

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO STUDY HISTORY

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Abstract

This paper will discuss why it is important for military professionals to study history. I will discuss the relationship between core skills in communication, problem solving, evaluating, and analyzing and how they will be improved by studying history and understanding how experiences from past conflicts will better prepare soldiers for the future. I will relate these issues to the conflicting situations of Task Force Smith, SGT York, and Bravo Company 1/7th Cavalry.

Why it is important to study history

It is important for military professionals to study history in order to improve core skills in communication, problem solving, and evaluating. History has been a point of reference for many military conflicts over the years. Military professionals constantly urge familiarity with history at every level of the Non Commissioned Officer Education System. The basis for current military functions and operations are developed based on historical experiences. Author Antulio Echeverria argued in the book *The Trouble with History*,

“Soldiers expect too much from the discipline. Instead of trying to draw lessons or gain vicarious experience from what are really just interpretations of the past, military professionals should instead primarily use history as another tool to develop higher-level thinking skills.”

Communication is one of the key steps to leader development. Leader’s communication skills are improved when the leader can relay and relate information to superiors, peers, and subordinates by use of analytical thoughts derived from historical data that relate to current and past situations in order to provide a better understanding of a technique, tactic, or procedure. I believe it is important that a leader be reflective in order to lead, train and motivate soldiers. Good leadership is developed from leaders who have learned from their past mistakes which have offered an opportunity of better understanding. Leaders can take the lessons from the past and use them while communicating with Soldiers as a development tool to heighten a Soldiers level of thinking. It is often shown that the study of history assists in the development and improvement of basic writing and over all communication skills.

Leaders must be knowledgeable on an acceptable level of military history in order to perform problem solving measures. A certain amount of knowledge is required to conduct problem solving or aide soldiers in solving issues. A historical prospective provides knowledge in acceptable phases of the past and offer different perspectives which will lend to the flexibility necessary in difficult situations which may be evaluated using problem solving techniques. According to many regulations some of the road blocks to the military problem solving process are failure to talk with soldiers who have experience in the particular area or with the situation being evaluated and absence of adequate information that could be helpful in the process. Both of these road blocks could be solved or assessed by researching historical data or historical experiences. The processes basis is to prevent repeating past experiences or reliving situations with limited end states.

Leader's use the process of evaluating to determine what happened, why it happened, and what can be done to make it better. It is very important to determine what effects a certain issue or action may have on soldiers. This evaluation is only effective if it is compared to something that has already happened and the possibilities of what may happen. The evaluation process is used to compare solutions in a number of situations. The military use different venues to evaluate people and situations. When it comes to leadership and NCO promotions the evaluation report is the tool used. These evaluations are uses to let a soldier know their current standing as well as to determine if soldiers are ready for an increase in responsibility and leadership. These evaluation projections are based on historical data that has determined what the army expects of a leader and aide in assisting a soldier as a development tool.

Our core skills in evaluation have been improved based on assessments from past military involvement. After evaluating the misfortune of Task Force Smith it has been assessed and determined that the Task Force could not have been more effective with the ancient equipment and minimum training they had access to. It has since been determined that the lack of hydraulic fluid for the M24 light tanks and the inability to move them by cargo planes or by sea to protect them from firepower aided in their inability to use this piece of equipment effectively during the battle. Due to the hodge podge mode of travel used to get the barely operable equipment into country only aided in it being useless and ineffective by the time they were ready to use it. I believe this evaluation has led to the care and training of soldiers prior to deployment. TTPs were developed to ensure there is a basic preparation measure in place to protect soldiers and provide success on the battlefield. Their premature actions during ambush led to a pursuit that they were ill prepared to complete. Task Force Smiths ultimate mission was to delay the enemy until a greater force arrived. Some historians see Task Force Smith as a failure, but if it had not been for their ability to delay the enemy the North Koreans would have gone straight to Pusan untouched and the war would have ended in North Koreas favor. Historically we have learned to be better prepared and better trained soldiers in order to be successful in completing our missions.

1/7 Cavalry's inability to secure an operational advantage of position led to their close combat fighting at Landing Zone X-Ray. According to FM 3-0 close combat has one purpose which is to decide the outcome of a battle and engagement. Close combat is used to defeat or destroy enemy forces, or seizes and retains ground. The initial plan was to move a reconnaissance force into the vicinity of Chu Pong Mountain to test the intelligence with specific orders not to take the mountain. LTC Moore's initial plan for LZ X-Ray was to move Bravo and

Alpha Company's northwest of the creek bed, and move Charlie Company just south of the base of the mountain. Delta Company would be used as the reserve and the center of the LZ would be LTC Moore's command post. Less than 2 hours after their arrival and before any forces were in place, the first shots were fired. In the aftermath of the battle 234 soldiers had been killed while 242 had been wounded. LZ X-Ray is known as the deadliest ambush in the Vietnam War.

Historically we learned from this battle that a combination of air and artillery firepower is a very effective mean of tactics. The North Vietnamese learned that close contact fighting with the American forces was a mitigating factor of that tactic.

SGT Alvin York was a World War I hero who was awarded the Medal of Honor for his brave acts while leading an attack on a German machine gun position. SGT York killed 28 German soldiers and captured 132 during the U.S. led Meuse Argonne Offensive in France. SGT York's contribution to history includes his ability to trust amidst doubt and adversity. This was his display of personal courage which we have embraced as our Army Values.

In closing, leaders have studied the actions and strategies used by past leaders in order to avoid mistakes and capitalize on that history in order to prevent recreation of past mistakes and train and lead a better trained and equipped force. History is indispensable and is often the justification for current and future actions of military leaders. Without history we would not be equipped to offer information and compare past and current conflicts to determine the best possible course of action to take in numerous situations. Without history we would not have the means to evaluate our performance and possibilities at war if there is no data to use in comparison. Information on historical facts is often used to improve core skills in communication, problem solving, and evaluating.

References

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