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It is Important to Study Military History

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The military is a profession that is geared toward problem solving just like engineers and scientists. Military history is important because it yields lessons in tactics and strategies that can be applied to current situations. That is why it is important for the military personnel to study military history. It is useful in illustrating points of doctrine in instilling in the young officer the proper military values through the military heritage. The military man looks at the history and gets formulas for success in war (Hanson).

Military history is taught because the officer needs to know what values he needs to uphold. For instance, blind disobedience to authority is no more to be encouraged than blind obedience. This is what British physician Dalrymple Theodore observes as he looks into those occasions when people ought to strike a delicate balance between the two.

Military history can provide vivid examples which illustrate situations when obedience became a blessing in disguise especially for the military men who just had to obey orders in order to keep them alive. (Milgram, Stanley as qtd in Zwygart, Ulrich). One of the invisible effects of suppression is that people hate the one who does the coercion. That is not the way to gain respect and draw out the obedience one needs from subordinates. Coercive power is based on fear in the leader and leads to external, temporary and negative control. This paper looks into the set-up in the army. Is there obedience given to superiors? Is due respect also exercised among each other? Or towards other people?

Carl Rogers once taught, "That which is most personal is most general (Ulrich)." For a while I could not understand this saying. That intrigued me no end. How can something be most personal also be most general? As I looked at the definition of leadership and influence, one comes to the realization that power and influence are literally as personal and as general as the

air we breathe. We are all in the business of influence. Influence is the most basic, most universal, and yet the most personal activity in life. Military history can influence young soldiers so that they will have more courage in the battlefield. They will also reflect on why some military leaders command respect and instant obedience while others elicit fear and hatred in their men. The key to true obedience is integrity and honor.

According to Stanley Milgram, “we are born with a potential for obedience, which then interacts with the influence of society to produce the obedient man.” (Milgram, Stanley as quoted in Zwygart, Ulrich Feb. 12 2008). However, this changes when he is placed in a context of a hierarchical structure. In this kind of set-up, he tends to define himself as a mere vehicle in demonstrating the wishes of his superiors. This is what soldiers and army men experience when faced with situations of whether to obey their bosses or not. Milgram aptly describes this process as characterized by inner doubt, externalization of doubt, dissent, threat and complete disobedience (Milgram, Stanley as qtd in Zwygart, Ulrich Feb. 12, 2008, 125).

Similarly, it is worth mentioning how Webster’s defines values as the “principles, standards or qualities considered worthwhile or desirable.” As I look into the military set-up, we find that it has a more distinct definition since values are “moral beliefs that shape a person’s behavior.” (Values in the Army). Even psychologists are convinced that what one believes in his heart and mind would eventually flow in one’s actions. I think this is what separates a good leader from an ordinary one.

A military leader connotes power. When we think of the word “leader” we usually think of the people who made a remarkable impact in our history. They are the ones who have the vision to guide people to have a dramatic change through time. Leaders pursue a mission in life to achieve a goal. They are usually idealists and sometimes radical, for their vision of a society.

Yet, as I look into a true leader's power, I think this emanates more from within and not so much because of his position.

In the military set-up, the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) is the bedrock of military law. The UCMJ is a federal law enacted by Congress. It contains guidelines on codes of conduct for soldiers and civilians working for the military. Some articles establish policy, assign responsibilities and prescribe procedures. In the same manner, it also contains punitive articles such as elements of the offense, an explanation, lesser included offenses, maximum permissible punishments and sample specifications.

Looking at Article 89 of the UCMJ, it states that, "disrespectful behavior is that which detracts from the respect due the authority and person of a superior commissioned officer. It may consist of acts or language, however expressed, and it is immaterial whether they refer to the superior as an officer or as a private individual. Disrespect by words may be conveyed by abusive epithets or other contemptuous or denunciatory language. Truth is no defense. Disrespect by acts includes neglecting the customary salute, or showing a marked disdain, indifference, insolence, impertinence, undue familiarity, or other rudeness in the presence of the superior officer." (Punitive Articles of UCMJ Feb. 12, 2008).

Looking at the "Army Regulations Adopted for the Use of the Army of the Confederate States," which was published in Richmond, Virginia in 1861, Section 244 reads: Courtesy among military men is indispensable to discipline. Respect to superiors will not be confined to obedience on duty, but will be extended to all occasions. It is always the duty of the inferior to accost or to offer first the customary salutation, and of the superior to return such complimentary notice. (Military Courtesy Feb. 12, 2008)

Discussing about the importance of respect in the military reminds readers of one great soldier, Alexander the Great, the most celebrated conqueror of the ancient world. He was born in 356 B.C., in Pella, the capital of Macedonia. When one studies the military history and comes upon leaders like him, then we can really say that studying military history is a crucial issue.

