

Running head: THE PREPAREDNESS OF THE U.S. MILITARY AT THE OUTBREAK OF  
HOSTILITIES

The preparedness of the U.S. military at the outbreak of hostilities

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## Outline

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### **Abstract**

The United States military primary focus is to fight and win the nation's wars. During the times of peace, the military has been dramatically reduced to save money from the cost of war. The Army has found itself in difficult situations at times at the beginning of conflicts after a reduction in force. This paper will show what happens when a nation becomes complacent during the time of peace.

## The preparedness of the U.S. military at the outbreak of hostilities

The United States has always focused on maintaining a strong and robust military to fight and win its nations wars. However, at certain points throughout the United States history the United States military has been faced with difficult challenges at the beginning of hostilities. This paper will take a closer look at two wars in which the United States military were not adequately prepared for and the outcome of the events. The two wars are the Korean War and Operation Iraqi Freedom I.

America is again in the middle of another upcoming Presidential election year. As always part of the candidates, main theme is national defense and the economy. All of the candidates are preaching the same message; we must continue to maintain a tough and ready military force. The message is always quite clear, however sometime the nation tend to forget some of the experiences of the past. History has proven time after time that when America feels the safest, the military is reduced because of budget constraints. Today, the United States military is attempting to grow, transform, and fight our nation's war all simultaneously.

The United States took their time getting involved in World War II. World War II was a huge success for the United States people and their military. The United States Soldiers entered the war and fought valiantly. The United States Soldiers were welcomed home as heroes, the pride of the United States. The United States government and people became complacent. It is common to live off previous successes, but we must remember the successes of the past were due to being prepared for and accomplishing the mission.

On the US side, the nation's military was still in the throes of the post-World War II drawdown, going from a force of 12 million to congressionally mandated force strength of 1,070,000 from 1945 to 1947. (Task Force) In fact, by June 1950, unit strengths for combat units

had fallen to 48.8 percent, and combat service support units had sunk to 25.9 percent. Only five years following the end of World War II, the United States was on the brink of getting involved in the war in Korea. Even though, the intelligence reports stated that North Korea was planning on invading South Korea, the United States military leaders did not believe the North Koreans would invade the south. To the United States surprise, North Korea began moving their Army south into South Korea. President Harry S. Truman ordered the commitment of United States ground forces to South Korea to help stop the North Korean invasion. General Douglas MacArthur ordered the Eighth Army's 24th Infantry Division from Ford Wood, Japan, to Pusan, Korea. Named for its commander, LTC Charles B. "Brad" Smith, Task Force Smith was assembled June 30 and then trucked to C-54 aircraft at nearby Itazuke Air Base for flight beginning at 0845 on July 1. This initial commitment of US ground troops in the Korean War consisted of two under strength rifle companies, half a battalion headquarters company, half of a communications platoon, a 75-mm recoilless rifle platoon with two guns, and two 4.2-inch mortars. In addition, the two rifle companies had six 2.36-inch bazooka teams and four 60-mm mortars. Each man carried 120 rounds of .30-caliber ammunition and two days of C-Rations. (Task Force)

The morale of the troops in Task Force Smith was high as well as the American people. Everyone figured the North Korean troops invading South Korea would buckle at the thought of American forces coming to the aide of the South Korean people. General MacArthur had called this small, ill-equipped unit an "arrogant display of strength." Like everyone else, the general thought that the mere presence of US troops would "chill the enemy commander into taking precautionary and time-consuming" actions. (Task Force) After the arrival of Task Force Smith in Pusan, Korea, the South Korean people gave them a warm greeting. Task Force Smith was

quickly sent to the front lines near Osan, Korea to slow down the North Korean Army advance while the rest of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division try to get settled. Colonel Smith found an excellent area to setup his Task Force. Around 8:00 a.m. on a rainy July 5, a North Korean division supported by tanks attacked the Americans. Task Force Smith lacked antitank mines, the fire of its recoilless rifles and 2.36-inch rocket launchers failed to penetrate the T-34 armor, and the artillery battery quickly fired its six antitank rounds. (American) As the North Korean Forces approached they drove their tanks right through Task Force Smith's positions cutting the single lines of communication. Colonel Smith had to use runners to communicate with the units, and he had lost communication with the artillery unit. Unfortunately, the United States forces were outnumbered and overwhelmed by the North Korean forces.

