

WARRIORS OF CHINGGIS KHAAN

"Wild, Devil hordes in sheep skin, riding their horses with wild shouts," described Medieval chronicles during the invasion of Mongol armies.

The puzzle remains how the horse riding nomads wearing only sheep skins could defeat the armor protected knights and conquer half of the known world of that time.

In reality, the "hordes" were highly organized, disciplined and trained armies of that time. Divided into units of 10, 100, 1000s, their heavy cavalry was the major attacking force, highly mobile and deadly.



Mongols were good disciples learning all the art of warfare of the predecessors - Huns, Xianbi, Kidans, adopting and their weaponry.

They used armors made of layers of hardened leather combined with metal plates,- light and flexible but providing sufficient protection for riders and horses against arrows and sabres.

Before the battle various methods of psychological warfare were used, beginning with spreading heart sickening rumors and using arrows that would howl and

roar.

Various battering rams and ballista were strong enough to tear down walls of any castle or citadel. These powerful machines threw various types of shot balls, from stones to pots filled with sewage.

Despite all the efforts of the Chinese emperors to keep the secret of making arms by prohibiting the sale of any metals to the northern neighbors, nomads learned how to melt metals and make own arms.

"Their sabres are exquisitely made and covered with ornaments. The steel is of such quality that can serve for thousand years," reported Chinese spies about Huns of third century B.C.

The secret of producing gunpowder was also stolen from Chinese. The reports of the testing of "fire" weapon at the Kidan's capital Yanjing as early as June of 1076 shocked the Chinese emperors. Arabic historical chronicles call these canons "Kidans' fires."



Therefore, 100,000 strong army of Chinggis Khaan was well armed and possessed the latest warfare technology available. Hundreds of workshops across the Mongol state produced weapons. A suburb was set up in the capital city of Kharhorin, where skilled craftsmen brought from all corners of the vast empire made bows, arrows, sabres and armor.

Special workshops made ballistas, throwing machines and canons. Heavy arms and armor were not the privilege of wealthy nobles only as all warriors were required to maintain full set of equipment.



Each warrior was obligated to have no less than five types of arms, spare stirrups and harness. Other must-have items included a grater to sharpen arms, fire maker, even needle with a thread.

Not many arms remained from that time as leather armor is not well preserved and all metal pieces were carefully collected after the battles.

But there are many detailed drawings of Mongolian warriors and armors left in Chinese, Iranian, Korean chronicles.

Also the oral epic of 13th century "The Secret History of the Mongols" gives good description of arms and weapons used.

Mongolian armor differed from that of predecessors. Usual armor plates were joined more stiffly making it less flexible but more enduring. Metal plates covered arms and body serving both as magical and real protection.

Under armors Mongol warriors wore special deel called khatangu, a long coat covered with several layers of hardened leather plates or even metal ones.

Boots also were covered with metal plates as well. Mongolian helmets had crest-like visor protecting the face. In addition, various cloaks made of leather with metal plates were attached to protect neck. Horse were provided with an canvas apron covered with metal badges.



The heavy cavalry armed with bows, pikes and sabres, able to cover up 150-200 kilometers within a fortnight, was the main striking force.

Mongolian warriors were all skilled archers. There is a stone monuments dedicated to the Chinggis Khaan's nephew who stuck the target from 335 ald or about 500 meters.



Plano Carpini, a Medieval traveler noted in his diary that Mongols, adults and children without exclusion are skilled archers.



N. Vitsen, a scholar who visited Mongolia in the last century described: "...they sit low on a horse to turn the bow easily towards the enemy. They ride fast but then turn and make a shot.

"While shooting they always do it straight up so that arrow lands the target from above hitting with the most force. When shooting they keep both eyes open. They shoot in series and I could see by my own eyes how arrows land almost simultaneously and very close to each other. If I did not see it I would never believed that this was possible."

Bows were of several types, for distant and close range shooting. An oral epic The Secret History of Mongols mentions: "When pulled with all strength, bows can strike as far as 1,300 meters, and smaller ones- for 700 meters."

There were special bows some two meters long and stretched by two men. Such a bow was sent in 14th century by Munkh Khaan to the French king as a gift demonstrating the force of the Mongolian army. Arrows were equipped with many types of arrow heads. Some, 14-15 cm long were used to penetrate bronze and metal armor.

There were 'howling' arrows that would make a terrifying howling sound during the flight. Fire arrows were used to set fires in a surrounded town. Two sided sharp arrows inflicted heavy wounds. Each warrior was carrying three quivers with 30 arrows each of various type.



The weapons used by Mongolian warrior were exclusively made. Called "Central Asian" type they influenced the development of arms in many other countries of Eurasia. When Batu Khaan began his conquest of Russia he had only 30,000 strong army.

But even superior weapons sometime failed to secure victory. Therefore, Mongol commanders were shrewd tacticians knowing when to use their advantage of mobility to defeat enemy armies with large number of men. No a battle would began without scouting and spying.

At the beginning of a battle, horse riding warriors would descend on enemy like "crows" and disappear after sudden attack like "lightning" The vanguard "crows" task was to cut through enemy ranks and wreck a havoc. Then the light cavalry would enter cutting the units into separate groups or making the enemy to chase them.



If an attempt to cut the enemy ranks failed, herds of wild horse, cattle were send disrupt the lines. And in between, the enemy was constantly showered with arrows, including "howling" ones to terrify. And then the heavy cavalry would enter riding in lines like "wolf packs" and finishing the surrounded enemy.

This tactic was the most deadly as many, better equipped armies of Persia, Iran, China, Russia and even some European discovered in their time.

