BATTLE DIGEST™
Lessons for Today's Leaders
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Ancient & Medieval:

Gaugamela

DATE:
Oct. 1, 331 B.C.

LOCATION:
Gaugamela, modern-day northern Iraq

OPPOSING FORCES

Macedonians: 47,000 soldiers (40,000 infantry and 7,000 cavalry) commanded by Alexander the Great.

Persians: Although estimates vary widely, a good approximation is 86,000 soldiers (56,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry, 200 chariots, and 15 Indian war elephants) under the command of Darius III, King of Persia.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In the fourth century B.C., Philip II built Macedonia into the dominant power among the Greek states. But his untimely death prevented him from a planned invasion of the Persian Empire. This task would fall to his 20-year-old son, Alexander, who, in 334 B.C., embarked on one of the most extraordinary campaigns in history. Alexander the Great's conquests of Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria, and the Levant were significant enough. But when he turned his army east into the heart of the Persian Empire to meet Darius III, King of Persia, the result was one of the most climactic battles of the ancient world. Alexander's lopsided victory at the Battle of Gaugamela not only destroyed the Persian Empire and ended the Achaemenid dynasty but also allowed Greek ideas and customs to spread throughout the known world.

STRATEGY & MANEUVER

Actions by the Macedonians – After the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta (431–404 B.C.), the once-powerful Greek states were exhausted. Though Sparta had won, she proved incapable of uniting the peninsula. Later, when Thebes defeated Sparta at the Battle of Leuctra in 371 B.C., Thebes proved no better. Even after Athens regained her strength, she lacked the appetite for Greek unification. It was against this backdrop that Philip II became the King of Macedon in 359 B.C.

Philip applied his many talents to creating a formidable army. He improved on the traditional Greek phalanx by combining infantry, cavalry, archers, javelin throwers, slingers, and siege engines into a stronger, more flexible force. Philip's infantry had smaller shields and 14-foot pikes, the sarissa, roughly seven feet longer than the Greek spears. He increased the depth of the phalanx and the spacing between the men. This allowed the ranks behind the front rank to lift their pikes above the heads of the men in front of them, creating a "hedge of spears" that made it difficult for enemy soldiers to fight their way through. Philip's son Alexander described his father's phalanx as "a storm of spears" which protruded at every angle, before he could even reach the initial rank of the phalanx."[1] Philip's phalanx was also modular – built from smaller formations called syntagmas. These flexible squares had 16 men per side and could quickly change direction or even add more men to the front rank. He created a new heavy cavalry, the Companions, comprised of Macedonian nobles armed with stabbing lances and swords. He also added three battalions of elite infantry, called hypaspists, or "shield bearers," with heavier armor and shorter spears, allowing them to operate outside the strict confines of the phalanx to close gaps or exploit opportunities. Some historians credit Philip's innovations for creating history's first truly integrated combined arms force.

With his redesigned army, Philip steadily grew his power. Then in 338 B.C., after defeating an allied army from Athens and Thebes at the Battle of Chaeronea, he formed a unified council of Greek states called the League of Corinth and proposed a campaign against Persia. Unfortunately, in 336 B.C., during his preparations, he was assassinated by a Macedonian noble who was reportedly in the pay of Persia.[2] This left Philip's 20-year-old son, Alexander, to assume the throne.

Alexander, who had been tutored by Aristotle, had a keen mind. He was also an experienced soldier by the time he became king. In 334 B.C., after spending two years securing his power back home, including defeating the barbarian threat on his northern frontier, he took his army of 40,000 and crossed the Dardanelles to pursue his father's dream. *(Map 1)*

Alexander the Great

As Alexander moved into Asia Minor, he was soon confronted by an allied army of Persian satraps (regional governors) at the Granicus River. After a victory that nearly cost him his life, Alexander continued south. Because he couldn't match the Persian fleet at sea, his logistical support would hinge on his ability to control the Mediterranean ports. To support his plan, he continued conquering cities along the western edge of the Persian Empire while King Darius gathered an army to stop him. In 333 B.C., Darius made his move, marching west to cut off Alexander's