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Argumentative Essay

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Introduction

An observation of the U.S. military's lack of combat readiness and preparation was evident during the Kasserine Pass of 1943 and Task Force Smith of 1950. These are two battle analyses given in the book *America's First Battles* which highlights conflicts from the past where the U.S. military went into an operation unprepared. Through assessing root factors that affected U.S. military operations and the role of the NCO, we can take lessons learned from the past to better prepare for ongoing and future operations.

Kasserine Pass, 30 January – 22 February 1943

The U.S. Army was engaged in World War II as a part of Operation Torch when the battles at the Kasserine Pass took place (Wikipedia, 2008). The Allied forces of the United States and Great Britain were engaged in an unorganized battle with the Axis powers of Germany and Italy. Major General Lloyd Fredendall was the commander of II Corps (U.S.) and Lieutenant General Kenneth Anderson was over the British First Army. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel and General Hans-Jürgen von Arnim was over the Axis forces. These armies met on February 19, 1943 along the two mile pass through the Atlas Mountains, known as the Kasserine Pass. Once the fighting broke out, U.S. lines were quickly broken and they were ill-equipped against the Germans. The battle would go on for six days where the Allied troops would leave their equipment and retreat from their posts. The Axis power gained occupation of the pass until they were pushed back by the Allied reinforcements on February 25th (Wikipedia, 2008). How did the Allied forces lose control of the pass? Why weren't the forces prepared and ready? All are questions that leaders, in retrospect, would try to answer. Charles Heller explains that Kasserine was a "bloody baptism" for U.S. forces into World War II (Heller, 1986). The aftermath of Kasserine would cause the U.S. War Department to study the conflict and analyze "what went wrong"? They would find themselves doing the same thing only seven years later with Task Force Smith.

Task Force Smith and the 24th Division, 5-19 July 1950

North Korea attacked South Korea with a surprise assault on the capital city, Seoul. This

attack took place in the early morning of June 25, 1950 (Quartermaster Professional, 1996). The North Korean People's Army advanced swiftly south when the Eighth U.S. Army under the command of General MacArthur was alerted to assist. General MacArthur received the order to send troops immediately to the Korean peninsula on July 1, 1950. Task Force Smith was organized as a quick reactionary force to depart from Japan, where the Eighth U.S. Army was based (Quartermaster Professional, 1996). Facing constraints of being undermanned, ill-equipped, and unprepared the task force progressed quickly to Pusan, Korea. Task Force Smith was sent ahead while the larger element proceeded forward from Japan. When the troops arrived in Pusan they were greeted with enthusiasm, praise, and crowds cheering. A false sense of security and invincibility overcame the troops. General MacArthur had ordered such a small force forward, because it was believed that the North Koreans would back down once they saw the "mighty" U.S. Army (Heller, 1986). The false sense of security had commanders believing that the mission would be quick; just a show of force. As a result, the troops of Task Force Smith only brought enough food for two days and one hundred and twenty rounds of ammunition each. The Soldiers traveled for four days straight in drenching rain when they finally arrived at their position between Osan and Suwan. The small, ill-equipped, undermanned task force was spread out over a mile in distance without the assistance of the Republic of Korea Army who they were to link up with (Quartermaster Professional, 1996). The North Korean Army moved in aggressively and attacked the U.S. forces on July 5th. U.S. troops fought valiantly and with courage, but were undermanned, unprepared, and did not have communications, resupply, or support. The Soldiers of Task Force Smith were dedicated, committed and "fought with distinction" (Heller, 1986). Their small arms fire was no match for the artillery and infantry of the North Koreans and Lieutenant Colonel Smith was forced to withdraw (Heller, 1966).

Root Factors Affecting Readiness

There are numerous factors that affect readiness and military preparedness for conflict. By reviewing the actions of the force during both Kasserine and the operations of Task Force

Smith, we can see that some of the key contributors are strength (personnel), supplies (logistics), and command and control. However, the root problem lies with the leadership. Training, proper equipment, and units operating at their full strength should always remain as top priority. If a unit does not have the proper amount of trained personnel and the equipment necessary to accomplish the mission, it will surely fail. In both Kasserine and Task Force Smith, the units were operating severely under-strength (Heller, 1986). Regardless of how confident and trained the individual Soldier might be, they can only perform to the capacity of one Soldier. Leaders in both conflicts knew they did have the necessary forces on ground at the time of the conflicts and underestimated the enemy forces as well (Heller, 1986). Soldiers look to their leaders for reassurance, training, equipment, and readiness for the conflict at hand. The morale of Soldiers rests with their leaders. And every Soldier will rally behind the leader that prepares them for the fight. Leaders can develop lessons learned by evaluating root factors from both conflicts.

