Medieval Battle Tactics Essay, Research Paper

MEDIEVAL TACTICS

Medieval tactics were essential for an attack or siege of a castle. Many tactics and strategies helped develop much-improved version of an attacking artifact, like weapons and sieging machinery. The knights of Medieval England which were the cavalry, improved as the years went by, but never actually had any tactics or strategies. The usual knight would just go out there and fight. The knights were the counter offensive against a small siege, but they were ineffective against a large siege of a castle. A siege was very essential for medieval warfare. Siege was like the most important part of an attack; that is if you re attacking a castle.

As you know no one inhabited New England back then in the Medieval Ages, so many nations were competing for it. One of them was Rome. Rome inhabited New England first, and as being the first settlers they left some of their customs, which among them was the key to war. The Roman legion composed of a huge amount of infantry and some cavalry was an important factor in Roman War. However, if Rome and England were compared then the cavalry of Rome later

developed into the Knight. The well trained infantry of Rome s legion for attacking and invading now was set to defend in Medieval England as it more compares to the castle. Now that you know some about the origination of the Knight and the castle, let s get into the tactics used by the land units of Medieval England like the knight and the archers.

The knight, being the cavalry of the castle, and also the last line of defense between invaders and the castle, were inferior to a well trained army of foot soldiers. Usually, it was the knight s ability and bravery decided the medieval battle. The Medieval Knight was trained from childhood. However, they were never taught any strategies. So, when it came to fighting in the battlefield, they used a guerilla warfare method where they would engage the enemy. This was nothing like the disciplined lines of musket men (soldiers with rifles) of the later British; but rather just went out there and everyone fought on their own like a free hand anything goes melee match. When traveling, the medieval knight traveled in a group, however the group was open to attacks because it was not arranged in a strategic way. Soon the knights, who had superior life, and had an advantage towards a one on one match vs. an infantry soldier changed when the English Long Bow was introduced. The Long Bow could pierce the armor and chain mail of a knight, and had very good accuracy.

Pavises or Mantlets were shields that bowmen or archers took around. The

purpose of these shields was to deflect crossbow bolts and arrows, so that the archer could have total protection to fire. These shields; were constructed out of wood, and had a slit through the middle allowing the archer to shoot through the slit and begin picking off the enemy. These were used in the battlefield or upon sieging a castle. They were most effectively used in the battlefield, because they can find a good spot and start shooting at soldiers.

The Siege of a Castle was a guarantied victory, but it took a long time of patience. Patience was the key to victory with this strategy, however it was scarce in the battlefield, because of the angry, impatient soldiers waiting to get home to their families. The city walls were suppose to be fortifying a position that could not be easily overrun, and that it could be strong enough to enable the defense to maintain that position for a long period of time. Siege of a fort, castle, or city walls had four basic concepts. The Sieging technique was directly directed towards these four. In order for the attackers to get inside they would have to go over the wall, tear a passage through the wall, dig a tunnel underneath it, or just wait until the defenders surrendered.

Going over the wall meant constructing a tower that was moved with the

help of wheels, this was called a belfry . The belfry was built on-site while the attacking army was camping outside the castle, and then once the belfry was ready it was pushed forward to the wall once the moat, or ditch had been filled in. These belfries contained a number of platforms connected by ladders and filled with soldiers. The soldiers would propel the tower, and then once it was in place they would go up the stairs and begin to fight. The belfry had a mini-drawbridge (which was used to cover the gap between the tower and the wall. At the top the front of the mini-tower was covered with wet-hides so it won t catch on fire. The back part of the top of the tower was left open. Upon reaching the top of the wall; the mini-drawbridge would be lowered to reach the top of the wall; the soldiers on the top platform jumped onto the other side and fight the soldiers. Then the soldiers on the bottom platform went fast up the stairs to the top platform where they could join the fight and start killing. If that technique was successful then the soldiers that were alive went over to the gate and lower the bridge or raise the gates. Some belfries had a small battering ram at the bottom that proved to be a waste of effort. It was so because if the attackers were going at a wall, the wall must have been like 10 ft. thick, and the small battering ram must have had no effect on the wall but some small cracks.

