

How did Chinggis (Genghis) Khan (c. 1162-1227) turn a pastoral nomadic society into an efficient war machine?

Before Chinggis, the Mongols were organized into tribes that fought and raided each other for plunder, for women (no marriages were allowed between members of the same tribe), and to avenge insults. Largely self-sufficient, they often raided, traded with, and extracted tribute from neighboring settled agricultural communities.

CAUSES:

From 1211-1225, central Mongolia experienced a period of mild weather and above average precipitation.

Women rode, shot with bow and arrow, and hunted. They gave political advice and could rise to the rank of chief, though rarely. On campaigns, wives, children, and flocks often went with the army.

Women and even children could be drafted to ride on the fringes of battle.

All males 15-70 served in the army, all as cavalry. The army's 95 units of 10,000 soldiers were subdivided into units of 1,000, 100, and 10.

Members of different tribes were mixed together in units of every size to ensure loyalty to the army above loyalty to the tribe. Allies and levies (people enlisted to fight) from conquered territories were brought into the fighting force. Those from conquered territories who were forced to fight were usually placed in the front ranks.

EFFECTS:

Absolute obedience to orders from superiors was enforced. Officers had tight control over their troops' actions (plunder only with permission, no one allowed to transfer out of their unit).

Officers and men were bound to each other by mutual loyalty.

No one in the army was paid, though all shared to varying degrees in the booty. All contributed to a fund to take care of those too old, sick, or hurt to fight.

During three months every year, large-scale hunting expeditions served as intensive military training simulations.

Cavalry troops had to supply their own bows and other military equipment, which had to meet officers' standards.

Gathering intelligence had high priority. Scouts were sent out, local knowledge sought, and traveling merchants rewarded for information.

Foreign experts and advisors were extensively used, notably Chinese and Persian engineers skilled at making and using siege weapons such as catapults and battering rams.