

Research on genghis khan a great conqueror



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At the end of the twelfth century, the Mongols were a number of small tribes that lived in the heart of Central Asia. They moved from pasture to pasture with the seasons and therefore often fought with each other or sometimes formed alliances. The rise of the Mongols began when Genghis Khan united the tribes in 1206 and became the first ruler of Mongolia. His ambitions did not stop at uniting the tribes; he started to conquer other nations in 1209 and began building his empire. “ In twenty five years, the Mongol army conquered more lands and people than the Romans had conquered in four hundred years” (Weatherford xviii). Without the leadership of Genghis Khan, the tribal Mongols would not have grown into a vast empire. Although the Mongols were born naturally as fierce warriors, Genghis Khan’s organization skills and military tactics helped the Mongols expand to an empire.

The Mongols’ geographic and economic conditions equipped them for warfare . The Mongols lived under harsh geographical conditions. Their winters were extremely cold, and all the lakes and rivers were frozen by November. They also had hot summers with very little rain (Marshall 16). It was impossible for the Mongols to maintain an agricultural economy under this kind of weather. They were forced to depend on hunting and herding to make a living. The Mongols were trained to ride horses, and shoot bows and arrows when they were two or three years old (Carpini 54). Their horse riding skills and their hunting skills equipped them to be great warriors.

Furthermore, the Mongols had to migrate several times each year to search for pastures and water for their animals (Marshall 16). These migrations demonstrated the Mongols’ organization skills because each migration involved hundreds of people and thousands of animals. The Mongols could

not bring along a lot of food during their moves. These seasonal migrations made the Mongols tougher than other agricultural societies. The Mongols therefore provided the best raw material for Genghis Khan to mold into a great army.

Genghis Khan reorganized the Mongol army after his rise of power to ensure loyalty. The system he used was based on the number ten. In this new system, ten families were organized into a group called an arban. Ten arbans became a jagun, and ten jaguns made up a minghan. Then, ten minghans made up a tumen which comprised of 10, 000 men (Marshall 37). In many cases, a minghan was made up of families with tribal ties. However, Genghis Khan sometimes chose to put people from different tribes and clans in the same unit. In this way, Genghis Khan broke the power of the old tribes and prevented the tribal chiefs to organize revolt. Genghis Khan ordered each arban to be loyal to each other like brothers. “ No one of them could ever leave the other behind in battle as a captive” (Weatherford 52). He also demanded complete discipline among his army. As Carpini described, “ when the line goes into battle, if one or two or three or more flee from the squad of ten, all ten are killed; and if all ten flee, unless the rest of the hundred flee, all of them are killed” (Carpini 71). All men over the age of fourteen had to join the army. When they were on duty, their wives and children traveled together (Marshall 37). This led to an advantage for the Mongol army. In traditional societies, armies had to be raised from the farming people. They were not used to discipline, and they desired to return home to their families more than they wanted to fight their enemies. On the contrary, the Mongol soldiers were fully devoted to their army.

Equipment was very important to an army, and the Mongols chose great weapons. The Mongols' main weapon was the composite bow. Each soldier carried two to three bows and a large quiver containing at least sixty arrows for different purposes. The Mongol Bowman was trained to shoot as they rode on their horses at full speed. They were able to hit their targets in front of him as well as behind him. Further, their bow allowed them to shoot an arrow more than two hundred yards (Carpini 26). Friar Carpini observed that the Mongol arrows were "tempered when they are hot in water mixed with salt...so that they should be very strong for penetrating armor" (Carpini 89). Genghis Khan also had his soldiers wear silk undershirts. If a soldier got hit by an enemy arrow, the silk would wrap around the arrow. The arrow could then be carefully removed without ripping more flesh and tissue (Marshall 39-40). Genghis Khan was able to utilize the Mongols' expertise in archery for his military expansion.

The horses were even more important to the Mongol warriors than their bows. Every soldier in the Mongol army was an armed rider; none of them was a foot soldier. This allowed them to travel fifty to sixty miles in a day. Each Mongol took several horses with him on campaign to avoid exhausting the horses (Carpini 26). The Mongols trained their horses so well that "they wheeled this way or that as quickly as a dog would do" (Marco Polo 70). The combination of horses and the bows allowed the Mongols to beat their enemies without being close to them. Besides giving the Mongols mobility and speed which they needed for their campaigns, horses also became the Mongols' food supply in case of need. According to Marco Polo, the Mongols "will ride a good ten days' journey without provisions and without making a

fire, living only on the blood of their horses; for every rider pierces a vein of his horse and drinks the blood. They also have their dried milk.....”(Marco Polo 70). Without the horses, the Mongols might not be that successful in their expansion.

