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The Study of Military History

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### Abstract

The studying of military history is vital and extremely important for today's military professional. Military history should not be forgotten, but rather studied, learned, analyzed and incorporated into current situations that might save lives while fighting the War on Terror. One of the problems that military leaders fail to do is use lessons learned from past military conflicts. It is important to note that only a small amount of military professionals write or study military history. Civilian historians who have little effect on the lives of our Soldiers mostly study military history. The author of this essay will show why more military professionals should study and learn military history instead of depending on individuals who study history. Understanding the importance of studying history will allow leaders to implement protocol that could prove success in areas of operation.

## The Study of Military History

### Reason for Understanding History

I believe one of the main reasons for studying the past is to prevent or change events from reoccurring. Leaders have an obligation to understand the importance of history. We all should have a sense of responsibility when it comes to lessons learned from previous leaders and conflicts. In order for young leaders to enhance their core competencies, senior leaders must ensure that they have the necessary tools to assist with the growth of our young leaders. I believe one way for this to happen is for leaders to take the time and study history. This is so true when it comes to military history. Previous conflicts can teach us mistakes made by former leaders and assist with the implementation of new means to ensure that the same mistakes don't happen.

The current War on Terror has similarities of previous wars. We are currently fighting an enemy that we should easily conquer however, because of the tactics being used to fight the American Forces, the war has been ongoing for the past seven years. Vietnam should have taught us that sometimes you have to think the same way as your enemy. During this war, our forces took a lot of casualties because of the inability to subdue an enemy that had made it difficult to fight. The same happened to Russia when their forces invaded Afghanistan. How can you defeat an enemy in their own backyard without modifying your methods of battle?

Nevertheless, as time has past, our military has made significant adjustments in the manner in which, we have decided to deal with insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan. Although we have taken casualties, the total is nowhere near what we took in Vietnam and World War II. History has taught us that we need better medical practices and equipment to ensure safety for

our Soldiers while saving lives. I believe that the military senior leadership thought if they could defeat this one tactic, they could end insurgent operations. If military professionals had taken a look at how successful Lawrence of Arabia had been in his campaign, maybe they may have noticed ways to defeat insurgent forces. Many years ago, Lawrence of Arabia knew that a small insurgency using natural cover and mobility could keep foreign forces from obtaining their objectives with constant ambushes.

The hope of an enemy that has constantly fought with the intent of disrupting the U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the eyes of public view, there's an appearance that our military have underestimated the insurgents and didn't take into account that when we invaded Iraq, we would not only fight the Iraqi Army but insurgents that have their own agendas. How long can our military professional continue to fight this battle, without an unforeseen conclusion to the War on Terror? Although we are suffering casualties, we must continue the fight until the Iraqi government is able to carry its own weight.

#### Studying Past Mistakes and the Importance of Being Prepared

Preparation is the key to everything we do. As time goes by and another war is upon us, our military continues to overlook what our enemies are capable of bring to the fight. Our armed forces have downsized after every major conflict. Being unprepared for combat operations was a major factor in the unfortunate events that led to the 507<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Company ambush while on a convoy mission in Iraq. The inability to place the convoy on the correct route of travel and lack of training led to the death of approximately 11 Soldiers and POWs' like Jessica Lynch and Shoshana Johnson. The unit was very close to me because from 1998-2000, I was stationed at Fort Bliss and the 507<sup>th</sup> maintenance company was in my battalion. Senior leaders within the unit failed to ensure training and maintenance was a top priority

however, these leadership failures place the unit in an unsuccessful situation and showed that their war-time capabilities and ability to conduct missions was flawed.

### The Need for Reliable Intelligence

Why is reliable intelligence so important? Since the early days in our military history, poor intelligence, misunderstood intelligence, and incorrect intelligence has hindered wartime operations because of a communication breakdown. The rush to conflict and faulty intelligence has caused many American lives throughout history.

Let's take a look at miscommunication. The Battle of Iwo Jima was suppose to have two concepts, which was to put our forces in a tactical advantage over the Japanese Army. However, a failure to communicate with higher suggested that if the United States sieges Iwo Jima, it would probably place the advantage card in Japan's court and further jeopardize any mainland invasion. Before the invasion commenced, Major General Schmidt of the Marines requested ten days of continuous bombing. Nevertheless, this request went unfulfilled by senior leadership. On another occasion, MG Schmidt requested nine days however; he was provided with minimal naval support while the Marines initiated amphibious landing on the shores of the Japan. Unreliable intelligence and support from higher place the Marines in a battle that cause major casualties because of Japan's superior weapon systems.

This miscalculation of Kuribayshi's aggressive defense led to the Marines suffering major casualties at the hand of the Japanese forces. This was by far, one of the deadliest battles of World War II for the Marines. The demise of the Marines during the Battle of Iwo Jima wasn't only because of a good defense by the enemy but a failure by senior military and civilian officials who didn't understand the importance of conquering Iwo Jima. Eventually, the atomic bomb would be dropped on Hiroshima, which would lead to the surrender of the Japanese

Empire. The actions of leaders and communication failure would lead historians to debate why so much blood was shed during this battle and the entire WWII campaign.

Today, society is facing some of the same questions when it comes to the current War on Terror. History is a tool to assist with decisions and implementation of course of actions however, the Battle of Iwo Jima may not have been worth the lives of American Soldiers and now the same is being said about the lives lost in Iraq and Afghanistan. We don't have to wait for historians to analyze the War on Terror and conflicts of the past but one thing is for sure, although improvements has been made, we continue to the same mistakes. No matter how long it takes, I hope that the future military professionals take the time to study this history and learn from it.

## Conclusion

It is a must that military professional take the time to study history, it shapes the way our key leaders and decision makers think about our nations wars. Leaders must study and have a clear understanding of past battles and history in order to be an integral part of the teaching process. The American public also learns from this history. Today's senior leaders should have a vivid understanding of the past, which comes from history and experience. Our military has been fighting wars for over 200 plus years and have made giant strides however, if our leaders do not sit back and look at the whole picture of war prior to execution, our junior leaders will constantly fall through the cracks. Nevertheless, if leaders decide to study, analyze, and learn from past military history, many costly mistakes, and the lost of lives can be prevented.