

Essay Outline

The Importance of Studying Military History

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Outline

I. Thesis: In reading military history, we gather information that gives us a better perspective on the reasons we do the things we do. It also has a more profound objective in educating us in what not to do. Military history provides leaders the resources that may assist them in their decision making process.

II. Why Study Military History

A. Learn from our mistakes to prevent from repeating them

1. TF Smith

- a. Overestimated unit's own ability
- b. Underestimated the enemy

B. Improve upon

1. Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)

- a. Insurgency increased when troops departed
- b. Go and Stay philosophy

C. Provides us a better understanding

1. How we became a nation

- a. Not everything we did was right
- b. Positive outcomes

- III. Negative outcomes from the study of military history
 - A. Glamorization of war
 - i. Media-centric society
 - B. Media and technology allows for more accuracy in documenting military actions

- IV. Conclusion

Lieutenant Colonel Charles B. Smith, the Commanding Officer of 1st Battalion, 21st Regiment, 24th Infantry Division was tasked to set up a defensive position covering the road between the cities of Suwon and Osan in order to delay the North Korean People's Army's (NKPA) advancement to Pusan. According to General MacArthur, "that arrogant display of strength" would fool the North Koreans into believing that they were facing a larger force. Some officers were overconfident and believed that the Task Force (TF) would delay the NKPA advancement simply because they (NKPA) realized who their opponent was. Together with part of the 52d Field Artillery Battalion the total number of soldiers, most of whom had no combat experience equaled 540 soldiers. Compared to the 1,100 North Korean soldiers, LTC Smith was vastly outnumbered and ill equipped. Peacetime cutbacks after World War II prevented equipment upgrades and supply shortages rendered some equipment useless.

On July 5, 1950 at 0700, Task Force Smith soldiers began to see enemy movement and by 1430 on that same day, LTC Smith was forced to withdraw. Ineffective ammunition had little to no effect on the NKPA-owned Soviet tanks, and shell and machine gun fire forced TF Smith soldiers to abandon their positions, equipment, and their fallen comrades. On July 6, 1950, LTC Smith arrived at Ch'onan and realized 186 of his soldiers were killed, wounded or missing, or captured.

Further assessment of TF Smith and the Battle of Osan brought to light significant deficiencies that led to the failure at Osan. After World War II, vast cutbacks in funding and military personnel set the stage to leave LTC Smith and his higher headquarters, the Far East Command with major personnel shortages, including shortages of trained soldiers. Reductions in funding led to outdated and unserviceable weapons and vehicles. Shortages were so considerable that some men were not afforded boots. It was later found that training both at the unit and at individual troop levels were not emphasized. Furthermore, arrogance by senior American officers led to the underestimation of the strength and capabilities of the NKPA. The lack of

credible operational and strategic intelligence combined with poor operational planning led to the failure at Osan.

The analysis of events that took place at TF Smith has since led to changes throughout the ranks of our armed forces. Individual and unit training now take precedence over occupational duties. In addition, the importance of adequate logistical support is emphasized. Even with the military downsizing that occurred in the 1990s, senior officials utilized the basic principles learned from TF Smith and President Clinton vowed in his inaugural speech to maintain “the best-trained, best-equipped, best-prepared fighting force in the world. To fulfill that pledge, we must keep it the focus of our effort throughout the planning, programming, and budgeting process.”² However, the most memorable reference to the impact of the events at Task Force Smith was the frequent use of the quote by General (Retired) Gordon R. Sullivan during his tenure as Army Chief of Staff. His deliberate use of the “no more Task Force Smiths” statement was to drive home the importance of proper operational planning (in peacetime and wartime) and accurate assessment of the enemy in order to prevent a repeat of the tragedies at Task Force Smith.³

Another objective that is met when we study military history is that we are able to improve upon past actions. In today’s Army, the improvement process is a daily recurring event and it occurs from the most junior Private to the most senior levels of military leadership at the Pentagon. Progress is not made strictly from failures. Each training evolution, each battle scenario, each battlefield objective needs to be broken down to its most basic components in order to determine what tasks should be improved upon. We have built the most powerful military in the world today on those same principles.

² <http://www.fas.org/man/docs/bur/part02.htm>

³ http://www.quartermaster.army.mil/oqmg/professional_bulletin/1996/Spring/tfsmith.html

In 2003, the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), convinced that the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD), vied for United Nations support of an attack on Iraq. By March 2003, US and UK forces began an aerial attack on the city of Baghdad, Iraq and thus began Operation Iraqi Freedom. American and UK troops rapidly overtook the Iraqi military and by April of 2003, the city of Baghdad fell. Throughout the country of Iraq, the American and British military successes were swift and numerous. By May 2003, President Bush (though regrettably), announced the war in Iraq was a “Mission Accomplished.”⁴ In the years that followed, there would be spikes in regional conflicts within Iraq. Due to US and Coalition troop drawdown and the asymmetrical war waged by insurgents on Coalition Forces the result was an all-time high number of attacks on and deaths of American soldiers and Iraqi civilians.⁵

It was necessary for the Bush Administration to rethink their strategies to continue the fight in Iraq. In January 2007, President Bush announced his intention to surge 21,500 troops back to Iraq. The objective had evolved from the protection of Iraqi civilians and training the new Iraqi military to defend itself, to a long-term goal of enabling the Iraqi government to sustain itself and to create an ally in the Global War on Terror (GWOT). There was no possibility of meeting those goals without the addition of more troops.

