Development of Tactics in Military Art of Genghis Khan

Dauren Kulibekuly Maikhiyev
National Defense University, Schuchinsk, Kazakhstan, 021700

Abstract: The article provides analysis of preparation and use of tactics by Genghis Khan. The factors and conditions are shown which influenced greatly development of military art. Mobile way of life of military nomads facilitated high level of combat capabilities. The studies prove that military art of Mongols was based on tactical maneuvers of horse cavalry and powerful weapon - bow. Their tactics was sudden attacks and chasing the enemy.

Keywords: Preparation and Use of Armed Forces • Tactical Skill of Genghis Khan • Forces and Means of War • Reflexive Mongol Bow • Tactical Move of Mongol Cavalry

INTRODUCTION

The history of military art of Middle Ages cannot be departed from tactical and strategic experience of Genghis Khan in military actions and this experience is significant not only for history but for military practices as well.

Historical and practical significance can be observed in all victories of Genghis Khan: no other army has won so many battles and was not able to build and then realize so grandiose strategic plans [1].

Military activity of Genghis Khan is now judged from all points of view, unbiased assessing of his advantages and disadvantages, achievements and mistakes [2-5] has become a norm. Both are historical treasures for us because both are the result of military activity of great commander in conditions of foundation of the greatest Empire spreading after his death from south to north: from Yellow see to Amur in the East and from the Euphrates to the Dunube-in the West.

Every new generation of historians will consider his activity as the past which is near and far in the same time. Here we fully agree at M. Usmanov's opinion [6].

Genghis Khan wars themselves are school for learning history of military art.

Study of military activity of Genghis Khan in development of tactics in the framework of history of military art is up-to-date because without knowing of the past (P. Labutin) and learning lessons positive changes in public consciousness are not possible [6].

Therefore our study aimed for understanding of military art of Genghis Khan and learning his lessons with the purpose of further development of tactics and getting new military and historical knowledge is up-to-date.

Wish to study history of Genghis Khan’s wars only for getting some historical information would not be reasonable. Such approach, in our opinion, can not bring any good in studying of military art of Genghis Khan.

Study of Genghis Khan’s tactics to understand trends in development of modern tactics, historical material must be used for consideration how and where development of military art of warriors influenced improvement of tactics moves when performing military operations. Only such approach can enrich the knowledge of military personnel in modern conditions.

Analysis of tactics used in military campaigns by Genghis Khan shows the ways by which warriors found way-out from situation on battle field, overcame difficulties and reached success, which mistakes were made, how they were corrected etc.

The most appropriate method for studying of military art of Genghis Khan and in particular, tactics, is historical method-when every event is viewed in its development-how it looked like before, which stages passed and which reasons influenced it.
Main Part: Military encyclopedic dictionary defines tactics (Greek language taktika-art of deployment of troops, tasso-deploy troops) as a component of military art covering the theory and practice of preparation and conduct of battle by units, divisions and parts of army [7].

The task of tactics is to defeat more numerous defending or attacking groups of enemy in specific section (region), to capture important points (regions, objects) by some specific date [8].

Tactics is discipline about combat (battle). Its subject is theory and practice of preparation and use of the troops (forces) in the battle. Main task of tactics is to find ways and forms of combat which are most appropriate for combat situation and most efficient for achieving of combat aims. With due and comprehensive regard to specific conditions of combat situation tactics defines the most appropriate ways of victory in the battle.

Analysis of chosen by us sources [9-11], military and historical literature [1, 6, 12-20] showed that Genghis Khan in his military activity trained and uses of troops (forces) paying much attention to tactics. He defined ways, means and forms of combat at different military situations for achieving victory. Therefore, Genghis Khan viewed mastering tactics by his warriors as one of the main tasks of military activity of his commanders. The evidence is all his victories.

Genghis Khan as a commander understood and used tactics as most mass sphere of military art and took into consideration that most part of soldiers of all his troops is involved into it.

In opinion of K. D’Osson nomads led a soldier-like way of life. As a result they had advantage over troops of other nations: skills to perform combat, quickness and mobility and strict discipline which was established by Genghis Khan. The most important idea: every who could use weapon was a military man [12].

D’Osson’s suggestion that Genghis Khan left instruction on how to make and these instructions are available in some place is of some interest for us [12].

General character of military art of Mongols described in the sources and in historical literature allowed to say that Genghis Khan and his commanders, when they made war for expansion of territory, realized that development of tactics will allow them to win and put Mongol people together, to create great Mongol state. Ata-Melik Juveini says that tactics of Genghis Khan was especially quickly developing in wars outside of the Great Mongolian state-Yeke Mongol ulus. This was determined by high speed of development of military legislature (Great Yasa), improvement of decimal system of organization of military forces and borrowing by him of knowledge and experience on organization of communication service as a tool to control forces [10].

The fact that Genghis Khan accelerated all the time the rates of tactics development of his troops signalizes that he knew about domination of Chinese and understood the urgency of improvement of his army.

Genghis Khan demanded from his commanders and warriors to master tactics art which was advanced for that period.

In practical teaching of cavalry tactics Genghis Khan made emphasis on hunt as military training.

That is why we propose to consider hunt as military training, aimed for tactical interaction of the units (tens, hundreds and thousands).

Historians of different countries pay attention to military character of hunt, its special role in training of warriors and inculcation of necessary skills in them [6].

We pay attention to the one aspect of hunt as military training: after hunt Genghis Khan and his commanders analyzed its course and the outcome as if it was a military campaign [14].

