

Gunpowder

Gunpowder shaped history. It helped armies wage wars, countries build empires and cities construct transport systems. All of these things were possible because of an accident.

The history of gunpowder begins in 850 AD.

A Chinese leader asked his staff to invent a medicine that would help him live forever. They failed in that task, but they did come up with a unique mixture: a powder that burned quickly and produced a loud noise when touched by fire. It was gunpowder.

At first, it was used to manufacture fireworks. Around the 1200s, somebody discovered how to make weapons with it. They put gunpowder and stones inside a bamboo tube. Burning powder produced a gas that launched stones into the air.

By the late 1200s, gunpowder was in Europe. By the 1400s, canons could launch 25-kilogram metal balls. Early canons were extremely practical because they destroyed forts. Early handguns were less useful. They were expensive to make and not altogether accurate when aiming at distant targets.

Gunpowder was a vital part of the evolution of European power between the 1400s and 1700s. This is when people from Europe traveled the world looking for new ways to make money. Gunpowder helped them become wealthy.

With canons on ships, navies controlled the seas, harbors and trade routes. With soldiers carrying long guns, armies marched into new territories and took whatever they wanted.

Looking at the history of gunpowder, one thing seems obvious. Countries that possessed it were strong and rich. People who did not were weak and poor.

Gunpowder was used for other purposes, like construction projects. It helped build roads, tunnels and mines by breaking large rocks into small pieces. That work was slow and dangerous before gunpowder. Eventually, gunpowder was replaced by better explosives like dynamite.

Today, gunpowder is not popular, but it's still used for fireworks. However, its influence was huge.

Gunpowder helped European countries become global powers that built large international economies, fought long wars with rivals and destroyed ancient cultures in the name of progress. All of this was possible because of an accident 1100 years ago.