

Running Head: THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING OUR MILITARY HISTORY

Preventing Past Mistakes

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Abstract

The importance of studying our military history is evident in every battle, campaign, operation, and war we have fought. This critical data is not just for historians to study or to provide information during staff rides; however, it is important for us as Soldiers serving in the United States Military to understand, to build and grow from.

As George Santayana, a Spanish-born American author stated “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (The Santayana Edition, 2005). Studying our military history is necessary to avoid making or repeating past mistakes. We cannot ignore our histories importance and the critical information it can provide.

Improvement of our Performance

As military professionals it is imperative to take time from our schedules to study military history. Our study of history will prevent the reoccurrence of past mistakes and will assist with the improvement of our performance. Our history provides important historical parallels of battles, campaigns, and operations. The study of our military history will allow us to get the most out of the lessons already learned. Its importance lies in providing a better understanding of the past and to equip our Soldiers for the challenges that may await them.

Our military is a “practical” profession geared a vast amount of time to solving problems. Military history allows us to glean information to better prepare our troops for what may lie ahead. It provides lessons, such as models of tactics and strategies that will directly apply to some present situations (Luvaas, 1995). Our history is valuable in signifying points of doctrine, those both successful and those which proved unsuccessful, and in providing the proper appreciation of our military heritage to our junior Soldiers and non-commissioned officers.

A vast amount of critical data and elements exist in our history. Tactics, strategy, transportation, weapons, communication, construction, and replenishment of Soldiers and supplies from previous battles provide a vast amount of important data. Our goal and our need to study our history, is to form leaders. The leaders we form have to possess the ability to use critical thinking skills and grounded in military history.

General Upton’s new system for the Infantry

General Emory Upton understood this concept and promoted reform. General Upton studied the armies of Asia and Europe. He was very impressed by the Prussian

military system. His study and critical thinking skills provided a new system of infantry tactics. The Army adopted this new system of infantry tactics. Additionally, his system understood new technologies and the impact of breech loading rifles (Stewart, 2005).

History holds a foundation of accurate intellectual data; it includes a process of critical thinking and training to assess evidence and reach rational conclusions. Our study of military history provides indispensable data and assists with the formation of advanced doctrine and tactics.

The Battle of Bunker Hill

The Battle of Bunker Hill holds another example of why the study of military history is vital. The American command structure violated the principle of unity of command while moving onto the hill. An important part of the patriots force were exposed in their indefensible positions, violating the principals of concentrating your force, mass, and maneuvers (Stewart, 2005).

The study of our history prior to this battle would have led to a more informed American command and would have provided a better understanding of what they were to face. The British forces learned from this battle that the Americans resistance would not happen easily. However, the Americans misread the battle and believed that a Soldier possessing patriotic emotion was no match for a trained professional.

Spanish-American War – Implementation of Change

Knowledge was gained after the Spanish-American War and produced some major modifications in the Army's costal defense program. The study of this war proved that there was need for the implementation of change, so the Army incorporated the latest techniques and devices to enhance performance. New and more powerful artillery

devices were tested. The coastal defense arsenal added fixed floating mobile torpedoes and submarine mines.(Stewart, 2005). Knowledge provides the power to advance and to obtain knowledge we must study all possible new advancements and study the documented events of conflicts that we have engaged in. Failure to gain knowledge can prevent our advancement and hinder our ability on the battlefield.

The importance of knowledge and studying our history added to the Army's use of the internal combustion engine. This engine proved to be the greatest influence in strategy, tactics, and organization. This new invention came in response to the productive capability in the early twentieth century (Stewart, 2005). This new invention improved our ability to transport both in the air and on the ground. It provided the ability to produce the motor vehicle. This invention brought a revolution most notably during World War I.

Current Examples of Histories Importance

Our current war in Iraq and Afghanistan, with each rotation of our Soldiers in and out of theater, we learn from our history and the actions of those Soldiers who served before us. The study of our history affords us the opportunity to learn those strategies and tactics that have proved to assist us in our mission. Additionally, we learn those valuable lessons on which to avoid to prevent further loss of life and injuries.

Colleges and Universities provide courses in the study of military history. Why is it that we as military professionals look at the study of our history as just another task? I would say that some military professionals fail to see the essential part our history plays in our success today. Given our current conflicts and the repeated deployments to theater we are busy; however, as leaders we must emphasize the need for us to study of our

history. We must find the time and learn from our past conflicts. More importantly we must teach our junior Soldiers of its importance.

Conclusion

As a professional serving in the United States Army we must embrace military history to learn from the experiences, to fully understand concepts in the military, to study the lives of Soldiers who have served in the past, and to fully understand doctrinal advancement. Our history contains a host of benefits to include providing us knowledge of leadership issues, to provide a broad knowledge base of military subjects, and to increase our understanding of military concepts, strategy, and tactics.

If we fail to study history we fail to have a basic understanding of history and our military procedures. Failure to study our history prevents us from having an understanding of the lessons the past can offer. These lessons are so very important to our success in the future. If we study our history and share and teach this information to our subordinates we can recoup our historical-minded image of the past.

Napoleon himself confessed, “You have only to study my principals and apply them faithfully, for ‘there exists a fundamental principle of all the operations of war’ which you neglect at your peril” (Luvaas, 1995, p.5). When we neglect to study what has occurred, we truly place lives in danger.

As leaders we must lead from the front. We must study and obtain the knowledge from our history and work to pass this historical information to our troops. In the realm of warfare, this is so important, as the lives of our Soldiers and civilians are hinged on the decisions we as leaders make. Our decisions and our policies require formulation with as

much historical data as possible. Our missions are critical and to perform those missions with minimal loss of life should always be our goal.

Knowledge and advancement can only come from our study of military history. Our history holds a vast amount of intelligence and provides excellent data to facilitate either maintaining our methods of engagement or to assist in the facilitation of improving our methods. Each campaign, battle, war and operation provides a wealth of information that we as military professionals can and should study to truly assist us in leading our Soldiers, training our Soldiers, and rendering sound guidance.

As military professionals we must take time out of our busy schedules and study our history. A critical aspect of our military history provides an understanding of what occurred in the past and if studied will prepare our service men and women for challenges that they may face. As leaders we owe it to our Soldiers to provide them with the best information we possibly can, the study of our history and lessons learned gives us the that information.

Bibliography

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