Analysis of works of Middle Ages author Ala-ad-Din Ata-Melik Juveini allowed to suggest the following variant of tactics training of Mongols [10]:

- The Mongols were trained to chase their enemy in any season of the year, any time of a day and regardless of terrain conditions;
- Were in touch with Genghis Khan and sent him messages about the enemy, solved the issues in regard to interaction with other forces;
- Key way of combat pattern of Mongols was intended for encircling of enemy.

Said above allows to conclude that Mongols used traditional tactics and strategy of combat.

The only difference is that military campaigns (big and small) differed from each other only by size of the theatre of military operations.

- Troops acted by scenario which looked like hunt: encircling.

Therefore tactics of combat of Genghis Khan was constantly developing but the radical improvement was provided during wars.

Ata-Melik Juveini says that tactics of Genghis Khan was especially quickly developing in wars outside of the Great Mongolian state-Yeke Mongol ulus. This was determined by high speed of development of military legislature (Great Yasa), improvement of decimal system of organization of military forces and borrowing by him of knowledge and experience on organization of communication service as a tool to control forces [10].
One of the key conditions influencing development of tactics of Genghis Khan and his successors (XIII-XIV centuries) was invention of Mongol bow, which was equal to invention of automatic guns: "Tatars (Mongols) had new overwhelming weapon, reflexing bow. The arrows sent from this bow got through any armour." [15].

It is worth noticing that military troops of Genghis Khan consisted of 2 kinds of cavalry: lightly-armed and heavily armed. Lightly-armed cavalry was most numerous, but use of heavily-armed cavalry in combat was decisive factor [16].

Plano Carpini testifies that cavalry was armed with bow. The Mongolian warrior was equipped with 2-3 bows and different kinds of sharp arrows. The soldiers put on heavy helmets and armour, the horses were also protected from hitting by arrows [11].

It is obvious that in Genghis Khan times Mongol bow was the most powerful weapon used from a distance. Famous English bow which stopped French knights at Cresset, pulling force was 35 kg, the arrow could damage at the distance of 230 m.

Mongol bow due to its design was reinforced to 40-70 kg of pulling force. The arrow could hit from 320 m. Mongols also had a special technique of shooting which allowed to increase initial speed of arrow [17].

This information is confirmed by S. Tarnbul-he writes that Mongol bow’s pulling force was 70 kg and killing distance was 300 meters [1].

The advantage of tactics of Genghis Khan troops was not only in use of powerful reflexive bow in combat, but, as R. Grusse remarks, in use of factor of suddenness. Special advantage was provided by the ability of the Mongols to appear and disappear quickly with overwhelming force not allowing enemy to provide get ready for resistance [18].

As a rule, Mongols’ tactics suggested numerous and targeted shooting into enemy for several hours, then heavy cavalry armed with spears attacked. Long spears were the tools to make first impact in attack. "At the sharp end or the pole of the spear there were badges made of horse hair which served to transmit combat signals" [19].

Use of heavy cavalry and improvement of the methods of use of light cavalry allowed Genghis Khan and his commanders to develop his tactical art greatly in combat operations.

His principles were exhaustion and constant chasing of enemy. R. Grusse believes that Genghis Khan troops exhausted the enemy and then killed them as a haunted beast. High mobility, ability to appear in proper time in proper place turned Genghis Khan cavalry into skillful tool of tactical combat [18].

- Mongolian tactics of combat made enemy forces withdraw to protected shelters, to the castles.
- Genghis Khan troops started to learn to fulfill seizure of castles and mastered different engineering skills.

"There are data-general-major E. Alexandrov notice that commanders of Genghis Khan approaching the enemy sent groups to improve roads, bridges, river crossings. The Mongols built bridges on ships, used rafts made of destroyed houses (Czi-Lin river-crossing in 1233) during invasion into China, but preferred to swim across the rivers. The soldiers used leather sacks stuffed with tree-branches (Jeikhun river-crossing in 1220). The Genghis Khan soldiers could perform big hydro-technical works-they built a dam at the siege of the Hogen castle in 1219. Siege skills of Mongols which mainly were borrowed from Chinese were on high level. The sources testify that the Mongols used most perfect siege mechanisms" [20].

Therefore, efficiency of combat activity of the Mongols under leadership of Genghis Khan and his commanders was based on combination of tactics experience and operative-strategic thinking and on use of engineering knowledge. Tactical art of Genghis Khan was constantly and quickly developing.

All said above, in our opinion was a precondition for appearance of maneuver means of combat in Mongolian military operations.

Example: battle of Genghis Khan troops against the troops of Czin Empire in Tan-Guan pass. In this battle Genghis Khan fought against Czin commanders, actively realized tactical maneuvers, commanders Tului and Chugu-kurgen rapidly attacked from the flanks and made the enemy withdraw. The defenders were not able to use their reserves, Genghis Khan and their commanders’ troops defeated running enemy "... and such killing of the Kitads (Czin soldiers) commenced as if we broke dry tree-branches"-wrote unknown author [9].

Attempts of the enemy to break the front line with old traditional methods relying only on the force of attack of cavalry and foot soldiers ended in failures and big number of casualties.

Combat tools as well as readiness for military actions was decisive factor of domination of Mongolian soldiers over their enemies.

**CONCLUSION**

All said above allows to argue that Mongolian soldiers were trained systemically, probably under the supervision of the commanders they were taught to coordination of soldiers in units.
Inference: Mongolian tactics in Genghis Khan epoch was transformed greatly. One of such changes was refusal from traditional order of troops allocation-continuous front.

Using tactics Genghis Khan efficiently involved his combat experience and the experience of his commanders. In the same time, he actively used tactics of his enemies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The article was written in the framework of PhD thesis. Many thanks to PhD in pedagogics K.K. Kulambayeva for her assistance in writing of this article.

REFERENCES