Due to the unconventional nature of the Global War on Terror and the characteristics of the enemy, it is now recognized that meeting short-term goals alone will not guarantee success. Long-term goals of stabilization and sustainment by local governments and its allies must be well thought out and executed in order to facilitate future victories in the GWOT. This “Go and Stay” philosophy continues to be carried out today. The United States has actively and methodically

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq_War#cite_note-blix-52

⁵ http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/july-dec06/iraq_12-19.html

increased its dialogues and cooperation with host nations where the enemy is known to reside in order to equip those nations to eliminate the enemy in the short-term and to prevent its reappearance in the long-term; a hard lesson-learned from the struggles during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Throughout our lifetimes, we immerse ourselves in history, sometimes by choice and sometimes we are immersed in history by fate. During our school years, we are forced to study the actions of our nation's founding fathers and the outcomes of famous battles. However, to what gain? Peter N. Stearns put it best when he stated "Major aspects of a society's operation, like mass elections ...or military alliances, cannot be set up as precise experiments. Consequently, history must serve, however imperfectly, as our laboratory...and people need to have some sense of how societies function simply to run their own lives."⁶ In other words, we must understand where we came from before we can understand where we are going.

As we analyze the history of our military and the epic battles that we have waged, the most common points scrutinized are the mistakes, failures, or challenges. Despite what we as Americans would like to believe about our history, not everything we did, as a military force was right. What is best recalled about the Battle of Little Bighorn or the Battle of Mogadishu? The most common answers are lost battles or flawed invasions. In the Battle of Little Bighorn General Custer refused to take the advice or the aid of his peers and was massacred by the Lakota-Cheyenne combined force. Today, military panels and boards consisting of top military officials convene to ensure checks and balances and to remove any wiggle room for senior military leaders to "refuse" advice or aid. The Battle of Mogadishu taught us the significance of

⁶ <http://www.historians.org/>

knowing the country, the culture, and the language as necessities for military operations.⁷ It is with these and countless other lessons learned that military leaders can evaluate and anticipate battle outcomes and the challenges therein and what makes us a better force today.

It is safe to say that opposition or disdain for war is a common theme. However, there is strong evidence that war can produce peaceful or positive outcomes. Despite ongoing conflict, the US-led war in Iraq has ended a decades-long tyranny of torture and genocide carried out by Saddam Hussein's regime. World War II brought about the liberation of hundreds of thousands of Jewish and Polish citizens from "death camps" aimed at the genocide of their race by the Nazis. World War II also produced enormous technological advances, including advances in American military aircraft and created new opportunities for and views of women in the workplace.⁸ In addition, the American Civil War led to the abolition of slavery.⁹ Therefore, in conjunction with the study of the reasons for conflict in our military history it is just as important to study the outcomes, both positive and negative.

On the other hand, are there negative consequences to studying American military history? History lessons in the classroom are forever changed. The technology that exists today has enabled us to remain informed of events in our history and current events as never before. Our society is engulfed in news tickers, internet blogs, and newsworthy events have become media sensations. Operation Iraqi Freedom demonstrated unprecedented levels of press coverage and put viewers on the front lines with the troops. However, the sanitized images presented on millions of television screens did not accurately reflect the brutality and gruesome events that

⁷ <http://www.ndu.edu/inss/books/Books%20-%201990%20to%201995/Somalia%20Lessons%20Learned%20Jan%2095/allardch1.html>

⁸ <http://www.rosietheriveter.org/>

⁹ http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/emancipation_proclamation/

took place on the battlefield. Manufacturers of video war-games such as games that simulate World War II battles have made hundreds of millions of dollars. This has caused impressionable young Americans to develop a false sense for what combat really entails and to fall victim to the glamorization of war. Studying the great battles in America's history can be easily misinterpreted into arrogance concerning our victories in combat.

Technological advances have also allowed for the quick and accurate documentation of our military actions. While generally seen as progress, these advances also make it more difficult to carry on military operations with any sort of secrecy. Media networks are able to broadcast live from remote locations and can expose or disrupt military operations. Internet connectivity allows for worldwide coverage in a matter of seconds. It is difficult for a government to dispute the occurrence of a covert military operation when it is aired on television and computer screens across the globe. People from across the globe rely on the internet and what is classified as "history" can be taken out of context especially when photos of the event are posted on public websites. Negative views of the military and its actions and then be propagated throughout the world with the greatest of ease and can be manipulated into propaganda as being "history."

However, regardless of any one individual's perception of our military history, it is difficult to dispute that there are no greater contributions to our future successes than the study of our military past. By studying history, we are able to gain knowledge about how our society and those societies around us were formed. Guidelines and principles of warfare based on those societal and cultural relationships can then be generated in the event that war is inevitable. Lessons learned from past battles are taken into account and new policies are put into place to prevent repeat mistakes. History also reveals how soldiers will react in battle and has generated a society of military leaders consumed with the concern for the well-being of the modern soldier. It also demonstrates how citizens will act in response to war. As a citizen, military history broadens your appreciation for what it has taken to become such a great nation. As a soldier, military

history is what shapes you and what defines what you will become. However, more importantly, the life that a soldier leads and the great challenges that he/she faces and overcomes are what the annals of history are filled with.