

Video: Close-up of the terrifying power of the 'super rocket' that fired 100 arrows at once in the 15th century

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When you travel around Korea to museums and historical buildings like palaces, you will see these wooden carts quite often. They are called hwacha and along with the rockets they fire. The machine may look primitive but it played a vital role in defending Korea from pirates and foreign invasions for over 300 years. Hwacha were usually loaded with singijeon or rockets, they could also fire a type of projectile. The hwacha was probably the most formidable defensive weapon of the Korean era.

The story of the invention of hwacha goes back centuries and depends on the Korean people being able to obtain the formula and materials to make gunpowder. The Chinese discovered/invented gunpowder and used it first for fireworks and then for weapons. However, they realized its importance and kept the method of making it a secret.

The hwacha "super rocket" was developed by two inventors, Yi Do and Choi Hae-san, of the Joseon Dynasty, Korea in the late 14th century. This rocket system applied the Chinese design, but was improved to be able to launch 50-100 arrows at the same time, much more dangerous than the system developed by China. The hwacha rocket was one of the first multiple launch rocket artillery systems in the world.

A hwacha rocket launcher capable of firing 100 large arrows at once, penetrating the best armor of the 15th century, became a nightmare for pirates and samurai armies of Japan.



Hwacha is made of wood. The hwacha launcher consists of dozens of tubes placed in rows. Inside each tube is a 1.1m long arrow with a paper tube filled with propellant near the tip connected by a slow-burning fuse. With just one ignition, all the arrows on the launcher will be fired within 2-3 seconds. This launcher is placed on two wheels to increase mobility.

The heavy arrows fired from the hwacha are powerful enough to penetrate all types of armor and shields at a distance of 100 - 150m. If fired from a high position and using light arrows, the hwacha's range can increase to 300 - 500m.

In the battle with Japanese pirates in 1419, the Hwacha rocket system helped the Korean navy completely destroy the pirate force. A testament to the formidable power of this weapon.

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