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The Battle of Long Island on 27 August 1776 was not the first engagement of the Revolutionary War; however it was the first major battle after the signing of the Declaration of Independence on 4 July 1776. The battle signified the beginning of a war for freedom from England and a realization of the power of the British military.

On 25 June 1950 North Korea invaded South Korea across the 38th parallel. The United States urged the United Nations to take action, and during the week following the invasion they took steps to stop the North Korean aggression. On 30 June 1950 General of the Army, Douglas MacArthur recommended sending elements of the Eighth Army, stationed in Japan, to Korea. President Harry Truman approved the recommendation. This began the movement of Task Force Smith, a battalion size element from the 24th Infantry Division, to Korea (Flint).

Similar issues affecting the military at the Battle of Long Island and Task Force Smith in Korea, indicate that military history is extremely important to the effectiveness of today's armed forces.

On 27 August 1776 there were about 7,000 American troops on Long Island: 4,000 at Brooklyn and 3,000 on the Heights of Guana (Gruber). These troops were prepared to defend Long Island against the British Army in the first major engagement of the Revolutionary War. George Washington, the commander of the Continental Army, had prior experience in warfare during his time in the British Army. Most of the Soldiers he commanded at Long Island had little, if no experience in war. If there was experience in the ranks, it came from short engagements with Indians. They had no experience in extended campaigns or the hardships that a war will bring to the men who fight it. These Soldiers belonged to regiments from eight different states, under the jurisdiction of thirteen separate governments, and all under the control

of George Washington (Gruber). All of the governing agencies had different requirements for the training and regulations their militias were required to adhere to. The terms of enlistment were different among most of the militias. This created a huge problem for Washington. Enlistments were for a short period of time and men would come and go almost daily. Washington did not trust militia and was very surprised at the differences in morale and discipline between the regiments. Prior to the Battle of Long Island, Washington had little success converting a few of the regiments into some semblance of an army.

The Soldiers who fought for America at Long Island were young men who stayed in the Army for lack of anything better in their lives. They tended to be the poorest of society without any desire for heroics, and for the most part, no desire for Independence. They stayed in the Army under the premise that they would acquire land grants and enough money to start a new life when the enlistment was complete. The men who fought the Revolutionary War were definitely a mix of all that was good and bad about the new country.

The officers who led the Army at Long Island were fairly well educated and had a good understanding of the tactics used to wage war on an enemy. They were veterans of the French and Indian Wars, which gave them experience with fighting in the American countryside. They knew they would have to rely on formations to move effectively. Earthworks would be important in defending their positions. The American officers were capable of bringing a good fight to the British and matching wits with them. The main disadvantage the officers faced was the ability to keep their men in the Army long enough to train them to be an effective fighting element. There is a possibility that George Washington may have known that he could not beat the British Army. He just knew he could not lose.

The Army at Long Island faced many challenges besides actually fighting the war. Manpower was the main concern. As enlistments were ending Washington was urging congress to provide more incentive for Soldiers to stay in the Army, as well as establishing a standing army under the control of one central government. The government was brand new at this stage in history, and currency was pretty much useless (Gruber). Congress was unable to grant Washington the money he needed to keep Soldiers in the ranks, and the States were unwilling to grant congress the power to form a standing army, because they feared allowing congress too much power.

After World War II the United States was involved in the Cold War with Russia. The political situation between America and Russia was very tense and the two countries began to build up their arsenals of atomic weapons. The United States feared the spread of Communism and intended to use the threat of atomic weapons as a deterrent to keep Communism from spreading to other nations of the world. When the North Koreans invaded South Korea on 25 June 1950, the United States solicited the United Nations to take some action to end the aggression (Flint). The United States knew that the Soviet Union and Communist China were behind the events that led to the aggression. One week after the invasion President Truman authorized troops sent to Korea out of fear that if they didn't intervene soon, it would be too late.

Lieutenant Colonel Charles B. Smith the commander of 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, and A Battery, 52nd Field Artillery Battalion, got orders to deploy to Korea. This unit was named Task Force Smith, and was made up of 406 infantrymen and 134 artillerymen (Flint). The mission of the task force is to stop the North Korean push as far north of Pusan as possible.

The 24th Infantry Division was occupying the island of Kyushu, Japan prior to the Korean War. The primary mission of the division was occupation, the secondary mission was training. The units in Japan fell into a peacetime mode of operation with the missions being handled on a daily basis in the towns they occupied. Training did happen, but for the most part it was what would be called hip-pocket training. The units fell into a daily rhythm that allowed for plenty of time to hang out with the Japanese and do a lot of drinking. The main problem that commanders had to deal with was venereal disease. The 24th was also under strength at the time prior to the war. The division was authorized a peacetime strength of 12,500; 66 percent of its wartime strength of 18,900. At the time of the war the 24th Infantry Division had 10,700 men (Flint).

The 540 Soldiers that made up Task Force Smith were a conglomeration of men from all over America. The officers and NCO's were primarily all veterans of the Second World War, while the enlisted men were in the Army mainly for the GI Bill, which was common of Soldiers at the time. In the middle of 1949 LG Walton Walker took command of the Eighth Army and training became the primary mission of the units in Japan. This was a good initiative by the General, but the duties of the occupying units often caused training to be much less than expected. The men of Smith's battalion were trained better than most of the Soldiers in the division. The Brigade Commander, Colonel John A. Dabney was an aggressive leader who expected his men to know their jobs. The NCO's and officers did what they could to make sure their men were trained as best as could be expected in an under strength occupation Army.

Many factors affected the way that Task Force Smith performed during the initial actions of the Korean War. The enemy situation was underestimated from the start. Task Force Smith was sent to Korea basically by themselves to stop an enemy force that was later estimated to be around 80,000 men and 100 to 150 tanks (Flint). The peacetime mentality that the United States

had forced its Army to fall in to was a critical factor when it came to being able to rapidly deploy forces in an emergency situation. This mentality also contributed to the fact that the American weapons technology had not improved since the end of the Second World War. The Soldiers of Task Force Smith deployed with weapons that did not compare to the weapons of the enemy. It may be considered that the United States did not feel that they would ever have to fight conventional wars again, because of atomic weapons. This thinking may have contributed to the reasons the United States found itself unprepared for the Korean War.

The Battle of Long Island during the Revolutionary War, and Task Force Smith at the onset of the Korean War were both firsts for the American military. Long Island was the first battle after declaring independence from England, and Korea was the first war for America in the era of atomic energy. The atmosphere surrounding both conflicts must have given all involved a feeling that they must win in order to save America.

Maintaining a standing Army is an issue that affected both conflicts. George Washington knew that he must be able to have a standing army at all times in order to ensure he would have enough men to continue the war during the fight for independence. This issue also appears at the beginning of the Korean War. The need for the government to cut the size of the Army to the point that the Army was smaller than peacetime authorization put all military personnel in jeopardy. The Army was stretched very thin and not able to respond to a crisis with the force and decisiveness necessary in modern times.

These are just two issues that were common during the Battle of Long Island, and Task Force Smith. There are also many things that are completely different about the conflicts. The main issue, however, is that politics dictates the situations the military finds itself in. Leaders in today's Army must attempt to understand the similarities in historical events. They can learn

from mistakes made in the past by other leaders, and use that knowledge to make informed decisions. Military history is very important to the effectiveness of the armed forces.

References

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