to move somewhat inland in order to proceed south to Athens. (There was a road running in that direction which the Persians wished to take - the road flanked by the Varna Valley position. It would have no effect on game play.)

Adjust elevations as follows:

1. Issus Levels 1, 2 = Marathon Level 1
2. Issus Levels 3, 4\* = Marathon Level 2
3. Issus Level 5 = Marathon Level 3\*\*.
4. Treat the Pinarus River as a shallow stream, equal to the height level of its adjacent North and South hexes. It has *no effect* on movement, cohesion or combat.

\* = The Issus level-4 hexes around the upper ford, which in the *errata* are lowered to level-2, should be treated as level-2 Marathon hexes.

\*\* = These hexes may not be entered by cavalry; they cost infantry 2 MP's to enter. (Although they were low-lying foothills, they were extremely rocky and broken, making passage through them quite difficult.)

#### Rules:

Players should use *The Great Battle of Alexander* rules and charts - as modified by *SPQR* 11.9, where applicable.

#### Deployment:

#### ••• ATHENIANS AND ALLIES

*All Athenian units are facing toward the Sea.*

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Hex(es)</i>
Miltiades -----	5104
Athenian HO 1 -----	5103 - 5104
Athenian HO 2 -----	5105 - 5106
Athenian HO 3-----	5107 - 5108
Athenian HO 4 -----	5109 - 5110
Athenian HO 5 -----	5111-5112
Theban* HO 1-----	5204 - 5205
Theban* HO 2 -----	5212 - 5213
Abatis -----	5102, 5113, 5114

• = *There were no Thebans present; these represent Athenians.*

#### ••• PERSIANS

*All Persian units are facing toward the Varna Valley and the Greek positions.*

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Hex(es)</i>
Datis -----	2512
Cardaces 1 -----	2504 - 2505
Cardaces 2 -----	2506 - 2507
Cardaces 3 -----	2509-2510
Cardaces 4 -----	2514-2515
Cardaces 5 -----	2517 - 2518
Cardaces 6 -----	2519 - 2520
Royal Gd [HO] 1 -----	2511
Royal Gd [HO] 2 -----	2512
Royal Gd [HO] 3 -----	2513
Persian LC 1 -----	Off Map
Persian LC 2 -----	Off Map
Artaphernes -----	Off Map

#### IMPORTANT:

*All Cardaces units are Missile capable archers.*

# Marathon: The Great Battles of History Series

## The Battle of Marathon Scenario II September 490 B.C.

### *Berg version*

Nobody likes a *kibitzer* . . . always hanging over your shoulder, telling you to play this card, not *that* card, second-guessing you with practiced expertise. And guess who answers that description? Well, despite the fact that Mark knows a lot more about this than I do, I would have done it somewhat differently. I can do this because we've included the counters in *War Elephant*, counters that (I feel) more accurately represent the make-up of the Persian force. You'll still need abatis counters from *GBA*.

This deployment - and counter choice - places the Athenians at the mouth of the valley (as per Delbruck's second-thought assessment) and the Persians somewhat closer, because of the (off-map) presence of the swamp to the south. The Varna mouth was approximately 1500 meters wide at the point Miltiades (purportedly) chose to deploy (as is the hexrow I have used). The unpassable foothills to the right flank of the mouth start off the southern edge of the Marathon map, providing the Athenians with right wing protection.

I have chosen to go mostly with a Persian army that is heavy in bow-armed light infantry, with some heavier units (the sources say "swordsmen", etc.) in the center. Although my gut feeling is that the Persians did not have any units that qualified as "Heavy Infantry", I have made the Persian detachments so. If the accounts of the battle are correct, and these units withstood the initial Athenian charge, it would be difficult to see how they could be anything else (given what we know about the relative strengths of the systems). Then again, perhaps this leads one to the conclusion that the Persian center, with heavy missile support from the flanks, actually counter-charged! In game terms, this would enable these Persians to be more of the Medium Infantry they probably were and not suffer from the effects of system Superiority. *Interesting*.