Alexander was only twenty years old when his father King Philip Macedon died. But he succeeded to the throne without difficulty. Philip had carefully prepared his son to succeed him, and the young Alexander already had considerable military experience. During his invasion of the Persian empire in 334 B.C. he had to leave part of his army at home to maintain control of his European possessions. Alexander had only 35,000 troops with him when he set out on his audacious quest – a very small force compared with the Persian armies. In spite of the numerical disadvantages, Alexander won a series of crushing victories over the Persian forces.

Examining his manner of leading his troop and eliciting obedience, I surmise that there were three main reasons for his success. In the first place, the army which Philip had left him was better trained and organized than the Persian forces. In the second place, Alexander was a general of outstanding genius, perhaps the greatest of all time. The third factor was Alexander's own personal courage, demeanor, obedience and respect. I discovered that although he would direct the early stages of each battle from behind the lines, Alexander's policy was to lead the decisive cavalry charge himself during the peak of battle. This was a risky procedure, and he was frequently wounded. But his troops saw that Alexander was sharing their danger, and was not asking them to take any risks that he himself would not take. The effect on their morale was enormous. Such is the stuff of real responsibility and commitment. Such is the stuff that earns one the respect and obedience that nobody can buy.

Indeed, the consequences of basing the power on fear are numerous. Sometimes the behavior just goes underground. What Alexander the Great did was an example requiring obedience without coercion of any kind. He knew that if people's negative feelings are elicited and then suppressed, they do not die, they hide, only to crop up at an inopportune time.

During World War I, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) trained four million men, one million of whom were sent overseas. Training was arduous. Training of military officers would have a requirement that one needs to tell the truth. There was a need for education and training. But because there was obedience emanating from true respect of orders and loyalty to the country, the soldiers were easily trained. The First World War proved a brutal struggle, with technology coming to the forefront. Gas warfare was introduced, the machine gun ended mounted charges, and airpower came of age. Victories were measured in yards gained per thousands of men lost. Though American forces saw limited action in comparison to British and French forces, it was the United States that tipped the balance of power in favor of the Allies.

Military service members need to respect and read military history every now and then and obey authority which is an important value in life. When one matches his words, feelings, thoughts and actions, with congruence and without duplicity, one elicits respect from others. To paraphrase Robert Louis Stevenson, a man worthy of respect cannot be perplexed or frightened. They go on in their own private pace, like a clock during a thunderstorm. In bringing this illustration to this essay, we could only imagine what it would mean if all the present-day soldiers in the army had the value of obedience because their superiors merited this from them. If military people live with true values, what they would radiate would be the capacity to influence others greatly. Their power will not vary. It will not fluctuate. It is not diluted. Others

do not have to wait us out or make apologies for them. Their officers need not make these excuses for them just to cover up their disobedience. "Perls. Frederick 1951".

In the army, sometimes rudeness is the insecure person's imitation of power. How do military Non-Commissioned officers (NCO) get their way? If one is not getting the results with their subordinates, some of them approach them with a threat, with the intent of making them do it. Chances are, they will respond in a compliant way at least in the presence of the superior. Yet the consequences of basing the power on fear are numerous. Sometimes the behavior just goes underground. People still do things one does not want but they don't do it when they are around. If people's negative feelings are elicited and then suppressed, they do not die; they hide. One of the invisible effects of suppression is that people hate the one who does the coercion. That is not the way to gain respect from subordinates. Coercive power is based on fear in the leader and in the followers and leads to external, temporary, negative control. In fact, during the Vietnam War, no general officers and only a few colonels chose to resign as a matter of ethical conviction. There were rare demonstrations of protests. Soldiers obeyed only because their officers were worth the respect and obedience. (Stockdale, James as qtd in Zwycart, Ulrich).

We have all on occasion excused unethical behavior on the grounds that the person who acted was suffering from psychological disturbance. Yet there is a taboo against believing that breaches of ethics can damage us psychologically. Since acts like disrespect and disobedience can affect the psyche, we must acknowledge this fact, even if people whom we consider naïve are opposed to disrespect for other reasons. If the real argument against disobedience is that it renews or intensifies fear of authority, can produce demoralization and muddy our own vision, we must not hesitate to oppose disobedience on the grounds that it is harmful to us. The simple truth is that we have not guarded against the decline of optimism and the losses of interest in life

unless we have adopted some carefully considered code of ethics and are working to uphold it (Baroch, Andrew).

Perhaps the biggest disservice to history lessons would come from the frequent association with a given set of military principles or doctrine and its interrelations with a set of military principles (Luvaas).

The study of how our actions affect us brings us inevitably to the need for a code of ethics. We cannot live without some value system; and for the sake of our own stability, we must adhere to the ethics dictated by whichever system we choose. Military history narrates important people who deserve being role models. In the end, military history is indeed something that military people can fall back and count as their teacher and mentor.

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