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The Lack of Experience on the Battlefield

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Abstract:

Since the battles of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the American Soldier has lacked the necessary training and experience to fight fearlessly and win on the battlefield. The absence of strong leadership at the officer and senior noncommissioned officer level has been a catalyst for the loss of life and equipment.. This paper will discuss some of the reasons for success and failure in combat. It will conclude with the current status of our forces.

**THESIS STATEMENT:**

The American Soldier's lack of experience on the battlefield has lead to defeat and loss of life during war. The absence of strong leadership and the inability to provide adequate training are key factors in Soldier readiness and mission failure.

I. Introduction: I will discuss the primary role of the United States Army and some of the individual tasks that are necessary to perform that role.

A. Kasserine Pass

1. Overall facts
2. Leaders' failure

B. Task Force Smith

1. Poor Logistics Plan
2. Leaders' Failure

II. In the concluding paragraph I will summarize the combat readiness of today's American army.

The battles of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have molded the way that America's Fighting Force conducts itself on the battlefield. Comparing previous battles in order to find things that worked as well as lessons to be learned, is a tool that is extremely useful to the Soldiers that are conducting on the ground missions in the modern counterinsurgency, the battles being compared in this case is Kasserine Pass, the infamous first meeting of American forces verses the Axis, during WWII. This battle will be put against the Battle of Osan, also known as Task Force Smith, from the Korean War.

Kasserine was the first major meeting between the German led Axis of Evil Forces, and the American led Allied powers. Taking place in Northern Africa, this is the first look at the Americans in action in the war. This battle started with the landing of forces better known as Operation Torch. After successfully landing on ground in Africa the Allied forces showed very little organization, slow movement, and indecisive action among other things. These in addition to inexperience among the ground troops led to constant defeat. The key to eventual victory in this case, was a tactical error by General Rommel, then a famed German General, leading one of his final campaigns. Rommel and his staff held up for two weeks deciding what to do after taking Tunisia. The Axis forces were forced to withdraw eventually after being overextended and undersupplied. They also finally met a quasi-organized Allied resistance led by British infantry, and a well laced American Artillery. The advancing of the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army was also a factor in the withdrawing German Force.

Similar to the Battle at Kasserine Pass, the US forces in the battle of Osan were ill prepared for their ensuing task. Assembled from the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Port Wood, Japan, Task Force Smith was named after its commander, LTC Charles B. Smith. The piecemeal fighting unit was comprised of 406 men. These men made up the maneuver, artillery, and

support assets that were perceived to be needed in order to complete this mission. The weight of the aircraft was a major issue for TF Smith. Each man was required to carry 120 lbs and anything extra was sent with the main party of the 24<sup>TH</sup> ID when they arrived on the Island. While being immensely overmatched, the morale of TF Smith was rolling high, and taking a train on the way to the north through screaming crowds sent the morale into overdrive. The deploying of the Task Force was seen as “an arrogant display of strength.”

Lack of preparation was paramount in both of these battles. This could have been seen as flaws in leadership among the senior and subordinate commanders in both cases, for not implementing the training necessary to complete the mission. In Africa, the common theme was the German Blitzkrieg meeting the inexperienced units of the American 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division. Post WWII the military was cut by almost 11 million troops after the war. This led to a decrease in the troops in the Far East, as well as a re-focus in the mission overseas. The Far East had 50,000 troops occupying Japan, and was more of a show of force type mission. Due to this the quality of soldier in the Far East Command was watered down to some degree compared to the types of soldiers that were needed to continue to exhibit some type of fortitude to sustain the operations tempo of an Army going to war. Of the soldiers that made up the Far East Theater, more specifically TF Smith, roughly one in six had seen combat in WWII. This lack of combat veterans led to an inflated view of what the American fighting force can do.

Another similar theme among the two battles of the Famed American wars is lack of strong leadership. With Kasserine, the leadership was slow in every move that was made. Operation Torch set the tone. Upon lading boots on the ground at French Morocco, the Commanders of the Allied Forces missed the ball. Soldiers hit the ground and were unorganized, and no real plan was set in place to make any type of a decisive move. The Allied Commanders

failed to seize the opportunity to slow the flow of German/Italian forces to the African Coast, via Sicily. This made it extremely easy for the Axis to send its forces and supplies back and forth to from the island to North Africa. The Commanders of the Allied Forces were also slow to emplace its casualty producing assets in a timely manner, making them ineffective and easily susceptible to the famed German Blitzkrieg. After the eventual German retreat at Kasserine, a large number of the senior leaders of the US II Corps were relieved from their command. Among those was the II Corps Commander MG Lloyd Frendall. Frendall was relieved for what was considered to be incompetence among his superiors, as well as a lack of confidence and respect from his subordinates. For TF Smith the leadership underestimated the strength of their adversary. It was also perceived that the American Forces were superior to that of the rest of the world, so the mission was seen as short “police action.” This led to a lack of training, and an inadequate service support plan. The leadership of the senior leaders of the Eighth Army and General MacArthur, failed to realize the proximity of the Soviet threat, and therefore failed to set any type of contingency plan. This lack of foresight doomed Task Force Smith before they were even boots on the ground.

While these two battles are similar, there are a number of things that contrast the two. With Kasserine the major issues were inexperience, and leadership. On the ground Commanders weren't utilizing their assets properly, and the forces themselves were just overwhelmed by the pioneering German-led Axis forces. The leaders of the II Corps forces were slow to act upon any given situation, and it led to the constant retreat of American Forces.

In the TF Smith campaign, supply was the major issue. Funding to the Far East Theater was sparse, and the types of equipment used were obsolete and ineffective. This did a major injustice to the Task Force. The soldiers of the TF Smith were limited to two days of C-Rations,

and also with the same amount of ammo. This was due in large part to the weight limits of the C-54 which was their means of air travel, but also in the overconfidence in their abilities, and the underestimation of the Soviet backed North Korean forces. TF Smith found them seemingly caught between a rock and a hard place. To the one end they faced being overrun. On the other end they faced North Korean troops and tanks to their rear. With obsolete weapons and limited supplies, the Task Force made it easy for the North Korean Army to move through their position, forcing LTC Smith to have to find alternate ways to break contact.

Lessons can be learned from both battles that can be applied to today's modern day Counterinsurgency. While neither battle deal with the problems or complexity that is seen in today's fight, the fundamentals can still be applied. First having a contingency plan is paramount to the success or even the survivability of the soldiers involved in any mission. No matter the seeming "invincibility" of the force, all factors must be taken into consideration. From Task Force Smith you can see where it is important to study the enemy's most probable course of action, most dangerous course of action, their composition, and their disposition. If those four fundamentals were examined a bit more then there would have been greater success in the mission, and the soldiers involved in the mission would have been better prepared for an intense fight. With Kasserine, it is easy to see where violence of action and quick sound decision making as a leader is crucial. The battles would have been completely different had the Allied Forces committed to seizing the ports of North Africa, cutting off a major passage for the Axis forces from Sicily into North Africa. Both battles give way to fine tuning what the American forces can do on the ground.

In my opinion the United States of America's armed forces is the best in the world. We receive the best training and are provided with the very best equipment you can find. Another

very important fact that all leaders must understand is the culture and the cause of the enemy that we face. We benefit from lessons learned from battles such as Kasserine Pass, Task force Smith and the current Global War on Terrorism. We must adhere to all techniques, tactics and procedures that have worked and ones that have failed in the combat zone in order to preserve the lives of our Soldiers.

References

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