

Primary Driving Forces in the Western Way of War

By: Christopher Channell

Due: November 19 2013

For: Daniel Hambly HIST 017

Introduction

This essay will discuss the technological and scientific advancements in the Western way of war. It will discuss the impact of the gunpowder revolution. It will examine the impact of the longbow on cavalry. It will also discuss the use of ships in warfare. The purpose of this essay is to prove that the changes in the Western way of war have been driven primarily by advancements in science and technology.

Gunpowder Revolution

The gunpowder revolution did not just change the Western way of war. It changed the way of war around the world. In the 9th century while searching for the elixir for long life the Chinese discovered gunpowder (Parker, pg. 106). The first depiction of a gunpowder weapon in Europe dates from 1326 and shows a knight very carefully igniting the charge of a bombard with a hot poker (Parker, pg. 107). With the introduction of gunpowder in Europe rich families and states were starting to purchase gunpowder weapons. The gunpowder revolution introduced cannons that could now destroy any wall defence. These cannons were hard to move, but they were devastating. “The powerful new weapon essentially rendered the traditional walled fortification of Europe, impregnable for centuries, weak and defenseless.”(Whipps, 2008, para.10). The French were the first to use individual gunpowder weapons in the early 1400’s. This weapon was called an arquebus. The arquebus proved to be too weak to penetrate armour at a distance (Legge, 2008, para.4,6). To solve this problem the musket was introduced. To make the musket more powerful they added metal to the gun. The gun became heavy. By the end of the 1500’s the musket was getting lighter because of the advancements in metallurgy (Parker, pg. 154-155). The gunpowder revolution made it possible for any man to become a soldier, and

within 24 hours train him to be an effective soldier “essentially a cannon shrunk down to portable size. Guns literally put weaponry into the hands of the individual, creating a new class of soldier — infantry — and giving birth to the modern army” (Whipps, para. 11). Without the gunpowder revolution people would still be fighting each other with pikes, clubs, axes and swords. People would still be defending themselves with useless high walls. This proves that the gunpowder revolution is a scientific primary driving force in the way Western war has changed.

The Longbow

The most important military unit on the battle field for 1000 years was cavalry. The introduction of the English longbow put an end to that notion. The English longbow is at most 3 meters in length. It takes incredible pressure to draw this bow. It also takes an incredible amount of time to learn and master this weapon (Parker, pg.92-93). The first time the deadliness of this weapon is seen is in the battle of Crécy. The longbow is used to kill many French Christian knights. The longbow was so effective against cavalry because horses are mostly unprotected. What also made the longbow very effective was its range “Little did the Genoese realise that the longbow had the greater range and could cover up to 320 yards” (Longbow Archers, n.d., para.16). In the battle of Crécy the English army was made up of mostly longbow men. The French army was made up of French soldiers and Genoese mercenaries. The English lost approximately 200, but the French lost 40% of its nobility “French and Genoese casualties are estimated at 10,000 to 30,000, the most likely figure being 12,000. Of these 11 were Princes of the realm and 1200 were Knights. The English suffered 150 to 250 dead” (Longbow Archers, para.21). The effectiveness of the longbow was shown again in the battle of Poitiers where the English Black Prince defeated the French King John. Once again the battle of Agincourt showed the effectiveness of the English longbow men. “Once again, many of the advancing cavalry and

infantry were brought down by arrows (clouds of them, we are told by an eyewitness) before they could even reach the English line” (Parker, pg. 95). Although it takes time to learn and master, the longbow was a major deciding factor in the 100 years’ war between French and English. Without the use of the longbow men the English may have lost at Crécy, Poitiers, and Agincourt. Therefore, this proves that the longbow was a technological advancement that changed the way of Western warfare.

Ships and Naval Vessels

There are 2 types of ships. There are galleys and there are galleasses. Ships have traversed the Mediterranean since 3000 BC. They were used by the Greeks and Romans for trade and war. These types of ships were galleys. Galleys are mainly powered by lots of men using oars with a small sail for wind. The advantage of a galley was that it could be easily moved over land from one place to another. The disadvantages being that it could not take long voyages without making stops along the way to resupply (Parker, pg.120-121). The galleass, however, has large sails and relies mainly on wind power and not manpower. This means that it can take much longer voyages. The invention of better navigational tools and the crucial importance of trade in European society were causing increased demand for bigger and bigger galleasses. The best advantage of a galleass is that it can easily be transformed into a warship. The battle of Lepanto saw the last use of the galley in a naval battle. The battle of Lepanto was a naval battle fought between the Ottomans and the Holy League. The Ottoman Empire attempts to control the Mediterranean (Crocker, 2006 para.2). The reasons for this war were economic and not religious. European businessmen donate their galleasses to the Holy League. If the Mediterranean is lost then those businessmen will lose lots of money. Now the Holy League had an ample supply of galleasses. The Ottomans only had galleys. In terms of number the Holy League was at a

disadvantage. Due to the fact that galleasses are much more effective than galleys, the Ottomans were crushed. It is said to be the most decisive naval battle in the history of naval battles. It took only 5 hours for the Holy League to defeat the Ottomans (Parker, pg.122). The crushing defeat of the Ottomans was because of the technological change from galleys to galleasses. Therefore this proves that, Ships and naval vessels were a technological driving force in the way Western war changed.

Conclusion

In conclusion this essay has shown that with the introduction of gunpowder anyone can become an effective soldier in 24 hours. It has shown that without the technological innovation of the longbow the English might have lost the 100 years' war. It has also proven that technological innovations on ships were a deciding factor in a crucial naval battle. These three innovations of gunpowder, the longbow, and ships were all primary drivers of change in the Western way of war.

References

Crocker, H.W. (December, 2006). Lepanto, 1571: the battle that saved Europe. *Catholic*

Culture.com. Retrieved November 6, 2013, from:

<http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=7391>

Legge, C. (July 1, 2008). Roll out the barrels; from musket to arquebus: firearms of the

English civil war. *Daily Mail (London)*. Retrieved from:

[http://www.questia.com/library/1G1180829364/roll-out-the-barrels-from-musket-to-](http://www.questia.com/library/1G1180829364/roll-out-the-barrels-from-musket-to-harquebus-firearms#articleDetails)

[harquebus-firearms#articleDetails](http://www.questia.com/library/1G1180829364/roll-out-the-barrels-from-musket-to-harquebus-firearms#articleDetails)

Longbow Archers. (n.d.). The battle of Crecy, 26 August 1346. *Longbow Archers.com*.

Retrieved November 5, 2013, from: <http://www.longbow-archers.com/historycrecy.html>

Parker, G. (2008). *Cambridge illustrated history warfare*. China. Cambridge University Press

Whipps, H. (April 6, 2008). How gunpowder changed the world. *Livescience.com*. Retrieved

November 5, 2013, from: <http://www.livescience.com/7476-gunpowder-changed-world.html>