

Running Heading: Study of Military History

Military Professionals and history

Mark D. Sims Sr.

Military Operations

Sergeant Schiffmann

January 27, 2008

### Thesis

Why is it important to study military history? Does the past have any relevance today? Will it teach me anything? These are all valid questions for some people, not me. I believe the present is an expansion of events that occurred in our past. Some leaders feel that to be a successful Soldier must know history. What must be considered is the military history viewpoint. I see this as important to men and women who will lead others into battle. Although our technology has changed significantly, combat leaders may gain experiences from the past battles.

### The Study of Military History

History may be easier to write than read and interpret. Some people see history as having little value to the present. Those people usually ignore that fact that we use references of the past daily. Most of our problems today begin from past events. Most historical events are controversial and people take sides of these events because of the uncertainty involved. History is embedded at every level of society. Presidents of countries have placed an importance on knowing and reading history. Libraries continue to expand with new books on history daily. Is this because we are fascinated or do we simply see the importance of the past?

In the civilian community, the study of military history has skeptics and supporters. Many skeptics' are anti-war and use their sentiments as a protest against institutionalizing war. Other revolted against the thoughts of operational military history. My personal feelings are that history has its place in the educational institutions of the military. In 1899, Charles Francis Adams promoted that writers incorporate more military history in their prints. A British historian, Sir Charles Oman talked about how disregarding the importance of military history is equivalent to disregarding the study for the cure for cancer. It is absurd to minimize the value of history.

Frank Craven stated "Let it be admitted that the modern technological revolution has confronted us with military problems of unprecedented complexity, problems made all the more difficult because of the social and political turbulence of the age in which we live. But precisely because of these revolutionary developments, let me suggest that you had better study military history, indeed all history, as no generation of military men

have studied it before.” (Air Mobility Historical Doctrine)

The study of history is not new to the military. Jomini, a Swiss theorist wrote on three phases of military history. The first was recanting all aspects of a given encounter. He felt it should include an analysis down to the small unit. The second phase is to use these encounters to examine the ideology of waging war. The last phase is studying the affiliation between the military and political, economic, and social factors.

History teaches our leaders how to better see the military as a whole. Leaders must understand how industry impacts the ability to overwhelmingly engage the enemy on the battlefield. Secondly, the institutional improvement that takes place and their role during peace and wartime operations.

Military professional must include politics in their historical studies. We are engrained in the political history of this country. I strongly accept as true that military will be successful if they echo the composition and desire of the nation. If a leader does not understand this they may need to look at every conflict that we have engaged in, including our current conflict. It must be concluded that the military is a wing of politics. The bottom-line, leaders must accept the fact that military and national activities are unified.

The United States Army started using military history in military schools on an expanded scale after WWII. Matthew Steel wrote a book, used in military schools, which focused on analyzing campaigns and battles. In 1937, Fort Benning’s Infantry School used historical documents to support military doctrine. Others during that time said that military history should be used to advocate developing a science to understand the art of war. Today this is called military science and taught at every university who has a ROTC

program. Military science became a mandatory course requirement for graduation for the USMA and ROTC. Military leaders in the 1940's became advocates for the study of military history more so than any other time in history. American leader began to link military history to national strategy and national defense. Although we realized in the 1940's the relevance of military history, two authors, Emory Upton (1904) and Alfred Thayer Mahan's (1890), wrote how military history should be used to develop national military policy. Their studies went further than military policy, they used it to focus on ideology and specialized institutions.

As the promotion of military history grew in the 1940's, it began to loose support after the Korean War. The relevance or dejection was mainly echoed by civilians. Military leaders saw war as strategy and a way to regulate people's actions. Some civilians argued that a modern commander who studied military history was derelict in his duties. Many believed history will only be relevant if studied by civilians. I tend to disagree, decision making in the White House is different than on the battlefield. Modern military leaders must know how leaders of the past dealt with similar situations. It will, in my opinion, be criminal not to understand how great leaders of the past grappled with military issues.

The relevance of military history should be made law. What is comforting, during the 1970's, there was a greater interest in universities for teaching military history. I say this because the military was loosing interest of military history being studied in military schools. Thankfully we never fully got away from the study and began to develop more sophisticated ways to studying military history. The fact that war is becoming more industrialized; many historians are expanding their approach toward studying military

history. Our current conflict in Iraq has made military history more important. We have learned that we need a better understanding of that part of the world. The studies of ours and other countries military history will aide us greatly. The Army of modern times has determined history as important to the Armed Forces as equipment. Knowing how to interpret all activities of the military during peace and war is vital to our well fare. There is no doubt how we fight in war depends on this. Our understanding of history will help us determine how war influences humanity.

Our study of history must encompass different categories that must be examined in order to truly understand military history. Our operational history gives us the understanding of tactics, strategy, and logistics. This gives more prudence to biographies and historical manuscripts. The administrative history validates the importance of doctrine, organizational configurations, training, and weapons. This is in peace and wartime. The Armed Forces and Nation both deal with the national strategy of the country. There is an undeniable relationship between the military, political, and economics structures.

I have discussed the tangibles of military history and relevance to being studied. I will talk about the importance of military history to military professionals. The studying military history can balance the lack experience. For example, some in the Army today have not served in Iraq. What other than combat training will prepare them for dealing with the local population? The question is simple, knowing the history of the people, country, and past engagements. Military history will never be able to replace experience but it can shine a light on experience from a different prospective. Leaders who analyze

military history understand that conditions from previous operations can bring about solutions relevant today.

The leader can take this information, dissect it and determine its value. I argue that a leader who has seen the effects of a poorly planned operation will not make the same mistakes in a similar situation. We know that life is short and experience is long. This means someone in another time will complete what you started and use what you knew in the past for future good. I know that it will be foolish to think that history is the clear cut answer. I will say one thing, many operations of the past resemble ones we are engaged in today. What leaders take from past conflicts is the possible solution for contemporary problems of today. The military professional can form helpful thoughts, theories, and interpretations from their studies.

I will argue the point that military history can be a motivator for military professionals. When soldiers know the hardships and barriers of past conflicts, they are more likely to adjust to combat better if they have a perspective of the conditions faced. The most important lesson a military professional receives is an appreciation for their profession. Military professional's character can be shaped by the past actions of others. I am referencing the ethics engrained in the military and the obligations of a professional military person. The bottom-line, history can be the answer to many open ended questions.

This is a quote from Sir Archibald Percival Wavell, "Study the human side of history. to learn that Napoleon in 1796 with 20,000 beat a combined forces of 30,000 by something called economy of force or operating on interior lines is a mere waste of time. If you can understand how a young unknown man inspired a half starved ragged, rather

Bolshie's crowd; how he filled their bellies: how he out marched, outwitted, out bluffed and defeated men who had studied war all their lives and waged it according to the textbooks of their time, you will have learnt something worth knowing.”

Summing up my paper, military history has some educational and utilitarian purpose. Soldiers can look at war and recount the activities that occurred and apply them accordingly. The professional frame of mind is nurtured by military history. The analytical studying of history will make leaders better critical and creative thinkers. There are some who see history as just telling a story. I will argue that every generation uses past generations experiences to make better decisions in present time.