Factors of Kasserine Pass

Some root factors for the defeat at Kasserine were an unprepared Army, lack of proper equipment and resupply, an untrained force, and poor command and control. The U.S. was victorious in World War I and a sense of accomplishment and complacency filled the force (Heller, 1986). The Army drew down the force and the War Department did not place emphasis on training, manning, or equipping the force. The actions of the War Department would cripple the U.S. forces on the ground at Kasserine, which was their first large-scale battle in World War II (Wikipedia, 2008). The Army had not updated its equipment since World War I. The Army developed an antitank weapon called the “tank destroyer”, but it was not match for German tanks and proved useless in the fight (Wikipedia, 2008). Soldiers left equipment on the battlefield after the Germans occupied the pass because the equipment had proven useless in the fight. The War Department criticized Major General Fredendall for his lack of command and control because he lost the faith and confidence of his troops and fellow commanders. General Fredendall was relieved from command after Kasserine (Wikipedia, 2008). The Army experienced equipment and personnel shortages as well during the initial operations in World War II, but would improve

as the war continued. Some of the same root factors at Kasserine were also present with Task Force Smith.

Factors of Task Force Smith

The factors that affected Task Force Smith were underestimation of the enemy, unprepared, ill-equipped, and poor command and control. General MacArthur and other commanders involved, believed that the U.S. only needed to show a presence of force and the North Koreans would retreat (Heller, 1986). Their theory proved painfully incorrect when the North Korean People's Army attacked the small, ill-equipped, and undermanned Task Force Smith. Their poor lack of judgment cost Soldiers lives and the operation as a whole. The Eighth U.S. Army, stationed in Japan at the time was undermanned and unprepared for combat. It was only five years since World War II ended and less than 20% of the force had actual combat experience. The task force had officers and NCOs that were brought in from other units in Japan with little time to prepare or react (Quartermaster Professional, 1996). Lieutenant Colonel Smith did not have communications due to failing radios and dead batteries, severely affected by the down-pour of rain. The Soldiers came with only two days worth of rations and low amounts of ammunition. The U.S. use of small arms fire was no match for the tanks of the North Koreans. The Republic of Korean Army was not in position to support and Lieutenant Colonel Smith did not have intelligence or knowledge of their location. These are some of the same conditions and factors that affected Kasserine seven year prior.

Role of the NCO

The role of the NCO, as we know today, did not evolve until after the Vietnam War era. With that said, NCOs were not used to their full capacity. During Kasserine, NCOs most likely provided guidance to the troops because General Fredendall was distant from the troops and had lost their respect (Wikipedia, 2008). The NCOs of Task Force Smith were new to the unit and were transferred in for the operation from other locations in Japan. Once the troops were under fire, the NCOs fought with distinction and valor alongside their subordinates and did all that they could to hold off the advancing North Korean Army. The role of the NCO has increased over

the last fifty years, but the spirit of the NCO has always been imbedded within the ranks. As a result, the NCO has become the primary trainer for Soldiers on individual tasks and weapons systems. It is the ever vigilant efforts of the NCO, as a leader and trainer that will keep the force prepared.

Conclusion

The U.S. Army was unprepared and not ready for operations in Kasserine and Task Force Smith. The actions of the commanders degraded mission capability by underestimating the enemy and its capabilities. In both conflicts the Army was undermanned, ill-equipped, and unprepared (Heller, 1986). The low state of readiness and training contributed to mission failure and was detrimental to the unit's combat effectiveness. In both instances the U.S. just came out of a major conflict (World War I and World War II) and the Army was down-sized. Many of the new troops lacked combat experience and did not have the necessary equipment and resupply to accomplish the mission. After both conflicts, leaders went back and assessed lessons learned. The U.S. went on to be victorious in World War II and the Korean War, but at the cost of many Soldiers' lives. Leaders can continue to apply lessons learned from past failures and grow not only the force, but the combat effectiveness and readiness of the Army as a whole. It is said that the "Army either learns from its history or runs the risk of repeating past mistakes on some future battlefield." (Quartermaster Professional, 1996). Let us take what we have learned from both the Kasserine Pass and Task Force Smith and apply it, unless history repeats itself.

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