

Running Head: Commanders Latitude on the Battlefield

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Abstract

Military Commanders have fought in both the Victorio Campaign and the Philippine War. During both conflicts, the U.S. Army was facing guerrilla warfare and commanders changed their tactics when previous ones had failed. Combatant Commanders when faced with challenges took the opportunity to change their tactics and this led to victory for the United States. Commanders must have the ability to make decisions on the battlefield. If leaders look at historical lessons learned and apply them to the Global War on Terrorism, we can meet with the same success.

Commanders Latitude on the Battlefield

Our nation's policies have chosen when and where we fight our wars. However, the United States Army's ability to delegate authority to the lowest level makes our Army great. This was not always the case but commanders have received the leeway to make battlefield decisions without the interference from politicians. This authority is at the heart of our Army's success. Although the wrong decision by a commander could be disastrous combatant commanders should remain fluid in their decision making when considering their strategic goals. Leaders at the lowest level must have decision-making authority and commanders must have the latitude to make decisions on the ground.

Victorio Campaign

Two important counterinsurgency campaigns will show how Army Commanders changed their tactics on the battlefield and in the process, the tides of war to a successful victory for the United States. The Victorio Campaign and The Philippine Insurrection are the campaigns that will show the similarities and differences of how commanders fought two different enemies. The beginnings have similar results with the United States Army starting out with little understanding of the enemy. However, when commanders have the latitude to make decisions and the Combatant Commander Change tactics the results equaled victory.

Background

The Victorio Campaign (1874-1880) was part of The Indian Wars (Birtle, 1998). The United States was a young growing nation. There was a massive migration westward by the settlers. The government saw the need to separate the settlers and the native peoples of the west, so the reservation system was established. Most of the tribal nations negotiated in good faith with the U.S. Government. However, the U.S. Government often overlooked the treaties. There were

often poor conditions on the reservations. It is with this background that the Apache Victorio would emerge as enemy to the U.S. Army (Gott, 2004).

Success & Failures

General Crook was a student of how the Apache fought (Gott, 2004). The Army would copy their tactics by doing things such as rapid movement of troops, stripped Soldiers of excess weight and enlisted Indian Scouts to help track the Apache. Many of the scouts were Apache who were not happy with the ways of Victorio (Gott, 2004).

There were several things that Victorio did that made him difficult to defeat. The Apache knew the areas of Texas and New Mexico. This was their territory. Victorio used guerrilla warfare in attacking the Army. The Army usually outmanned and outgunned the Indians. Therefore, a keen tactic of Victorio was to attack on his terms with quick guerrilla like strikes (Gott, 2004). Victorio also used the International border of Mexico to hide from his pursuers. The United States Army could not cross international borders without the approval of our government (Gott, 2004).

Victorio had met with several early victories against the Army. Even though General Crook had studied how the Indians fought, the apache had the advantage. They were more familiar with the territory than the U.S. Army. Colonel Grierson was the Commander of the 10th Cavalry, one of two colored cavalry regiments authorized by Congress (Gott, 2004). Colonel Grierson realized the futility of pursuing Victorio and his men. The prior strategy had only resulted in worn-out men and horses (Gott, 2004). Therefore, Grierson changed tactics. First, he would cut-off Victorio's support from the reservations by disarming the reservations and confiscating their horses. Secondly, Grierson changed from pursuing Victorio to securing the water holes (Gott, 2004). Neither men nor animals could survive in the hot climates of Texas or

New Mexico without water. This fundamental shift in tactics allowed for the eventual defeat of Victorio in Mexico (The Handbook of Texas, 2008).

The Philippine Insurrection

The Philippine War (1899-1902) was also a conflict fought against an enemy that would seem to be inferior to the United States Army. The United States laid claim to the Philippine territory. Spain gave the U.S. the Philippines in December 1898 (Birtle, 1998). The Philippine people did not acknowledge the United States authority and they revolted against us. So less than 20 years after the Victorio Campaign the U.S. was in what would become another guerrilla war.

Background

The Philippines started this war by conventional means. However, they quickly saw that they were no match for the U. S. Army and they changed to guerrilla warfare (Birtle, 1998). The U.S. experienced early success but when the focus shifted to guerrilla warfare the massive territory of over 7,000 islands began to wear on the Soldiers (Birtle, 1998). The U.S. also had to deal with a civilian population of over seven million people (Birtle, 1998). The United States did not have the experience in nation building. The Army had a lot of experience at the senior level but the junior officers were inexperienced (Birtle, 1998). The senior level commanders did allow their junior officers some degree of latitude when it came to making decisions (Birtle, 1998). The Army used similar tactics that had proven successful in the Indian Wars. They used the local population as scouts and had Soldiers stripped of excess equipment for speed (Birtle, 1998).

Success & Failures

The policy of United States President McKinley was to win over the people of the Philippines (Birtle, 1998). General Otis was in charge of the U. S. Army. The Army started out

by imposing very strict discipline on the Soldiers. Soldiers paid for supplies that they got from the locals (Birtle, 1998). Although this was a good-hearted effort by Otis, it did not work. Thus, the Army changed its tactics starting with the replacement of General Otis with General MacArthur (Birtle, 1998). MacArthur believe in what had been called the Policy of Attraction however he wanted to put some teeth into it so he called his policy The Policy of Chastisement (Birtle, 1998). His local commanders received the authority to enforce his policies as they saw fit. This policy was the “carrot and stick” approach. If the local people did what the U.S. wanted, they would receive incentives or carrots. If they failed to do what the U.S. wanted, they received a hit on the head with a stick. This is figuratively speaking. However, local commanders chose the way in which the people would be punished (Birtle, 1998). With the shift in policy came a new offensive by MacArthur (Birtle, 1998). This new offensive coupled with the new shift in policy concluded with the surrender of the Philippine resistance fighters (Birtle, 1998).

Conclusion

There were many lessons learned from these conflicts that can be of benefit in the Global War on Terrorism. Things such as small groups can fight for a long time against an overwhelming force. Knowing this fact can help shape public opinion by preparing them for a longer rather than shorter conflict. The President has done this. The use of the native peoples to assist the military is still important aspect for our Commanders. The Army must separate the enemy from the ability to receive support or resupply from outside forces or the local populace. This has never been more evident than in Iraq and Afghanistan. We must keep the enemy constantly on the run not allowing them time to rest. This is a current U.S. strategy. In addition, commanders and noncommissioned officers at the lowest level need to make decisions. That may be one of the most important factors for victory. Of equal importance however is for our

Combatant Commanders remaining flexible enough that when current tactics fail that they make the necessary change for victory.

The military must take the historical lessons learned and apply them to current operations to help ensure our success in the Global War on Terrorism. Leaders taking the latitude to make decisions at all levels and change tactics are what make the U.S. Army so successful. It is this fundamental difference in the way we allow our people to lead that will ensure us with our continued success and eventual victory in the Global War on Terrorism.

References

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