

Then: Technology for Fighting

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will consider how different technologies develop and the role militaries in particular play in their development. Humans, and even human ancestors, have been creating and using “technology” for millions of years. Humans have also always experienced existential threats -- including from each other. One of the main motivators humans have had to develop new technologies has always been our own preservation. Militaries help serve this function and as militaries have become more and more complex, so have the technologies they have developed. The new technologies developed by militaries throughout history have also found their way into other aspects of our lives. While these technologies include advancements in warfare, weapons, and medical care, they also include advancements in how we communicate. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Technology For Fighting
2. The Soldier's Experience



BEFORE YOU START

How has technology changed the way the military fights in wartime?

1. Technology For Fighting

Just as it has changed nearly every other aspect of life, the technology that has been developed during U.S. history has changed the way wars are fought.



EXAMPLE One of the earliest weapons used in American wars, the musket, could be used only at very close range.

Just a few decades later, these kinds of close-encounter tactics were already out of date. The invention of repeating rifles and handguns allowed soldiers to fight from greater physical distances (American Battlefield Trust, n.d.). World War I brought gas weapons, tanks, and improved artillery; in World War II, the United States began the nuclear age by developing atomic weapons—and by using those weapons against the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a tactic that brought the war to an end.



An assembly line for B-24E Liberator bombers at Ford's plant in Willow Run, Michigan, 1943. Assembly line technology helped the U.S. quickly begin building the weapons it needed to fight World War II.

Technology developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries allowed battles to be fought not only on water and land, but underwater and in the air. From the early “ironclad” ships of the Civil War to today’s aircraft carriers, fighter jets, and nuclear submarines, the nation’s armed forces have a history of inventing and adapting to new technology.



Agility: Skill Tip

If you've ever heard the phrase "Don't fight the last war," you know that it is the perfect illustration for how swiftly technological innovations alter the face of the world. A military force and its leaders must take advantage of the newest technologies—otherwise, they'll be stuck in the past. This phrase has also become a saying in the world of business and finance, as entrepreneurs and investors must be skilled at adapting to new technologies and situations.

2. The Soldier's Experience

As military technology changes, so does the experience of warfare. Think about a Revolutionary War soldier running through a field under cannon fire, a World War II pilot flying on a bombing mission, a military convoy driver navigating through Afghanistan—they all fought with different weapons and faced different weapons from the enemy. And yet they shared some experiences, such as working with comrades or missing home, that remain constant over time.

Historians often read letters written by soldiers to investigate what different wars were like for those who fought in them (and for those who stayed at home). Let's take a look at one of these primary sources. The following is an excerpt from a letter written by Lewis Warlick to his future wife, Cornelia McGimsey, during the Civil War (Warlick, 1864):

Primary Source Excerpt

Type: Letter

Author: Lewis Warlick

Year: 1864

We are lying in reserve say a mile from the Yanks (our advance being close up) rather gone into camps, but when the mortar and picket firing gets warm we lie low. The mine explosion of Grants was a terrible affair. It was set for us but caught more blue birds than gray. I will write in a few days again—will quit and try and eat some breakfast.

Technological innovation doesn't affect warfare only through weaponry. It also helps defend individuals and even entire countries from violence and security threats. In the next lesson, we'll look at how the military has used changing technology to defend soldiers and territory against enemy attack.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned how changes in **technology for fighting**, such as new weapons and new modes of transportation, has altered the nature of warfare. Although **the soldier's experience** has shifted over time due to changing military technology, there are some aspects of it that remain constant.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: Strategic Education, Inc. 2020. Learn from the Past, Prepare for the Future.

REFERENCES

Letter from Lewis Warlick to Cornelia McGimsey, near Petersburg, August 8, 1864. (2014, September 18). *Civilian Wartime*. www.civilianwartime.wordpress.com/category/cornelia-mcgimsey

Small Arms of the Civil War. (n.d.) American Battlefield Trust. www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/small-arms-civil-war



ATTRIBUTIONS

- [An assembly line for B-24E Liberator bombers at Ford's plant in Willow Run, Michigan, 1943. Assembly line technology helped the U.S. quickly begin building the weapons it needed to fight World War II.](#) | Author: Howard R. Hollem / Library of Congress | License: Public Domain