Genghis Khan transformed the Mongols annual hunt into a military operation. The Mongols used the hunt to practice military strategies. A variety of techniques were used. After their search of prey, the Mongols fanned out and formed a circle. Then they gradually closed in until all the animals were trapped in a ring of men and horses. At the command of the Khan, the hunters would unleash their arrows and began their slaughter. Another technique was to string the army along a starting line, sometimes even 80 miles long. On a signal, the Mongols would march forward, killing all the animals they encountered along the way (Marshall 40-42). Under Genghis Khan’s leadership, the hunting of animals became the pursuit of enemies. The pretended withdrawal was a favorite tactic used over and over again successfully. When Genghis Khan encountered an enemy that he could not easily take over, he often ordered his troops to retreat and then prepare an ambush to trap the enemies. These retreats could last a day to even ten days. When the opposing army started to break up, the Mongols would secretly come out to attack (Carpini 75). This often led to total victory.

Genghis Khan always had detailed planning before he launched an attack. He sent out scouts ahead of the main invasion force to check out the water sources, weather, road conditions, people, and any other information that might be useful for his army. These scouts also looked for a route to retreat if it became necessary during their invasion (Weatherford 86). Genghis Khan

also planned out a detailed communication system. Most of the Mongols officers were illiterate. All the orders had to be in oral communication. Oral communication could lead to inaccuracy of the message. The Mongol warriors therefore used a set of melodies to communicate. Hearing the message was like learning a new verse to a song (Weatherford 88). Genghis Khan also used “ torches, whistling arrows, smoke, flares and flags, and arm signals” to transmit information over short distance during warfare. For longer distance, Genghis Khan used “ arrow messengers” who rode from station to station to pass out information (Weatherford 72). Again, Genghis Khan demonstrated his ability in planning out his campaigns.

Genghis Khan was good at using scare tactics. He realized that it was more efficient to get a city to surrender without struggle instead of resorting to warfare. In 1215, Genghis Khan invaded Chung-tu, one of the largest city in northern China. Besides shooting arrows on fire onto the Chinese’s wooden houses, Genghis Khan also had the soldiers started a massacre with swords. After the fire and the slaughter, “ the streets were greasy with human fat and littered with carcasses” (Marshall 48). The destruction sent a clear message to China’s neighbors. In 1218, the Koreans surrendered to the Mongols with huge payments in order to avoid destruction (Marshall 48). Genghis Khan also used scare tactics to deceive the size of his army. When his army had fewer soldiers than his enemy, he used boys, women, and even straw dummies on horses to mask their numbers at a distance (Carpini 75). At other times, he sent troops out to throw sand in the wind or tied tree branches to the horse tails to stir up dust so that his enemy would think the

Mongols had a bigger army (Marshall 96). Genghis Khan's scare tactics often succeeded in confusing and intimidating his enemies.

Genghis Khan was cunning, and he was a genius in using trickery. During the invasion of Hsi-Hsia, the Tangut State in the south, Genghis Khan's army encountered their first fortified city, Volohai. The Mongols were not able to defeat the city. Genghis Khan then negotiated with the fortress's commander. He agreed to withdraw his attack if the commander gave him one thousand cats and ten thousand swallows. The commander agreed to this deal and delivered the animals to the Mongols, making sure that the city gate stay closed during the delivery. Genghis Khan took the animals and ordered his men to tie tufts of cotton to the tails of the birds and cats. Then they set the cottons on fire and let the animals loose. The animals fled back to their home city. The city was burned down, and the Mongols succeeded in taking down a fortified city (Prawdin 107-108). In order to overtake other fortified cities, Genghis Khan used other tricks. During the Jurchid campaign, in order to get the enemy out of their fortified gates, Genghis Khan commanded his soldiers to pretend to retreat. As they fled, the troops left behind their equipments. The enemy then sent their soldiers out to collect the equipments, thinking that the Mongols left in fear. The Mongols then blocked the opened city gates with carts and animals, and they rushed in and attacked the city (Weatherford 95). Without Genghis Khan's cunning ideas, the Mongols would not have a chance to take over these fortresses.

Genghis Khan learned from his experience that he needed new innovation to defeat fortified cities. He had noticed that the Chinese engineers knew how to build siege machines that could destroy fortified city walls. These

machines threw “ catapult hurled stones, flaming liquids, and other harmful substances at or across city walls” (Weatherford 94). After each battle against the Chinese, Genghis Khan recruited Chinese engineers from the captives. The Mongol army therefore added on engineering units. Besides building mechanical siege machines for the Mongols, these engineers also helped in diverting rivers and digging tunnels in order to attack some forts (Carpini 76). Genghis Khan was willing to adapt in order to defeat his enemies more efficiently.

In conclusion, the Mongols were fierce warriors by nature whom Genghis Khan needed to create his empire. Their migrations made them tough. Herding perfected their riding skills, and hunting made them excellent archers. However, they needed a great leader so that they could expand to be an empire. From his rise to power in 1206 to his death in 1227, Genghis Khan “ conquered more than twice as much as any other man in history” (Weatherford xviii). His ability to bring about loyalty of his army, his skills in planning campaigns, his brilliant military tactics, and his willingness to adapt made him one of the greatest conquerors in world history.