

UNIT 3 : The Development of Warfare c.1250 to the present day

What have been the main developments in naval warfare over time?

MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN PERIODS : c.1250s-1700s

The Medieval Period

During the middle ages, ships were mainly used to transport troops and supplies e.g. during the Hundred Years' War. Most were merchant ships hired for the task, though some kings, for example Henry V, also built warships. Naval combat was often like a land battle – an exchange of missiles before troops on one ship tried to board the enemy vessel. Henry V's great warship the Grace Dieu had only three cannon and relied on its archers to kill the enemy before boarding their vessel.

WELSH EXAMPLES : In 1282 Edward I sent troops by ship under Luke de Tany to capture Anglesey. However, when de Tany tried to build a boat bridge across the Menai Strait, he failed and he and 300 of his men were killed or drowned.

The Tudor period – the beginnings of an organised navy

Henry VII could be described as **the father of the English navy**. He saw the importance of a strong navy that would compensate for England's lack of manpower on land. He began a programme of ship building that Henry VIII continued.

Elizabeth I made the navy a top priority. Her new ships e.g. Dreadnought were at the cutting edge of technology. They were faster, more manoeuvrable and armed with more powerful and accurate cannon. New tactics evolved. Rather than try to board the enemy, ships now fired broad-sides at distance to damage and destroy enemy weapons. The high point of Elizabeth's reign was **the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588**.

The Spanish were defeated as a result of a range of factors. One major factor was **superior English naval tactics**, allied to **better ships with more fire power**. **Experienced commanders** e.g. Drake, Hawkins and Howard used more imaginative tactics such as the use of "hellburners" at Calais to break up the Armada.

After the Civil War, **Oliver Cromwell** realised a strong navy was vital to defend the country and increase its power. He expanded the navy to over 200 vessels. When Charles II was restored, he continued the work. The term Royal Navy came into use. In the late 17th and early 18th centuries the navy grew considerably in size because of wars with Holland and France. As a result England was to become the most powerful maritime nation in the world. As part of his **"blue water" policy**, **Charles II** added 25 more battleships to counter the naval strength of the Dutch.

INDUSTRIAL PERIOD : c. 1750s - 1800s

The navy in the 18th century

The navy continued to expand in the 18th century. By 1755 it had over 200 ships with a personnel of 40,000. At the height of the Seven Years' War (1756-63) the navy had expanded to 300 ships with a manpower of 80,000. The war was a triumph for the Royal Navy and established Britain as the greatest colonial power. Naval technology continued to improve and in 1765, the Navy Board built the 100 gun "first rate" ship Victory which became the model for ships of the time.

The role of the navy in the defeat of Napoleon

The navy played a vital role in the defeat of Napoleon. During the wars with France from 1793 to 1815 the navy had several roles to fulfil.

- It **protected Britain from French invasion**. To do this it more than doubled in size (500 ships in 1793 to 950 by 1805); manpower was increased from 45,000 to 120,000; dockyards were refitted to keep more ships at sea; and constant gunnery practice kept crews at their peak.
- It **kept the English Channel clear and protected Britain's trade routes**. Wealth continued to flow in Britain to help pay for the war. French and Dutch territories such as Trinidad, Tobago and Ceylon were captured and provided extra revenue. **French ports were blockaded**, weakening its economy.
- A policy of **attack at every opportunity** led to many victories - Cape St. Vincent and Camperdown in 1797 ended French plans for an invasion of Ireland; the Nile in 1804 left Britain in control of the Mediterranean; Trafalgar in 1805 ended Napoleon's dream of an invasion of Britain. After this, Britain was unchallenged at sea.

With the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 the Royal Navy reigned supreme. As warship design and construction changed from wood to iron and then steel, and from sail to steam, the Royal Navy continued to enjoy control of the seas for the rest of the century.

WELSH EXAMPLES : The town of Pembroke Dock was founded in 1814, during the Napoleonic War. Over the next century, as ship-building technology changed, it built 263 vessels for the Royal Navy, ranging from gunboats to battleships. The last ship was launched in 1922.

MODERN PERIOD : c.1900s-present day

The navy in World War I

In the years before World War I, Germany built Dreadnought battleships and U-boats to challenge Britain's naval supremacy. As a result, the Royal Navy had to adapt its role and tactics during the war to maintain control of the seas.

- The Grand Fleet was stationed in the North Sea to stop the German navy breaking out, with other ships at different points along the coast. It was also used to blockade German ports in order to weaken Germany's economy.
- The Mediterranean fleet kept open links with the empire which provided men and supplies for the war effort.

British strategy was generally effective. The German Navy broke out once. In the Battle of Jutland (1915), though Britain lost more ships, the German Navy returned to port and never came out again. After Jutland the navy focused on protecting merchant shipping from U-boats. By autumn 1917 the threat was reduced when Britain began a system of defended convoys.

The navy in World War II

At the start of the war the Royal Navy was the largest in the world with 1,400 ships. As in World War I its role was to defend Britain, protect trade routes and blockade German ports.

- The Battle of River Plate (December 1939) was the first major sea battle of the war. The navy suffered losses but the Germans lost their cruiser the Graf Spee.
- At the Battle of Taranto (November 1940), the Royal Navy defeated the Italian Navy in the **world's first successful carrier-borne air attack**. This **protected British supply routes** in the Mediterranean.
- The navy also **protected Atlantic convoys** from U-Boats. Working with RAF Coastal Command it was able to reduce the U-boat threat and keep Britain supplied.
- Naval supremacy was also vital for amphibious operations. It provided vital cover during the evacuation from Dunkirk in 1940, in the invasion of Italy and especially during the Normandy landings in June 1944. The Allied armada which crossed the Channel consisted of 4,300 vessels.

WELSH EXAMPLE : In the post-war period as naval warfare became more hi-tech a submarine –listening station was set up at RAF Brawdy. Undersea microphones (hydrophones) were used to detect Soviet submarine activity in the Atlantic.