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Should We Study Military History?

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Abstract

Military history is science very important in life and development of every senior NCO. We can learn a lot from history, but also we can repeat old mistakes. I'll try to present to you both sides of my view what should military history means to me.

### Should We Study Military History?

Why should we learn military history when this is 21<sup>st</sup> century? It won't be a first time to hear something similar from our junior NCO's and Soldiers. Maybe they are right, but on the other hand what that "Nintendo generation" knows about life? I can tell you, a lot. They already had seen one war and some of them participated in the other, global war on terror, but to return on my topic, how does military history affect their minds? Now, we are coming to exactly where I want to go – Croatian history.

*WW 2 in former Yugoslavia (Croatian Territory) 1941. – 1945.*

We have two sides of that part of Croatian history; therefore it won't be hard to write from opposite viewpoints. One part was written by winners of WWII on these territories, Yugoslav communist party and their supporters, and the other one was product of looser side, Croatian nationalists and pro-Nazi oriented Croats. I can't say which side has correct opinion about real events of that time, but for young soldier is important to consider both viewpoints, and then he/she should decide what's closer to truth.

But, we immediately have another question; why should a Croatian soldier should know some things which occurred more than 60 years ago and which can have negative impact on him/her as person? I'll try to describe events which happened in those days from different sources and as I was taught history back in days.

After the German invasion of Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941., The Independent State of Croatia was established under leadership of dr Ante Pavelic, Croatian emigrant in Italy, backed by Hitler and Mussolini. A territorial look of new state was not even close to modern state (Republic of Croatia), under agreement with fascist Italy Croatia lost all coastline and islands, with exception of small portion under Velebit Mountain, but took whole Bosnia and Herzegovina

instead. Immediately after establishment of state, the Croatian armed forces were established – Croatian Home Defense consisting of Army, Navy, Air force, Gendarmerie, Railway Security and Labor Service. Nationalist party “Ustase” also formed all volunteer forces, Croatian version of Waffen SS. After all, those forces were defeated and betrayed from their leadership who were interested only how to protect and expand their wealth, so that above mentioned gentleman who ruled Croatia during those years fled to Franco Spain, and left his loyal people and army to face communist vengeance.

On the other hand, the communist party organized uprising against Nazi’s under leadership of Josip Broz “Tito”. They organized armed forces on a similar way as Soviet Red Army was organized, but unable to achieve decisive victory in open conflict, communist decided to adopt guerilla tactics hit and run.

Who won in the WWII is well known, but consequences at Balkans are present today. Long struggle between Croats and Serbs culminate every couple of years, so that’s why is important to know history from both sides, sometimes it’s conflict of ideologies, sometimes of religion, but most important is to say that all those stories are bedtime stories for narrow minded masses. Regimes from both sides collecting wealth on behalf of those conflicts, but population is still blinded with so called “nationalism”. But, WW2 on Croatian territory wasn’t only conflict between Axis and Allies, it was also war between Croats with different ideologies pro-nazi and pro-communist, sometimes brothers were on different sides, or father and son, and most likely relatives. What’s maybe important to stress is that communists recognized role of women in combat, so Croatian women participated in combat equally with men.

*Homeland war (Croatia 1991. – 1995.)*

Let's go a little bit further, shall we compare all above mentioned with latest war in former Yugoslavia. Three people with associates divided Yugoslavia during 1990. All three are dead now, but consequences of last conflict are still present. If you ever ask member of different entity, every one of them will have different story about beginning of the war. Croat will tell you one side of story, Serb other and Bosnian third version. All of them are same in one, we didn't start, they did.

I was active member of events in those days, and I can give you my side of story, but it will be Croatian side of story and if I am concerned that story is true, and I'll repeat that story to young soldiers and NCOs endless number of times.

Like every other war according my opinion this one was totally unnecessary. We could separate obsolete communist federation like Czech and Slovaks did, peacefully and without bloodshed, but no, Serbian leadership started to arm civilian ethnicity in Croatia, provocations started and within hours we had open conflict with first casualties. Paramilitary Serbian formations took every opportunity to attack Croatian civilian police and to kill couple of police officers. Those events forced us to form our armed forces and confront with better equipped enemy. Army of former Yugoslavia stood openly and firmly at the side of rebel Serbians within borders of Republic of Croatia. According to some sources that was fourth army in the Europe of those days, but nationally divided that army couldn't be efficient same as first days of Hitler's aggression back in 1941. Croatian people finally united, without ideological division, and more determinate and resolve than ever before in our history, fight and won that war against terrorist. I said terrorist because they intentionally attacked civilian targets with heavy artillery and planes, and we didn't, nonetheless there were those who spoke in favor attacking civilian targets in

Serbia. Luckily, it never happen, because Croatian soldier, I mean real Croatian soldier knows words honor, honesty and pride.

### *Conclusion*

If you want to check the other side of coin, there are many sites on internet, published books and newspaper articles which are totally different from my history lesson written above. As your leaders mentioned hundred of times, tell your story, I'm telling as active participant of those events. And you are participants in terrible war on terror, so I believe that your story is the same, because one day, not far from now it will be history. I'm also fighter against terrorism and my participation in Afghanistan speaks in favor of that.

Now, I believe that this story explained to you events on Balkans. That's history and history repeats itself, can we disregard that? And we, as a man kind, are good in repeating mistakes from past. As a soldier I'm asking you, should we read and research military history and overall history? Yes, we should, we can learn a lot from history, but that heavy burden of wrong legacy which our forefathers left to us could also crush us. I can not pass further and not to mention Germany and excellent job they did with their heavy burden from history. I hope that same will happen in Balkans in the future and there will never be war like that again, but history tells me otherwise.

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