

The Importance of the Study of Military History

Roy Rocco

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

Class 35

SGM Gary Ortega

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A solid grasp of military history is crucial to the development of leaders at all levels of the Army. Military professionals must take the time to study military history to gain invaluable facts and data of previous wars and conflicts. It is imperative for modern day Soldiers to study American Military History to obtain a comprehensive understanding of their victories and defeats. The lives of the sons and daughters of our nation depend upon the sound judgment and sensible priorities of the Army's senior leaders.

Although the common understanding of history applies, it should equally meet its objective for specific groups such as the military sector. History has acknowledged many military conflicts showing victories and defeats with regards to its historical background. The front lines of today are constantly changing thus bringing to the forefront diverse and unique challenges that require quick and rational decisions in order to save Soldiers lives and to wisely use all other resources. Considering the military's strategies for today's conflicts, our American Forces are tasked to ensure peace, order, and security through systematic means. Without prior deployment experience, undertaking a first time deployment always relies on pertinent references from the past to make the upcoming deployment successful.

After researching and analyzing individual battles during World War II, I can now troubleshoot modern day conflicts utilizing lessons learned from past battles. I have

broken down two particular battles: The Attack on Pearl Harbor and the Battle of Bataan both provide valuable lessons and are important for students and citizens alike especially for the primaries involved the Soldiers and their leaders.

The attack on Pearl Harbor known as one of America's deadliest days of battle is the perfect example of a communications breakdown. Through lack of communication and our own pride we fell victim to a surprise attack by the Japanese. The major lesson learned from Pearl Harbor is to never take too lightly the intentions of an adversary. However, that lesson was forgotten resulting in the multiple attacks on September 11, 2001. We had the partial picture gleaned from intelligence reports to prevent the attacks and ensure the safety of our citizens. Through pride and lack of communication between various governmental organizations we fell victim to a surprise attack once again proving the importance of the study history to prepare for the next battle.

During the battle of Bataan, Major General Wainwright was forced to surrender to the Japanese after several days of intense fighting. Hoping the Japanese would treat them fairly as POWs, Major General Wainwright and his men along with 66,000 Filipinos were forced to march hundreds of miles under deplorable conditions humidity, starvation, suffering wounds and tormented by their guards. Prisoners were killed out of hatred and hundreds more died due to the conditions at the camp in which they were held prisoner. A lesson we had to relearn when our Soldiers were captured in Vietnam bringing the tenants of "If I am captured I will..." The deaths of our past Soldiers leave us with teaching points that leaders of today can utilize for their situational planning purposes. By

doing these leaders can ensure that their Soldiers are prepared and rehearsed for any given situation.

Leaders of today unfortunately, don't study military history looking for expeditious ways to achieve victory. They are studying past conflicts looking for clues on what to expect from our opponents. By studying those clues leaders will have an idea of what to look for as the battle progresses. If we can understand our enemies and the Soldiers we lead we may be able to more swiftly resolve each conflict. This can best be summed up in a statement from the American Historical Association:

“In the first place, history offers a storehouse of information about how people and societies behave. Understanding the operations of people and societies is difficult, though a number of disciplines make the attempt. An exclusive reliance on current data would needlessly handicap our efforts. How can we evaluate war if the nation is at peace—unless we use historical materials? How can we understand genius, the influence of technological innovation, or the role that beliefs play in shaping family life, if we don't use what we know about experiences in the past? Some social scientists attempt to formulate laws or theories about human behavior. But even these recourses depend on historical information, except for in limited, often artificial cases in which experiments can be devised to determine how people act. Major aspects of a society's operation, like mass elections, missionary activities, or military alliances, cannot be set up as precise experiments. Consequently, history must serve, however imperfectly, as our laboratory, and data from the past must serve as our most vital evidence in the

unavoidable quest to figure out why our complex species behaves as it does in societal settings” (Stearns, 1998).

The study of military history has to be a standard part of our Army’s curriculum at all levels so Soldiers and Leaders can gain a better understanding of the past so as not to re-live those mistakes in future conflicts. Many Soldiers have read and studied our past military history, in my opinion there has not been enough emphasis placed on studying military history so our leaders can enhance their decision making process for current and future conflicts.

Those in positions of power are typically well educated and familiar with history. This may be because decisions are usually based on intuition, personal morality, and social norms, instead of the rational analysis of something abstract and removed like history. Everyone has heard the saying, "Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it." It should also be added, Those who choose not learn from history are doomed to repeat it, as well.

Reference

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Why Study History. 1998. Peter N. Stearns.

<http://www.historians.org/pubs/Free/WhyStudyHistory.htm>