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### Abstract

This objective of this paper is to provide all Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) with valuable information for you to determine if Military History is Important or Not. After an extensive research I found it to be important to study Military History. Learning Military History composes a fundamental component of leadership development. By studying the past of the military, leaders at all levels will gain knowledge of military heritage, form mature leaders able to make better decisions based on past experiences, and learn about the evolution of our Army.

### Military History Important or Not

Military history became a subject of using examples from the past in ways to deal with current situations. It can be considered a useful tool to educate yourself at any given time during your career as an NCO with an interest in the history. The objective is to find out what happened and why it happened. You can find out why a specific war started, why one side wins and the other lost, how to avoid wars, etc. We shall all promote the studying of military history precisely because we wish to avoid repeating the same mistakes and overall to preserve our fellow Soldier lives.

Through the study of military history, an NCO can learn details of successful victories or failures in past wars. You will be better prepared and will have more knowledge on a potential foe and their tactics. By revising strategies used on past wars you can evaluate them and use what is considered a good practice and work on how to improve the not so good practices. Military history and leadership development are foundational concepts for NCOs. The study of military history will produce leaders that will use their critical thinking grounded on their military history background and as the basis for decision making.

Our first experience with history was in elementary school. The reality is that it was a compulsory course; which placed us on the unpleasant mode. By being in that mode you create sort of a shield that will prevent you from learning all the good information you can get from studying history. The study of history can be more enjoyable if you are not forced. Everything has a history. We cannot escape from the past. You need to keep in mind that your experience with the past means self knowledge and a way to improve your leadership development.

Skelton's (2000, ¶ 4) stated the following:

All the great commanders have benefited from a strong foundation in military history.

Consider the words of a few of the masters of war:

Military history, accompanied by sound criticism, is indeed the true school of war.

*-Jomini*

The study of military history lies at the foundation of all sound military conclusion and practice.

*-Alfred Thayer Mahan*

[History is] the most effective way of teaching war during peace.

*-Helmuth von Moltke ("the Elder")*

[T]he science of strategy is only to be acquired by experience and by studying the campaigns of the captains, Gustavus Adolphus, Turenne, and Frederick, as well as Alexander, Hannibal, and Caesar, have all acted upon the same principles.

*-Napoleon*

Only the study of history is capable of giving those who have no experience of their own a clear picture of what I have just called the friction of the whole machine.

*-Clausewitz*

History seems to repeat itself and leaders should study previous battles and conflicts and apply lessons learned to current and future operations. Events, environments, and situations may

not be the same, but the outcome and leaders actions and decisions may have a greater effect. If history does not repeat itself, the man is prone to make the same mistakes repeatedly. It obliges us to consider studying the past and to seek advice from dependable resources.

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it,"<sup>1</sup> The fact is that when a mistake is made but not severe enough to merit remembrance, the same mistake is bound to be repeated. By the same token when something really good happens it will be repeated as well hoping for the same result. Knowledge of the past is a key to understanding the present. It is important for us as Senior NCOs to study military history because we can identify how different leaders acted, what was behind their thought process, knowing others intelligence, to improve our knowledge, to help us understand how our Army changed and how we got to where we are now.

A comparison can be made with the current conflict in Iraq to the U.S. Counter Insurgency Operation in the Philippines. The U.S. helped the native defeat the Spanish occupation then refused to recognize their leaders. As a result the locals turned and conducted insurgency operations against the U.S. forces. We fought the Muslim and similar insurgency back then just like we are doing now in Iraq.

Compare our fate in Somalia to the British fate during the battle that started the revolution in Lexington, Massachusetts, when British Army tried to capture Samuel Adams and John Hancock that were considered War Lords at the time. The outcome off both conflict were similar.

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<sup>1</sup> George Santayana (December 16, 1863, Ávila – September 26, 1952, Rome), best known as an aphorist, and for this remark.

The outcome of the lack of support and how the U.S. military leaders and war planners underestimate the enemy during Korean War and Operation Somalia can be compared. U.S. Military leaders send the ill equipped and undermanned Task Force Smith to fight the North Korean Army. The U.S. Military leaders did the same in Somalia with the Ranger Task Force.

Some leaders think that history does not repeat itself. History often repeats itself, but it doesn't have to if one remembers such historical lessons. It is often argued that the Viet Nam War served as a model for fighting the "insurgency" in Iraq. However, evidence indicates that the Algerian war has in fact been a source of inspiration in devising counter-subversive strategies on the ground, and formulating justifications of torture at home. The US has undertaken similar strategies that have resulted in social and political problems in Iraq and at home that mirror those encountered by France in Algeria in 1954-62.

Let's take a look at another military occupation in the Middle East and what did the U.S. learned from it. It was the Israeli occupation of Lebanon in 1982 and the U.S. occupation of Iraq today. In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon to stop terrorist attacks against Israel. At first, the Israeli army was welcomed as liberator, but the war quickly turned into a series of guerilla style wars with insurgents attacking Israeli troops and the Israeli military hitting back hard and killing civilians in the process.

Whether one believes they are freedom fighters or terrorists, insurgents will always provoke a reaction when they attack the occupying force. As in most cases - from Baghdad to Gaza - the insurgents have positioned themselves in residential neighborhoods so that when the counter attack happens, it will kill some civilians as well. It's hard to avoid them. That, in turn, leads to support for the insurgency because when your neighbors are killed, you only see the

military power in your country in one way. We've seen the same thing in Gaza. Israeli forces have destroyed hundreds of homes that they say were being used by militants to attack Israeli soldiers. How can someone whose house was destroyed ever consider the occupier as anything but an enemy?

It is clear that by learning military history we would not have all the answer to our questions, it would not produce the solutions to all situations, nor can it guarantee victory in our career, but it can offer the basis for solving situations and career success. The truth about history depends from what source you are getting the information. Everyone can have their own interpretation. It all depends from where you are gathering the data, criticizing and evaluating the data, and presenting the material in a readable form. This step will assure you a good source document.

To end, the study of military history serves the purpose of enlightening you about past breakdowns that have protected our present liberty and security. Leaders at all levels who know what was attempted, and what results followed, are better able to act indeed with high priority situations. As your thought process grows, you will attempt to analyze critically, conceptualize creatively, and test theories. It will help you develop a better way of thinking and viewing things. At the level that you are, it shows the great importance of personality and honesty. Reexamining the past will give you more wisdom, understanding, and guidance. You need to study history in order to comprehend the present and gain direction for what is yet to come. The study of past wars refines the intelligence and develops point of view for existing situation and plan for what is yet to come.

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