

**UNCLASSIFIED**

**Running Head: America's First Battles**

**History Essay**

**SGM Billy Williams**

**United States Army Sergeants Major Academy**

**Class #35**

**SGM Gregory Taylor**

**20 July 2009**

**UNCLASSIFIED**

Long Island 27 August 1776

America's first battle that is, the first general engagement involving an army of the United States, took place on Long Island, New York 27 August 1776. The battle fought by citizens united by the new nation to sustain their claim of independence from Great Britain was by no means America's first experience with war.

For nearly two centuries before the unification of the nation states, English colonist had fought to maintain and extend their control over the Atlantic coast of North America from Florida to Nova Scotia and Quebec. At first, they struggled mainly with American Indians, employing small mobile bands of militia in a succession of skirmishes and short inconclusive campaigns.

By the eighteenth century, they were engaged in increasingly bitter fighting against French and Spanish colonist. On their fighting frontiers, Indians and regular European forces led a 1740 full scale war and Anglo-American conquest of Canada in 1760.

For all their experience with warfare, Americans remained inexperienced in general battle engagements until August 1776. Americans had never yet experienced fighting of the scale and duration of a general action, or anything close to the Battle of Long Island.

It would seem that Americans entered their first battle at a disadvantage, not only had they never fought a general action; but they had very limited experience with managing the kind of forces needed for such an action. They had relied traditionally on militia to fight Indians or neighboring colonists; they had rarely cooperated in inter-colonial expeditions that were not given coherence and direction by the British Army.

Senior American officers at Long Island were less experienced than their British counterparts; their comparative inexperience was neither as great nor as decisive as it might at first glance seem to have been.

To say merely that the twenty one American generals at New York in 1776 were on, forty-three years old with slightly over two years military service and that the fifteen British general were forty-eight with thirty years service is to create a misleading impression of decisive disparity.

At a time when there was no systematic education or training for officers, when only one of the British generals had attended a military academy or training for officers, experience was particularly valuable in preparing an officer for command.

The American Generals, by contrast has served almost exclusively during wartime and in North America. Fourteen of twenty-one had been in combat before coming to New York in 1776, and seven had commanded brigades or regiments in the opening engagements of the revolution. American Generals were not professional soldiers, and they were not as familiar with combat or command at the British.

The British success and American failure resulted form fortuitous interplay of officer Selection, tactical circumstances and illness. King George III chose Major General William as commander in chief and Henry Clinton as second in command who were clearly among the best general officers in the British Army.

The Americans were not to be so fortunate, in choosing George Washington as commander in chief; he was left to find able, experienced soldiers by the costly process of trial and error. New York 1776, he also had to divide his forces and attention among Manhattan, Long Island, and New Jersey. George Washington also had to replace his ablest General,

Nathaniel Greene due to illness. As a result, Washington was unable to supervise closely all preparations to receive the British, and was not present when the Battle of Long Island began.

The British Army was under more centralized direction than the American: it was a national professional force under a parliamentary monarchy. The American Army was a combination of local, regional, and national forces under the loose control of a confederation of states.

The American Army suffered from the absence of strong executive authority and of well defined bureaucratic jurisdiction. The American Army was for much of the war “poorly housed, miserably clothed, ill-equipped, underfed and had a lack of finances.

The Army had relied on Britain for most of its food as well as its cash, clothing, camp equipment, arms and ammunition was frequently immobilized for want of supplies or overland transportation; it couldn't depend on impressments to offset shortages and foraging parties were always vulnerable to attacks.

When American officers wanted to go beyond the mechanics of marching and firing, when they wanted to learn how to manage an army or a war, they turned to the very books and authorities most popular among British officers known as “Caesar's Commentaries and Saxe's Reveries.” Henry Knox who was Washington's chief of artillery at New York complained that “good books are impossible to obtain in America.”

The Americans being closer than the British to their sources of men and most supplies, had trouble turning militiamen into a Continental Army. The U.S. fighting a war so close to home gave them speedy access to resources, and supplies, it also created a moral booster, the British not being able to exhaust the natural resources created another positive factor in an American victory. Being at home also created a sense of purpose, the American militiamen were fighting for a purpose, they were outnumbered, sourced, and inexperienced; such

factors gave the men sense of patriotism, love for ones own united nation. From Lexington and Concord to the Battle of Long Island, Americans were ready to defend themselves against the British whether at Boston, Charleston, or New York; but only rarely did Washington have enough disciplined troops with an adequate supply of arms ammunition to consider a general action.

Although Americans were slow to modify their strategy, they did make a greater effort than the British to learn from the Battle of Long Island. Their defeat was in part the result of their poor and non-offensive strategy, their determination to defend New York City against a superior fleet and army was directly affected by the Long Island lost. As a result of the Battle of Long Island, Congress set aside its opposition to long-term enlistments, suppressing its fears of a standing army; by creating the kind of force Washington would need to fight and defeat a major power, and the kind of professional Army that could sustain the Revolution.

#### Kasserine Pass 30 January -22 February 1943

When World War II opened in Europe in September 1939, the U.S. Army lacked the elemental capacity to conduct modern warfare. Although many dedicated, professional soldier during the 1920 and 1930's had studied to e ready for the next war, decline, neglect and stagnation were fundamental methods that marked America's military.

