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Study of Military History

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Abstract

The study of military history is paramount in the planning, training and institutional schooling of our Soldiers at all ranks. History has served our Officer Corps well in all phases of operations but has less than notable presences in our Non Commissioned Officer (NCO) Corps. With the current Global War on Terror Operations the battles are being waged at the junior NCO level and we have an obligation to train these NCOs on the study of military history. This will ensure that we do not make the same mistakes that have been made in the past. Our NCOs need this training in the NCO education systems to ensure the seamless transitions of the modular battles being fought.

Study of Military History

Why should we teach and study military history? As a leader in the military, I feel military history should not only be taught to our leaders, but also to our Soldiers throughout their military career, so we have a better understanding of what happened in the past and not repeat the same errors in the future. Further, I also feel it should be taught in civilian academic schools, so our Nation as a whole has a better understanding on why the military leaders take the action that they take and why it is so important to take action. In addition, education on military history is important for civilians in order to assist the military and make informative decisions especially during a time of war or a national crisis.

Military history is not just a school study, military history molds the way ahead that our leaders follow during times of crisis or war time situations. Military history is used to make decisions almost on a daily basis and without the knowledge of military history how can Soldiers and leaders make informative decisions that will affect the future of our country. An example of using military history to make a decision happened during a leaders huddle after the attack on the United States September 11, 2001. The plan was to attack Afghanistan. US intelligence did not want to use ground forces because of the riots that came during the British invasions in Afghanistan in the 19th century. These uprisings also happened in Afghanistan during USSR invasion during 1979. On a routine basis, leaders talk about how to work issues that are happening in OIF, sometimes by citing history lessons or things that have happened in the past to help current operations; (2006, Kagan).

During our current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, leaders in the Army have implemented a just in time approach to history in these areas of operation. Our deploying units receive culture awareness training (often taught by a Soldier in the unit and not an expert of the culture) and a

country hand book that is usually handed to the Soldier just prior to boarding the plane en route to the area of operation. This type of education is a quick fix to a major problem. These Warriors need to know what they are up against, from the years to centuries of ethnic fighting to knowledge of who is in charge of a village to the city or clan.

Military history encompasses all of what happens in history down to the fights between the gangs of Bloods and the Crisps to the current struggle with the Sunni and Shiites in the Global War on Terror. Military history offers the past knowledge of people and how they fight, live, and why societies do what they do. As leaders we can use this history to change the way that we operate to look back into the past and not make the same mistakes or hard lessons learned that our predecessors did during past conflicts. At this point we can learn how to implement change; (2007, Wikipedia).

Military history also provides leaders and Soldiers with institutional memory and shows how troops perform in battle. It provides a sense of direction, reveals patterns, trends and relationships necessary for doctrine development and doctrine change. And finally, it provides a method to take a look into the past in order to make sound decisions for the future. Past history has been known to provide intelligence on decision making information for the ground tactical commander in the field and has been know to assist the staffs in the military decision making process. With some focus during the operational planning and order phases, we can ensure that are Soldiers on the ground have knowledge on past tactics, techniques and procedures of the local populace as well as the enemy.

During the course of many years the study of military history changed within the Army among the Officer Corps. During World War II, military leaders studied past operations during their military education classes. After World War II, the study of military history started to

decline. This occurred because the study topics broadened so greatly that the region the leader was required to study and due to the changes in technology the study of the past experience was considered irrelevant. In military schools today, military history became a matter of using examples from the past in courses dealing with current problems instead of studying history in detail; (2007, Wikipedia).

In 1970, Brigadier General Hal Pattison, Chief of Military History at West Point voiced his concern to General Westmoreland, the Army Chief of Staff, he expressed his concern of the change of course at the academy from a history perspective to one based on the foundation of the Ivy league schools like Yale and Harvard that had very little alliance on the classes of history yet that of military history. This General stated the military, due to the loss of knowledge of military history, paid a dear price during the problems in the 1960s. He urged military history to be restored as the highlight of the West Point Academy. The study found that there was a need to increase the study of military history by all ranks. The committee explained that education in military history would significantly contribute to broaden perspectives, sharpen judgment, increase perceptivity, and increase professional expertise of all Soldiers. The committee further recommended publishing a training support plan (TSP) for the use of military history for all military leaders. This TSP was to be used as a self study guide to help supplement the limited military history received during army schools.

Military history not only helps leaders make decisions, broaden perspectives and increase professionalism, it also fosters unit pride by providing Soldiers with the history, lineage and honors of their organization. Without the teachings of military history how would a Soldier achieve an understanding of what his organization accomplished many years ago? Military history continues to offer the knowledge of how past interactions and what have inflected the

military on current operations. This knowledge has also shown that we can learn from past conflicts and wars due to the deep routes of most societies and their backgrounds of thousands of years of heritage. The knowledge of military will assist Soldiers to understand the ground that they are fighting on and the past conflicts that have occurred on that ground.

Conclusion

Military history has been taught during some of the Army's professional development courses and schools; Captains Career Course, Army's Intermediate-Level Education (ILE) formerly the General Staff Officer's Course (CGSOC), U.S. Army War College (USAWC) and the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA). These institutions have done a great job in training our senior leaders on military education. Currently with the Global War on Terror (GWOT) we have a gap in the training and education of our junior leaders. The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are large scale operations that are delegated down to small unit tactics and missions where the mission leader is a Staff Sergeant. We currently do not have a Non-Commissioned Officer Course in place that trains these company level Non-Commissioned Officers on military history that could and will enhance their mission success.

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