Faced with being overrun and caught between the North Korean troops and tanks in the rear, LTC Smith ordered a phased withdrawal beginning with Company C on the right flank. Company B, holding the left flank position and straddling the main road through which the tank attack came, saw the withdrawal of Company C and began to fall back on its own. The withdrawal turned into a rout with soldiers stumbling through the rice paddies and abandoning weapons and equipment. Of the 406 Task Force Smith soldiers who started the battle, only 185 could be mustered a week later after reaching friendly lines. (Task Force)

Evidence shows that Task Force Smith's mission was doomed from the start. The United States Army had been downsized considerably, and the lack of combat experienced personnel did not set the Task Force up for success.

Again, in the early 1990's another dictator decided to take his Army south to claim land that he presumed was his. Iraq surprised the world when they invaded Kuwait. The United

States quickly went to the Kuwaiti aide. In August 1990, the United States deployed the first of its forces to Saudi Arabia to help push back the Iraqi military. Fortunately, during President Ronald Reagan years, he concentrated on building the military. The United States military was presumably ready for this war. The United States military took the next several months building up their presence in Saudi Arabia preparing the strategy to push back the Iraqi Army. The United States military had roughly about 550,000 personnel deployed in the area of operation (AOR). Many of these units spent an enormous amount of time sitting in the desert awaiting the word to move north. Once the actual ground war started, the United States military only faced small pockets of resistance. Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm ended rather quickly. The American people rejoiced and celebrated the return of the troops.

Once again, after a conflict and a large scale build up of the country's Armed Forces, the military was faced with another reduction in force. Throughout the 1990's the Army offered Soldiers money for early out options. Many of the Army's highly trained Soldiers took advantage of early out or the fifteen year early retirement. After the attack in New York City on September 11, 2001, the American forces were deployed to Afghanistan in search of Bin Laden. Only two years later, the United States military forces were again called upon for Operation Iraqi Freedom I.

The 507<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Company from Fort Bliss, Texas was attached to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division from Fort Stewart, Georgia. The 507<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Company crossed over into Iraq as the last 33 vehicles as part of a 600 vehicle convoy. Their mission was to follow the convoy and assist in recovering vehicles. The unit spent countless hours recovering heavy vehicles stuck in the sand. Part of the unit was separated from the main convoy while they were recovering vehicles.

The commander of the 507<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Company decided to tell his Lieutenant to continue on with the convoy with all the available vehicles, while he waited for the rest of his company to catch up. Once the commander had control of the rest of his unit, he continued on highway 8 toward Baghdad. When the commander arrived at a critical point in the convoy when he was supposed to turn left, he decided to continue on highway 8.

The convoy traveled through Nasiriyah and observed armed civilians but none of the people fired at the soldiers, the report said. King led the convoy out of the city and realized he was off the route they were supposed to take, and after conferring with 1st Sgt. Robert J. Dowdy, he decided to retrace the route through the city. (Cruz) After the unit turned around to reenter the city, they were hit several times. Unfortunately, because of the size of the vehicles they became split into three groups. The first two groups managed to fight and get through the obstacles that were placed in front of them. However, the soldiers did complain about numerous weapons malfunctions. The third group of vehicles with the First Sergeant was all longer and heavier vehicles. This group encountered many mishaps, and found it more difficult to maneuver. All of the soldiers in the 507<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Company fought bravely during the 60 to 90 minute battle.

Both of these wars occurred at the time when the United States military were downsizing their forces. The military had lost the majority of their combat experienced Non-Commissioned Officers through the reduction in forces (RIF). The results of these early battles were unpreparedness and loss of life.

## References

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