The Army, which had shrunk in size between mid 1919 and the 1930s, was unable to absorb new techniques of waging war. Personnel shortages brought Regular Army training to a standstill in 1934, as did a lack of funding. With Soldier fighting a war abrupt, their homes were decaying, the land not being farmed, families not being cared for, no irrigation of crops, or domesticating of animals, the land was drying and families shrinking. A lack of funds, and failing economic strides were reducing the availability of advancing resources and pay. There

was not established NCO (non-commissioned officer) duty but the officers instructed men who later became the NCO crop. These militiamen chose to provide for their families and continue to subsistent farm, or fight a losing battle with hopes of a victory and standing of a new nation. The Great Economic Depression tightened congressional appropriations, causing the decline of man power, halting development of weapons and equipment. At the outbreak of war in Europe, the U.S. Army was still seriously undermanned, under-equipped, and practiced obsolete procedures with out-dated weapons.

The standing Army lacked airplanes, tanks, combat, scout cars, anti-aircraft artillery guns, searchlights, fire control equipment and other vital materials. As late as the summer or 1939, the Army was still attuned to the combat styles of 1918. To achieve war readiness was out of the question for most of the interwar period because of the stringent economy in defense expenditures, the low peacetime strengths of the Regular Army, the National Guard, and the Organized Reserve Corps.

By 1939, the Army had virtually forgotten how to conduct training on a broad scale. Very few officers could handle organizations larger than a battalion. The weakness the Americans showed were usually demonstrated by inexperienced troops committed to battle for the first time, they were overconfident and jittery. They lacked proficiency in newly developed weapons and were unable to identify the weapons and equipment.

The U.S. Army chiefs of staff in the 1920's and 1939's, General Peyton March, John J. Pershings, John Hines, Charles P. Summerall, Douglas MacArthur, and Malin Craig struggled to modernize the Army. Their efforts were in vain because of a lack of public interest and the scarcity of funds. Due to the inexperience of the commanding officers, the actual enlisted men needed more than leadership, they needed training, mentors, companions, and a purpose other

than their own means of belief. The role of the NCO is believed to be born during this period, when the officers were focused on matters other than the well being of the enlisted men, other enlisted men began to take on the role of acting as an enlisted leader, conducting and placing order within the battalion when the officers were not around. The Americans were handicapped by certain poor commanders, Major General Lloyd R. Frendall, who was arrogant, opinionated, and perhaps less than stable; Brigadier General Raymond McQuillin and Colonel Alexander N. Starks Jr., whose reactions were slow, cautious and characteristic of World War I operations. Troops were often deficient in physical fitness and training. At this time in the American Army, every man was under direct supervision of the officers, yet has an effective NCO corp been developed, because the organization is still inefficient.

By 1943, combined arms training had never been satisfactory, infantry and armored officers had inadequate training, higher commanders and staffs were inexperienced in coordinating operations, not enough weapons and units existed in 1942 or even in 1943.

The Battle of Kasserine Pass imposed a role for which Americans were psychologically ill, yet the underlying cause of the American failure was discrepancy in numbers and many mistakes were made in the large scale engagement of the war in Europe. The Americans at Kasserine paid in blood the price of battlefield experience.

#### Analysis

Preparedness has never been reckoned the strong suit of U.S. military capacity, more or less the outbreak of war has meant frantic improvising, not least in raising, arming, training and deploying ground forces adequately for the conflict. The fact of having a poorly trained, first battle Army was due to a chronic shortage of good NCOs'. The U.S. military in this period was peerless in modernizing and advancing its Army, but with no direction, winning a fight, having

some sort of offensive strategy was inevitable, but it never occurred to the Chiefs of Staff that the missing link was the presence of a strong NCO. From Long Island to the present, observers of the Army have noted that good human material in the ranks has failed to realize its potential because of inadequate leadership, training and experience.

#### Role of the NCOs

1. Training individual soldiers, crew and small teams.
2. Conducting standard based performance oriented training.
3. Cross training to ensure critical wartime skills within the unit.
4. Explaining how individual soldier task training relates to the units collective mission essential tasks.
5. Planning preparing, rehearsing, and executing training, conducting AARs, and providing bottom-up feedback.
6. Maintaining awareness of ongoing risk management actions that support individual, crews, and small team training.

In conclusion, the U.S. military today has fundamental obstacles to achieve; the Army needs to develop a plan for better reinforcements and timeline for deployment and redeployment for global operations. A plan is also needed to get newer equipment into the hands of the NCOs' faster so they can learn what works doesn't work best for the Soldier. More good and experienced NCOs' are needed to train Soldiers and crews for readiness of the Army combat forces to deploy and fight.

### Summary

The American Army was unprepared to do battle because of a lack of experience, lack of finances, inexperienced and arrogant commanders who had inadequate training in coordinating operations. They also lacked the necessary knowledge of the equipment being used in the war. There weren't enough soldiers to spread out among the different cities to do battle nor was there enough soldiers to spread out among the different cities to do battle nor was there enough up to date equipment. There was enough time for the soldiers and units to gain the necessary skills needed in the war.

As through knowledge of war dramatically increased competence and self confidence of military leaders. The basic principle of war has not changed, but has become more complex and far more deadly.

In both mentioned wars, there was a lack of means new procedures. Realistic exercises to train and test individual soldiers, units, and combined arms, to practice procedures in the field and to achieve war readiness was out of the question for most of the Army due to the economy. Everything possible should be done to prepare troops for combat, including choosing good NCOs' who are knowledgeable in training the units assigned to them, making sure soldiers have the necessary equipment needed and that they are knowledgeable of the equipment being used.

References

- Blumenson, Martin. 1967. *The Battle of Kasserine Pass*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Gruber, Ira D. 1984. *George III Chooses a Commander in Chief*. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Arms and Independence: The Military Character of the Revolution*. Charlottesville, Va.
- Heller, Charles E. *American's First Battles 1776-1965*. December 1986. First This edition. University Press of Kansas.
- Macgregor, Douglas A. *Transformations under Fire*. 21 November 2008.  
<http://www.collegebooks.com>.