I have also accentuated the Athenian "heavy flanks-thin center" array by "isolating" the center hoplite unit in the Athenian Phalanx and doubling up the flank hexes. To do this I have reduced the size of the Athenian hoplites and added an additional unit. I have also included the two skirmisher units that appear in some depictions of the battle (and had nothing to do with its outcome, to be sure).

### ••• ATHENIANS AND ALLIES

<i>Hex(es)</i>	<i>Units</i>
4618	Athenian Javelinists (SK)
4516	Scythian Police* Archers (SK)
4601-2	Athenian Hoplites (PH) #s 1 and 2 [See Double-Depth Rule]
4603-4	Athenian Hoplites (PH) #3
4606-7	Athenian Hoplites (PH) #4
4609-10	Athenian Hoplites (PH) #5
4611-12	Athenian Hoplites (PH) #6
4613-14	Athenian Hoplites (PH) #7,

Athenian/Plataen Hoplites (PH) [See Double-Depth Rule]

4600,

4615 - 16 Abatis markers (from GBA)

Any hex **Miltiades**

\* = Mark H. assures me that if there were *any* Athenian-type archers present they were most likely small detachments of Scythians used as city police. Sounds interesting.

### ••• PERSIANS

<i>Hex(es)</i>	<i>Units</i>
2900 -----	*Khorassan Light Cavalry #1
2902-3 -----	Ethiopian LI Archers, #s 1-2
2904 -----	Hyracanian Light Infantry
2905-6 -----	Indian Light Infantry #s 1, 2
2907-8 -----	Persian Heavy Infantry
2909-10 -----	Sacaeen Medium Infantry
2911-12 -----	Babylonian Light Infantry, #s 1, 2
2913 -----	Egyptian Light Infantry
2914-15 -----	Ethiopian LI Archers, #s 3, 4
2917 -----	*Khorassan Light Cavalry #2

Any hex ----- **Datis**

2900 or 2917 ----- \* **Artiphernes**

\* = The Persian player may deploy his cavalry from the start. This helps balance things out, and the usual assumption that they were not present is not a sure thing. If he wishes to use the Herman Reinforcement Method, go ahead. But make the "entrance" die roll (see Off-Map Persians, below) a "0" or "9".

## Special Rules:

### *For both Herman & Berg Scenario Versions*

#### Off-Map Persian Forces

It is not clear where the Persian cavalry was, what role it played in the battle or whether or not it was even present. **Artaphernes** and two Persian Light Cavalry units are off map at the beginning of the scenario. At the start of Datis's Orders Phase, the Persian player rolls the die. If he rolls a '0', Artaphernes and the two Persian Light Cavalry units immediately enter the map through any Marathon Level 1 hex on the South edge and it is, instead, Artaphernes' Order Phase. (Datis may go later.) Artaphernes entry counts as his first orders phase for that turn. Thereafter these units are treated normally. The Persian Player may not so roll on the first turn of the game.

If playing the Bergian Deployment you may start the game with the LC (here, Khorassan cavalry) on the map or off. If off, they enter on a die roll of '0' or '9'.

# The Great Battles of History Series: Marathon

## Overall Commanders

There is only one Athenian commander, Miltiades; I guess that makes him OC. There is *no* overall Persian Commander.

## Miltiades and Leader Replacement

Miltiades may use the Elite Initiative rule (5.5). If Miltiades is killed he is immediately replaced by the Alexander (Chaeronea) leader counter, which represents Callimachus. Place Callimachus on or adjacent to any friendly combat unit. If Callimachus is killed continue using the Alexander counter from Chaeronea. Historically, there were ten Athenian generals at Marathon, including Themistocles (founder of the Athenian navy and victor at Salamis) and Aristides (Battle of Plataea), so there is always an Athenian leader on the board. Callimachus and his potential successors may *not* use the Alexander Initiative rule.

If either Persian leader is killed, simply replace him in any other hex - other than the one in which he bought it - either adjacent to or stacked with any friendly combat unit.