Tearing a passage through the wall meant tearing it down by making a hole in it. This job was left for the battering ram. The battering ram was like a shed with an iron-shod balk of timber suspended by iron chains from the ceiling, and just being swung back and forth. When walls became thicker, this method was beginning to be used less and less because of its ineffectiveness. The defender s only way to stop it was to get the operators. They did so by throwing stones or boiling on the battering ram hoping it would reach the operators. But a method of protection against the boiling water and stones was soon developed. This was called the tortoise or testudo , which covered the ram and the workers. Another kind of battering ram was the bore , which instead of having a blunt end for breaking through doors and walls and being made out of wood, this was a strong metallic pole with a sharp end which loosened the stones in the wall.

Digging a tunnel underneath a wall became the most used method of attack and constantly improved. The people that mined these treacherous tunnels or mines were called sappers. When a group of sappers got to work, the fall of the wall was just a matter of time. In order for the wall to be stable a foothold had to be used or another way to support it was lumber beams. Once again the tortoise comes in. This was also to trick the defenders. The tortoise was used to covering the miner s tracks. It did so by deceiving the defenders by thinking that the attackers were trying to bust through the wall in order to get to them. When in reality they were digging a mine underneath. Once the mine was far enough through the wall, it would be stuffed with pig fat or a whole bunch of dead pigs (it really didn t matter because they were both composed of a lot of fat), straw, lumber. Then once the stuff had been put inside, they would set the mine on fire so that the supports would burn. Hopefully if this strategy worked then the attackers would bust through and

start attacking. The defenders tried to develop some good counter-offensives for this strategy. Here are some of the counter-strikes used: the first one is placing a water cup on the ground by the wall, the vibrations from the sappers would cause the water to vibrate; thus telling the defenders when mine was being dug. The second one is once they know that the attackers are mining, they would dig a tunnel intercepting the miner s tunnel, then a small group of soldiers would go in and kill the sappers, then once that had been done, the tunnel might be flooded or filled with fire. This second one however, had its drawbacks. The first drawback is that maybe the defender s digging might contribute towards the undermining of the wall. The second one is if the small group of soldiers is too small, then the miners might over power them and leave an open entrance to the fortress.

In siege weapons that were used, like heave machinery (not the metal kind, but the wood kind that was used in the medieval ages) that shot heavy, solid objects from far distances. These kind of siege weapons really changed the medieval war era. There was the Ballista that fired large arrows. Then there were the Mangonel and Trebuchet, these both projected stones over large distances.

The ballista which needed a heavy framework to support the javelin. Behind that there was a very flexible strip of timber that was being hauled by a windlass. Once that was done, it was released and it hit the rear of the javelin projecting it a large distance. It proved to be an effective weapon in conquering new territory, and capturing castles.

The Mangonel was a machine that looked like a long wooden arm with a

spoon-shaped end, once again like in all medieval machinery, it was mounted on a heavy framework. The arm was buckled to a crossbeam, that when the buckle was released it would send the object flying through the air. The arm was on a bow and arrow type of structure, so the way it worked, was that the arm was pulled down and buckled and that applied pressure on the rope which was getting its pressure from the flexible wooden beam. So like bow and arrow, when the buckle was released the arm went and stopped at the bow, therefore releasing the boulder. The boulder would then fly off to hit its target. Most boulders were one hundred to two hundred pounds. This siege weapon was so effective that if aimed correctly at a wall, it would cause amazing results. Not only can it be used effectively against walls, so that soldiers could go in, but you can also aim it at the inside of a fort, destroying the defender s buildings.

The Trebuchet, on the other hand, was the biggest of all the siege weapons. Trebuchet lives up to its name meaning slinging machine. The trebuchet had a long arm that had a big end so that the end would help it propel when released. The arm was buckled down to one side, while the big end would hang in the air until the buckle was released. At the top of the arm you would find a sling with a rock inside. When the buckle was released there were usually soldiers at the other side with ropes attached to the weight, and helping it propel by pulling the ropes.

England came a long way from just plain foot soldiers with minimal padding, to armored knights and siege weapons. Perhaps it was because Feudalism must have affected the way that the medieval forces were and developed along the medieval era of England. Medieval War and War Tactics played a very important role in medieval life because it helped shape future generations of empires. With out war in the medieval ages of England, they would have probably not been prepared for their future role in war among other countries focusing on conquest and expansion of other parts of the world.