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First Battle's Essay

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15 August 2009

### Abstract

Adequate preparation for battle is a key component to a successful mission. During the Battle of Long Island and the Battle of San Juan and El Caney, government reluctance to build a large Regular Army and lack of proper training and equipment hampered the necessary groundwork for a successful mission. Even though the battles occurred during different time periods, similar obstacles remained which decreased the effectiveness of the mission. Various electronic and literature works are cited to support findings which confirm inadequate strength, training and equipment resulted in undesirable outcomes.

### First Battle's Essay

The Battle of Long Island in 1776 and the Battle of San Juan Hill and El Caney in 1898 exposed inadequacies of the United States Army during the formative years of our nation. Government reluctance in building a large Regular Army and the lack of proper training and equipment hampered the Army's preparation for battle. As a result of the two conflicts, legislation was enacted to reform the American Army. Administrations from both eras were unwilling to amass a large Regular Army (Cosmas, 1986; Gruber, 1986). Congress desired that each state support a strong militia rather than increase the number of Soldiers in the Regular Army. Military leaders were also unprepared for combat. Lack of professional training was evidenced during the conflicts. According to Gruber (1986), numerous appointments were made with regard to social standing rather than military experience. Soldiers also were lacking in standardized equipment such as uniforms and weapons. As a result, many soldiers were incapacitated, wounded or killed (Cosmas, 1986; Gruber, 1986). Consequently, lessons learned from the two conflicts enabled the United States Army to recognize not only the need for sufficient preparation and supplies for the soldier, but acknowledge the need for a large Regular Army.

Prior to the Battle of Long Island, Americans were reluctant to give Congress full authority to build a large standing Army (Gruber, 1986). Many colonists believed that a large army under the leadership of one commander would suppress the people. "Suspicious on the principle of a standing army and acutely aware of historic examples of seizure of political power by military leaders, its members kept a watchful eye on the Army's commanders and insisted they defer to civilian authority" (U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2004, p.57). Therefore, the Continental Congress desired to rely on a small regular army supported by a large militia

controlled by the states (Gruber, 1986). George Washington however, did not trust the militia. “He believed that only a regular army-only an army with discipline and coherence enough to fight effectively in open country-could defeat the British” (Gruber, 1986, p.12).

Washington's military experience was perhaps greater than that of any other American, and he came from the largest and most important of the southern colonies. His impressive appearance, quiet and confident manner, and good work in military committees of Congress had impressed all. (U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2004 p. 51)

As a result of his persuasiveness, Congress authorized eighty-eight infantry regiments for Washington (U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2004). The Articles of Confederation were later passed in 1781 which “set the terms, size and configuration of the army” (U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2004).

Congress was still reluctant prior to the Spanish American War to increase the size of the United States Army. According to Blodgett ( n.d.) “While this force was small compared to European armies, the fear of a large standing army that dominated the early colonial mindset still existed. The popular concept for the defense of the country remained a small regular army backed by the expandable militia” (p.1). Secretary of War, Russell Alger had asked for an additional 100,000 troops, but was defeated by lobbyists for the state militias now known as the National Guard (Cosmas, 1986). The Guard was considered an acceptable alternative to an increase in military strength. Alger negotiated with the National Guard lobbyists and was able to recruit 60,000 troops for the regular Army (Cosmas, 1986). The National Guard was accommodated by President McKinley “for a piece of the action and to provide an outlet for

patriotic enthusiasm than to meet expected military requirements” (Cosmas, 1986 p. 111). According to Cosmas (1986), 220,000 volunteers for the National Guard were called to action in 1898.

Before the Battle of Long Island, the colonists relied on British Army manuals and Soldiers to train their militia (Gruber, 1986). Formal military training was non-existent. Officers often referred to manuals and books by Marquis de Feuquieres, Maurice de Saxe and Julius Caesar (Gruber, 1986). Some officers lacked experience because they were appointed to leadership positions due to social standings and wealth. George Washington “himself recognized, when he accepted the command, that he lacked the requisite experience and knowledge in handling large bodies of men. His whole military experience had been in frontier warfare during the French and Indian War” (U. S. Army Center of Military History, 2004, p. 51). During the Battle of Long Island, Washington was defeated due to poor selection of officers and tactical errors (Gruber, 1986).

After the Civil War, the majority of officers serving in the Regular Army continued to lack formal military training. Leadership experience was gained while commanding units during the Civil War. Major General Shafter, commander of the V Corps had “no divisional or higher command experience” (Cosmas, 1986, p. 115). Theodore Roosevelt was commissioned as a Lieutenant Colonel presiding over the 1<sup>st</sup> Voluntary Cavalry without any prior military experience. His recent appointment as Secretary of the Navy had influenced his commission (Cosmas, 1986). Army units located west were “forced to conduct their own training” (Blodgett, n.d., p. 2). National Guardsmen received no formal training similar to their predecessors in the Revolutionary War (Blodgett, n.d.). Following the Battle of San Juan and El Caney, the National Guard and Regular Army recognized the need for joint training and exercises in order to increase

combat readiness. According to Cosmas (1986), “the absence of large-unit training threatened to reduce to near chaos the execution of any ambitious battle plan “(p. 115). After the Spanish American War, the Militia Act of 1903 was created. Its purpose was “to bring the National Guards training program, organization and equipment in line with that of the Regular Army” (Yarrison, 2001 p. 2).

During the Battle of Long Island, Soldiers were not equipped with proper uniforms or weapons (Gruber, 1986). Most Soldiers wore “work clothes or hunting shirts and carried any musket, rifle, or fowling piece that could be found” (Gruber, 1986, p. 9). Clothing and weapons had to be obtained from either captured British Soldiers or allies. Militia uniforms sometimes resembled those of their British counter parts resulting in deaths due to friendly fire. The militia and the Continental Army competed for the purchase of weapons and supplies provided by local merchants and allies. George Washington commented that the Continental Army was “‘poorly housed, miserably clothed, ill-equipped and underfed’ “(Gruber, 1986 p. 8). Disparities in weaponry and uniforms resulted in the Continental Congress providing George Washington with resources to gather much needed supplies. The newly formed department responsible for supplying resources was known as the Board of War and Ordinance (Gruber, 1986).

At the Battle of San Juan and El Caney, the V Corps comprised of Regular Army members and National Guard was not equipped with standardized uniforms or weapons. Regular Army soldiers were issued wool uniforms unsuitable for the tropical climate (Cosmas, 1986). States had difficulty supplying National Guardsmen due to lack of funding from the War Department (Blodgett, n.d.). Regular Army units were issued the Karg-Jorgensen rifle which used smokeless powder. National Guardsmen were equipped with Springfield rifles which used black powder producing a gray smoke signature. Once the Springfield rifle was fired, gray

smoke was seen by the enemy and the Soldier's location was compromised. The difference in weaponry resulted in a much higher mortality rate for the National Guard Soldier. Eventually, all members of the V Corps were issued a Krag-Jorgenson rifle (Cosmas, 1986).

Even though legislation has been created to increase Army strength, current global conflicts affirm a large standardized armed force may not be needed in preparation for battle. National Guard troops comprise a majority of active forces deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Guard troops continue to provide needed support for local, state and federal agencies in times of disasters and conflict.

Adequate support, training and supplies are necessary for the United States military to be successful. After the Battles of Long Island and San Juan, our government recognized the need to provide sufficient resources to defend our country. As world conflicts and technologies change, so does the needs of the United States military. Even though strength levels may not be as high as they once were in the past, the readiness and effectiveness of the United States Army prior to commencement of combat operations has never been better.

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