

Running Head: IS HISTORY RELEVANT

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Abstract

History is a library of data from the past that provides military professionals with a framework for current and future operations. The principles outlined in history are inherently responsible for sustaining the western world's military forces for centuries, as conflict provides lessons learned that cannot be duplicated by simulation.

Is History Relevant

History enables leaders to understand cultures, environments, concepts of operations, economics and politics. By studying the past, we can draw from history's experiences to develop current military theory, the nature of the battlefield and doctrine. Professionals who ignore the benefits afforded through studying history stifle their abilities to lead elements into the 21st Century. This nation was born in war and continues to be the leader on the battlefield simply by evaluating past conflicts, lessons learned and tactical doctrine. The present is a result of the past where the study of history passed best practices down throughout the ages, to be adapted, applied, borrowed, used and improved upon from earlier concepts.

The Why in History

A failure to learn ensures repeated mistakes and according to Cohen & Gooch (1990): History plays a role in sustaining a community's sense of purpose; all individuals, consciously or not, make use of history. In the case of military organizations, however, this is more true than others: History serves as monument to past achievements, an inspiration to newly inducted members, a database for operational analysis, a training ground for prospective commanders, an institutional memory, and as a source of recreation. (p. 35)

Carl von Clausewitz, a student of war maintains history is a guide that leaders do not exactly emulate but rather educate as performance can only be improved by learning. Noncommissioned officers (NCO) are trained by doctrine and experiences; however neither can substitute for the economics and politics that often drive a nation to war. This knowledge is crucial in understanding the enemy and can be best analyzed through historical data. Today's conflicts

occur from globalization and hierarchies whose past is rooted in confrontation which makes doctrinal principles not always correct.

Consider our current conflict in Iraq, and the events that lead to the United States involvement. Events dated back to Operation Desert Storm and Desert Shield, a small conflict that has provided military leaders with information that has shaped our present military strategies in that country. Particularly with our Reserve Component (RC) personnel, during Operation Desert Storm and Desert Shield according to the Department of Defense Observations (1992):

Some RC forces, particularly large ground combat maneuver units; need some post-mobilization training, often in CONUS, to prepare them for operational missions. During Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, a misperception existed that the three Army RC brigades could be made ready for deployment with little or no post-mobilization training. (p. 486)

Leaders utilized history in preparing these Soldiers for Iraq, “A Kentucky National Guard unit is being credited with responding in “textbook” fashion during an ambush....killing 27 insurgents and capturing a sizable weapons cache and valuable intelligence” (H110A, p. 30). The NCO’s on this mission attributed their success to training:

Sgt. 1st Class Marshall Ware, platoon sergeant for the squads involved, agrees that the training the unit received “absolutely” made a difference during the attack. “From Day 1, there was an emphasis on training,” he said. “we trained and trained and trained. (H110A, 2008, p. 30)

Recognizing the training gaps existence greatly affected the success of our NCO’s and prepared them for victory in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Military conflict does not occur overnight

and according to the Department of Defense (2002) “the new strategy and the Gulf War continue to be linked, as we draw on the lessons of the war to inform our decisions for the future” (p. xvi).

Future Strategies

A nation at peace cannot effectively evaluate war-time strategies based purely on present military theories. A theory requires observation, identification, derivatives, hypothesis and testing. While conflict cannot be initiated to test leadership, equipment and skills; history can provide these experiences.

When the 24th Infantry Division was called into South Korea, they were woefully unprepared much like the Eight Army. The United States was a nation at peace and had still not changed its problem with replacements that it experienced in World War II. During this war we misjudged the Chinese threat according to Howard (cited in Cohen & Gooch, 1990), “wars resemble each other more than they do anything else. The dangerous implication of this truth lies in the proclivity of large and successful military organizations to see all wars as pretty much the same” (p. 195).

Overconfidence and logistical issues escalated this defeat, mainly with leadership riding on the highs of World War II fostered the attitude that:

just as their comrades in the 21st had been, the men of the 34th Infantry were confident, even unconcerned, boasting that the North Koreans would soon run when realized they were fighting American. They, too, expected a quick return to Japan. (H108A, 2008 p. 28).

Their military strategy was ineffective because their leadership, equipment and skills were based on present day misconceptions. The history lesson is every war is different a leaders observations should reflect current knowledge with past experiences and not past triumphs.

Scope of the Battlefield

The nature of the battlefield is a primary factor in any campaign. The validity of its assumptions is only as good as its strategies. The nature of the battlefield has always included fire and movement. Compare the stalemate on the Western front during World War I and Operation Desert Storm. Where the forces of Saddam Hussein were attempting to hold back the allied forces through lines of fire encased trenches. These trenches created a “no man lands” that prevented either side from advancing. According to Winston Churchill, “the inability of both sides to attack a flank” (H106A, 2008, p. 17) was the problem however just as the allied force used technology to surmount this problem the same strategy was implored in Operation Desert Storm and Desert Shield. The Soldiers may have been different, but the lessons learned the same.

Compare the return of the wounded Soldiers in World War I to the wounded warriors today. The country was not prepared then or recently to receive them in terms of their overall care; from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to the Walter Reed Scandal. History may not be exact; however the similarities must be explore especially in doctrine.

Guide to Action

Doctrine is a guide to action, a reference linked to theory that evolves from history. Military operations are grounded in doctrine that addresses pertinent questions such as:

- Who are we
- What do we do
- How do we do that
- How well did we do it in the past

Leadership in Germany during World War I recognized that their historical methods of warfare were ineffective. Using the historical data of the Battle of the Somme in 1916, the German

military changed their doctrine and tactics. The new tactics emphasized flexibility, decentralized control and counterattack (House, J. 1984). These new tactics asked the pertinent questions and provided a solution while absorbing past mistakes. The new concept of combined warfare also gave squad and platoon leaders independence. Saddam Hussein would have benefited from this history lesson on alternatives to trench warfare. NCO's today use this same concept of past experiences and After Action Reviews as a guide to determine ineffectiveness.

History is Still the Past

Naysayers would quip that history is the past and we live in the present, our future should look towards innovation in technology, strategic planning and training that is realistic and consistent. Society requires current useful information not past antidotes. Realistically, the present is a result of the past, the experiences and lessons learned can identify where change is needed, stimulate planning and rule out ineffective doctrine.

Conclusion

History cannot win our nations wars however the framework of past military operations can provide military professionals with leadership skills, doctrine, theories and the nature of the battlefield. With the formation of smaller nations possessing the same technology, money and total destruction attitude; military leaders of the 21st Century must employ techniques from our history to be effective. History is a database of the past, a tool to ensure that we learn from mistakes, document success and capture our nation's story.

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