

Running Head: TRANSFORM OR DIE

Transform or Die

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Armies are similar to societies in that they must adapt, and transform with the changes in technology, economic policies and political environments. Additionally, armies must also adapt to enemy tactics and of course the ever-changing battlefield. This transformation is a natural sequence of events for armies. Another similarity between armies and societies is that if either of them fail to adapt or transform they will surely perish. Great societies, such as the Ottoman Empire, that fall behind are usually overcome by stronger or more advanced outside powers. Armies that fail to transform and adapt suffer a similar fate.

As the United States returned home from Europe after World War I, it was slowly becoming the power to be reckoned with around the world. Thanks to the War, nearly all of the Allied powers owed debts to the United States. In fact, the United States was probably the only big winner of the conflict. She was the only country that did not see the devastation of war in her own land. Economically, the United States was reaping the benefits of imperialism on nearly every continent in the world.

Diplomatically, however, the United States felt that she no longer needed to be involved in the business of Europe. As the tensions in Europe and Asia began to escalate, this feeling of isolationism began to intensify. To many Americans, those in Europe should handle Europe's business. The threat however, would not remain in Europe. Soon, it would become clear that the United States would indeed have to mobilize its forces to protect its own interest and to stop tyranny.

The Coming of World War

In 1939 the whole world watched as the German Blitzkrieg rolled over Poland within a matter of days. Their coordination of air support and mechanized warfare

annihilated the Polish forces, whose horse mounted Cavalry fought bravely, but did not stand much of a chance (Ray, 2000). The tactics of Cavalry charges were somewhat outdated in World War I; twenty years later, they were suicidal.

Was Germany, the country that the Treaty of Versailles punished the most, the only country that updated their military? Unfortunately, the United States Army's readiness would fall victim to the political feeling of the day. To many Americans, after the end of the "war to end all wars" there was no need to invest so much money into advancing the military materiel. The American people were tired of fighting and some believed that advancing the military would only lead to more fighting.

In all fairness, the United States did not allow their military to become completely sedentary. In 1940, while the Germans were rolling over France, President Roosevelt asked Congress for \$5 billion to modernize the army and expand aircraft production. In addition, the United States forces in the Pacific were bolstered as the relationship between the United States and Japan became increasingly chilly.

Still, in 1939 the United States Army was about 227,000 strong, with enough equipment for about 75,000 Soldiers (Garamone, 2003). Moreover, the Nazi Blitzkrieg, that completely annihilated Poland and within a year would hold most of mainland Europe, proved that the current tactics would not hold up against such warfare. The Army Air Corps would have to own the skies and work in close support of the infantry and armor. Up to this point in time the Air Corps functioned almost independently, striking targets behind the forward lines. On the equipment side, the United States military would have to step up the development and production of tanks, artillery and rifles. The overall state of affairs looked pretty dim indeed for the United States entrance into a major war.

A transformation would have to come and come quick. It would be only three years until the United States would have ground troops fighting.

Transformation did come. General George C. Marshal, the Army Chief of Staff, raised the military strength to 8.5 million by the time major combat operations kicked off. He became the leading advocate for transforming the Army into a force that could counter the Nazi war machine. General Marshal made changes from the top down. Once he became the Chief of Staff, Marshal would make some major changes at the Senior Officer level. He decided that the General Officers were far too old and outdated to command troops in the modern field of battle. In his words:

The present general officers of the line are for the most part too old to command troops in battle under the terrific pressures of modern war...I do not propose to send our young [Soldiers] into action...under commanders whose minds are no longer adaptable to the making of split-second decisions in the fast-moving war of today (Larrabee, pg. 101).

Interestingly, General Marshal's quote shows his understanding of the modern battlefield. Additionally, it shows the importance that he put on transforming the army to meet the demands of current warfare.

Thus, with General Marshal at the helm, the United States Army ventured into the greatest transformation of all time. Weapons, tanks, airplanes, and artillery pieces were put into production. Soon the United States would be back to war levels on equipment and personnel. Tactics were also changed. The addition of airborne forces soon joined the Army; giving the ability to strike well behind enemy lines. Yet, the transformation did come with a price. The lack of preparation in the inter-war years was very difficult to

overcome. Much of the equipment that went into combat for the first time was not up to speed with the war proven German machinery. The first encounter of American and German forces at the Kasserine Pass proved disastrous for the Americans. The transformation would prove to be continuous. Soon, the Army would add tank destroyer units, upgrade the current tanks with heavier armor and bigger main guns and add upgraded bazookas to the infantry, giving them a tool to defeat the enemy armor. As history would show, General Marshal's transformation would eventually save the world from tyranny.

A Changing Enemy

Fifty years later, the United States Army would again find itself in a position that would require transformation. A decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States had done little to change its Cold War mindset. In the early 1990s, the United States Army went through a period of reduction, losing several active divisions. Of the divisions that were left, only four were light infantry division. The remaining six divisions were heavy mechanized units. Clearly, the United States Army was still in a fairly good position to fight an armored war against the soviets across Europe. However, as earlier deployments to the Balkans had shown, mobility was an issue and there was little threat of an all out armor war in Europe.

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States army found itself deploying to Afghanistan to fight the Global War on Terrorism. Initially, special operations forces and light infantry units conducted operations within Afghanistan. The rugged mountainous terrain was no place for mechanized units. However, two years later Operation Iraqi Freedom would commence. There in the deserts of Iraq, American

armored units rolled through the country taking the capital in only a few short days. The American's technologically advanced tanks and air power had little trouble decimating the Iraqi forces. The real problem was getting the units to the area of operation.

After General Peter Schoomaker became the Chief of Staff of the Army, he shared his vision to transform the Army. His understanding of the need to transform rivaled that of General Marshal. Additionally, General Schoomaker understood how the current political environment affected the transformation of the Army. Much like General Marshal, General Schoomaker had to deal with a period in which the army went through a period of little development. His work would be to undo the nearly 60 years of Cold War mentality and doctrine.

The period of transformation in 2006 would prove to be as difficult, if not more so, than the transformation of World War II. This time the Army would transform while forces were in the field of combat. Many politicians called the transformation while at war ridiculous. General Schoomaker knew that it was not only critical, but it was also years behind schedule.

Transformation is and will always be an integral part of the United States Army. Chances are that we will not fight the same enemy in twenty years that we fight today. The battlefield that we fight on may be an urban environment in Europe or it may be a jungle in Micronesia. The battles that we fight may be armor on armor or small unit firefights. The point is that there is no way for the Army or its leaders to predict who or how we will fight the nation's next battles. Therefore, for the United States to remain a world power and the United States Army to remain the premiere army in the world, it must transform periodically.

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