

The development of warfare

War. It's a complex beast, spanning troop recruitment, military tactics, weaponry and much more.

And while we can't put a finger on a single cause of war, we can explore some of the factors which have influenced conflict throughout the centuries. Back in medieval times, kingsmen would sometimes round up recruits in brothels and taverns, forcing people to fight.

Later, some men were given weapons training, forming an unofficial militia. But by the 17th century, most fighters were paid for their work.

Following the success of Cromwell's New Model Army during the Civil War, King Charles II created a standing professional army in the 1660s.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, before conscription, rulers often violently or sneakily abducted people to fight in the army and navy. This was called 'impressment'.

But when warfare scaled up, so did the demand for men.

During the First World War, conscription was introduced. The government issued propaganda posters to pressure men into joining. Those who resisted were imprisoned.

Conscription was reintroduced for the Second World War, but ended afterwards.

Military tactics have also changed massively.

In the medieval period armies attacking enemy strongholds often used siege tactics, like catapulting disease ridden carcasses over walls, poisoning water supplies, or cutting off food sources.

Later, pikemen with specially designed spears, were really effective against horses. They were eventually replaced by musketeers, who were in turn replaced by riflemen.

By the First World War, the tactic of entrenchment was being used, creating static, stalemate battlefields, while the Second World War was a Total War: planes, boats, infantrymen and bombs were employed, and everywhere was a target.

One of the key factors that has influenced warfare has been technology.

Bitesize

In the 14th century, longbows revolutionised warfare until firearms such as muskets took over. Muskets remained the firearm of choice until the 18th century.

Machine guns were developed in the 1860s, and huge artillery like the 43 ft long 'monster gun' by the 1880s.

Technology was used to horrific effect when America dropped an atomic bomb on Japan in 1945, killing up to 250,000 people and ushering in the nuclear age.

Today, computerised drones mean more precise targeting.

National pride has influenced warfare. It was Henry VIII's desire to equip ships for war that kick-started Britain's navy. By 1540, ships were big and heavily armed.

Elizabeth I built on his legacy with the powerful fleet that defeated the Spanish Armada.

By World War One, Britain had by far the largest navy in the world.

What about women's role in warfare? In the 12th century noblewomen might have accompanied their husbands on Crusades, while lowly lasses supported men in battle by hurling missiles.

Throughout the Renaissance and into the 18th century, some women fought actively, occasionally disguising themselves as men to do so.

By the 20th century, women were performing vital roles in the war effort, both in the field and on the Home Front, such as nursing, mechanics, admin work and driving.

And since 2016, women have been performing active combat roles.

So, from the advance of weapons technology, to evolving military tactics, to national pride and the rising presence of women, warfare has changed unrecognisably over the years.