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America's First Battles

Introduction

Throughout the history, the importance of the first battles at wars was seen as factors that could not be overestimated for determining the outcomes of those wars. First battles can be outlined from the subsequent military operations in a sense that mostly they demonstrate the level of the armies' preparations which in most case show irrelevant combat experience due to political influences rather than combat experience.

As a support of such statements, examples of America's first battles demonstrate that first battles are unique in their own way where they differ from subsequent battles, but nevertheless they play a decisive role in the outcomes of wars. In that regard, this paper showing examples of first battles states that the first battles often represent a certain obstacle and a disadvantage, which is compensated once the battle is over playing a role in subsequent battles' outcomes.

Important First Battles

Bull Run

For the first battle of Bull Run in July 1861, the Confederation armed forces were counted at about a hundred thousand men, which were an enormous number for that time. Arming, equipping and organizing such number were far from an easy task. By the start of military actions it was not possible to finish this task, and for their first battle the army went with no divisional organization.

The Union army also had particular difficulties, where the enthusiasm was so high and the faith in own possibilities was so strong that most of the people believed that it will require no more than a couple of months to destroy the army of the enemy.

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It can be seen that the Union army was mostly organized by professional politicians and businessmen, where their service in the army was considered as another step in the political career. Describing the battle of Bull Run it can be said that the battle was not between armies but rather two controlled masses, where "the generals on both sides had no experience of commanding even moderately large bodies of soldiers in battle." (Hankinson, 2004)

The changes caused by the first battle of Bull Run can be evident, where for example the most popular weapon was the 1855 version of the Springfield rifle-musket, but due to the fact that most of the combatants were volunteers, both armies did not have enough arms to equip all soldiers. As a result of the wide diversity in arms and calibers, because of arming whatever weaponry available, the soldier's often were provided with ammunition different than the weapons they have.

The latter battles were already different at least in that component, where "As the war progressed most soldiers eventually were armed with rifled muskets, although even late in the war some troops on both sides still carried smoothbores." ("SMALL ARMS," 2006)

World War I&II

Another example of America's first battles can be seen through the initial stage of US involvement in World War I, and then consequently in World War II in the New Guinea campaign. The battle of Cantigny, 28 May 1918, was the first American offensive of World War I. Precedent to the military actions; the American forces had gone through a training period. Nevertheless, the real knowledge came through the long tour in the front lines near Cantigny.

The French village was recaptured and lost to the Germans twice during that period, as a regiment of the American 1st division under the commandment of Major-

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General Robert Lee Bullard, captured the village which was held at that time by the German Eighteenth Army under the commandment of Oskar von Hutier. The French aided the American advancement, although the attack plan itself was the creation of the American side.

The plan consisted of advancing with a machine-gun and 37 mm guns, as well as French flame-throwers, and twelve French tanks. Over two days the attack was rehearsed, as most of the soldiers were not familiar with flame thrower. In general, for a first battle the amount of preparation as well as the amount of fire power was impressive.

In this example the effect of the first battle can be seen not in the successful seizure of the occupied town, rather than in the consequent German seven counter attacks which resulted in severe casualties from the American side, but nevertheless consequently gave a victory in the war.

As a parallel, in World War II, the battle of Buna form the New Guinean campaign was one of the most severe losses for the United States and the first offensive against Japanese troops, but nevertheless, one of the key elements that played a consequent role in the victory for the allies.

The battle can be characterized for its savage nature and lack of information and knowledge as well as the absence of a realistic assessment of the problems of the troops and the limitations of the US forces (Heller & Stofft, 1986), but despite that fact the village of Buna fell and the area was secured, thus accomplishing the battle's mission.

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The Losses of the First Battles

Bull Run

The effect of the first battle can be seen through the usage of the key word first, where it can be arguable whether the losses from the first battles were compensated by the consequent preparations and experience for the following battles. Counting the losses from the both sides in the battle of Bull Run, they might seem rather insignificant. Nevertheless, for that time these losses can be characterized as huge, where the south lost almost two thousand men, 387 killed, 1,582 wounded, and 13 missing, specifically the negative consequences were apparent among the officers.

The losses of the North were more sever, where 460 men killed, 1,124 wounded, 1,312 missing, killed or captured, with a less proportion toward the officers compared to the South. (Hankinson, 2004)

At that time, the South and the North could not have imagined that there were still four years of war ahead, where the consequent battles were more serious and severe than the battle of Bull Run. Nevertheless, despite of such scale, the first battle of Bull Run played a huge role in the history of the Civil War, where there is nothing that was close to that battle in terms of the inexperience of the combatants facing each other. From a tactical point of view, the battle of Bull Run was the first in a row of defensive victories achieved by the South. However, in contrast to the following battles, this victory played a decisive role.

World War I&II

In terms of the World War I and II, it can be seen that despite the consequent success in both wars, the first battles had a lot of deficiencies that varied in the consequences, perhaps for the battle of Buna being the worst. Taking the battle of

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Cantigny, where despite the accomplishments, the infantry due to factors such as inexperience attacked in formations that would not have worked for different circumstances as well as making targets of themselves walking in the ruins.

In that regard the casualties of the battle of Cantigny approximately were 1,067 (GROTELUESCHEN, 2002), while for the battle of Buna they were more severe resulting in about 353 men killed, 1,508 wounded, and 93 missing. (Drea, 2002)

Conclusion

It can be seen from the aforementioned that the peculiarity of the first battles makes them distinguished among subsequent military actions. The training prior to the real combat cannot compensate the lack of real combat experience which is gained through the first battle experience; "Even the most intensive training will be less-than-adequate preparation for actual combat." (Heller & Stofft, 1986) Even if the first battles resulted in a victory, the cost of these victories was very high and it can be argued whether it was compensated by the gains achieved. Nevertheless, the experience for consequent battles proved necessary, as it can be seen in the known outcomes of World War I and II.

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