## The 8 Stadia, Mini-"Marathon"

Supposedly, the Athenians set off at a run and covered 1500 meters (8 Stadia) before clashing with the Persian forces. Delbruck, with simple logic, points out this is physically unlikely. Lets face it, how likely is it that 7000 Athenians in 40+ pounds of heavy armor took off on a mile run, maintained their formation cohesion, and won a battle? Looking at it from a game mechanic viewpoint, 1500 meters is 20 hexes, or five Orders Phases. The last four would earn the unit *at least* four Cohesion Hits (for moving more than once), which would place them awfully close to Rout even before any attack. What Delbruck points out is that the Athenian burial mound is exactly 1500 meters from the Athenian starting positions. Herodotus stood on this mound when surveying the battle. It is likely that the burial mound marks the position where the Athenian pursuit ceased after routing the Persians. It is also likely that there is something to the ancient accounts, therefore I propose the following rule.

The Athenian player may, in any *one* orders phase, but only *once* during the game, declare a scaled-down version of the 8 Stadia run. Upon this declaration all Athenian units may move double their movement allowance (to 8 MPs). Each Athenian unit that exceeds its 4 MP allowance during this declaration receives one cohesion hit. Persian infantry units may not conduct Orderly Withdrawal (6.6) in the face of an onrushing Athenian "marathoner". If using the optional Drift to the Right rule (6.5), it does not apply during the 8 Stadia Run.

## Greek Double-depth Phalanxes

This rule is borrowed from the *Cynoscephalae* scenario in *SPQR*. We have used the term "phalanx" to mean an individual hoplite unit (even though the actual unit is not designated as such). (Four Athenian phalanxes start the Berg Deployment Scenario already in double-depth.)

To form double-depth, Greek hoplite units may stack, two to a hex. Forming double-depth requires an Order, in which the

stacking unit starts its movement directly behind the "front" unit. The back unit then expends one MP to stack (but no Cohesion Hits); the doubled phalanxes may then complete the movement/order, under the following restrictions:

- For *any* movement that would incur a Cohesion Hit, *each* unit incurs that hit.
- The doubled phalanx may *not* Reverse, Wheel or use Column. They may move as one unit but it does take two Individual Orders to move both units at the same time.
- Doubled phalanxes may use the 8 Stadia Run rule, but they earn two Cohesion hits for doing so.

*When resolving any Shock involving a doubled phalanx, the following apply:*

- The sizes of both units are *combined* (usually producing a Size of 20)
- Persian units defending against Shock by a doubled phalanx add one (+1) to their Charge check die roll.
- A defending, doubled-phalanx subtracts one (-1) from its Pre-Shock Charge check die roll.
- Only the TOP unit makes TQ checks. However, if it fails such check (gets a Cohesion hit), the bottom unit then checks.
- If a defending, doubled phalanx is shock attacked from its flank or rear, cohesion hits incurred are *tripled*, not doubled.
- If either phalanx unit in the stack routs, both rout.
- Each Phalanx unit keeps track of any Cohesion hits separately.

## Retreat Edge

Persian units rout toward Level 1 hexes on the South edge of the map. Athenian units rout toward their starting positions and off the board between the Level 3 hills on the East edge of the map.

## Army Rout

Both sides rout when units with a TQ totalling 30 points have routed. If both sides rout on the same turn the Athenian player wins.

## Size and TQ Levels (Herman)

Player	Size	TQ Pts	Rout Ratio	Quality Ratio
<i>Athenian</i>	70	42	71%	0.60
<i>Persians</i>	85	64	46%	0.75

## Size and TQ Levels (Berg\*)

Player	Size	TQ Pts	Rout Ratio	Quality Ratio
<i>Athenian</i>	74	55	55%	0.55
<i>Persians</i>	83	77	39%	0.93

\* = Berg's Persians are somewhat higher in terms of TQ. This has more to do with the fact that Herman is stuck using the *GBA* Cardaces counters, while Berg gets the benefit of brand-new counters from *War Elephant*, than any real difference in opinion concerning the worth of the Persians.

## Victory Conditions

Athenians - Rout the Persian Army.  
Persians - Rout the Athenian Army.

**Cowardly Draw** - If there has not been a shock combat by the 10th Game turn then the battle is over and nobody wins. Remember both sides are desperate, so get on with it.