

It is important for military professionals to take time
out of their busy schedules to study military history

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August 15, 2009

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Class # 35

Abstract

Military history is not just about battles fought won or lost. It is also about the people of the those nations the conflict is. Military history is about the technology, the tactics and doctrine. Military professionals should be required to take time to study military history in order to increase their awareness and understanding of the past. To prepare them to make the right decisions needed to succeed. Military history is about “how societies form their institutions for their collective security and how those institutions operate in peace and war” (Stewart, 2005, p 1).

Through the study of history comparison of then and now can be applied to present situations. History cannot be ignore or set aside for historians over the years have shared information that is useful and critical to assist military leaders to successfully execute with confident and success future challenges. Although the challenges of today and the future may differ from the past, knowledge of historical events can prevent repeating mistakes. Lack of knowledge leads to lack of preparedness.

Military professionals should be required to take time to study military history in order to increase their awareness and understanding of the past, to prepare them to make future decision. Military history is not just about who fought and who won battles, or about past mistakes. History brings out the cause of war, the society it was born out of, the technology and tactics used for that period.

History teaches that although the character of individual war is different and there is change “the enduring nature of war as a human endeavor will remain largely unchanged” (Gilmore, 2009, p 2). The study of military history is a form of communication between the past and that helps military professionals to understand where we are today (Prokovic, p1). With this in mind military professionals have an obligation to study and become familiar with the past to make necessary adjustments and decisions.

Knowledge provides a means to build on what is already known. Lack of knowledge as well as training can have a negative outcome. This evident during the Mexican American war when Pancho Villa considered a bandit by U.S. was sought for the attack on Columbus, New Mexico, but was never captured. President Woodrow Wilson assigned General John Joseph “Blackjack” Pershing to capture Pancho Villa “dead or alive”(The Hunt for Pancho Villa1993, p1). The pursuit lasted nearly a year with Pancho Villa eluding General Pershing and his Soldiers. The capture failed as Villa took refuge in the rugged mountains. “The military aircraft, with the canvas-covered fuselages and wings and wooden propellers, failed in the hot desert environment” (Sharp n.d, p 1). The motorized military vehicles (the first time either were used in U.S. warfare)”was not enough to capture Villa (Griffith, 1997, p 1).

Although Villa was not captured “the activities of the American troops in Mexico and along the border were not entirely wasted.” One good thing that resulted from the presence of the Americans, was the reduction of activities at the border (Stewart, p 379).

In today's war against terrorism troops are faced with similar situations as back in the days of Pancho Villa. Without history this analogy could not be made. As the result of the 911 attack against the United States, "President George W. Bush mirrored the model established by President Wilson for the capture dead or alive" of Osama bin Laden. (Fisher, p1).

With the current and future conflicts, it is necessary for war fighters to be knowledgeable and well trained to meet the demands of the battlefield. They must be equipped with the best and feel confident to operate the equipment necessary to accomplish the mission. United States has learned that without proper operating equipment the mission cannot be accomplished, as was the case in the pursuit of Pancho Villa..

Having the proper equipment is vital, and according to LTG Chiarelli the process to procure and field new armored vehicles in Iraq was slow. "In a conflict that has lasted longer than World War II, the majority of our personnel in overseas combat zones still operate in armored HMMWVs—early 1980s technology not well suited to the hazards we face" This prompted awareness that in order for troops to do the mission and reduce casualties the military had to correct the problem. It was not as quick as many wanted it, but improvements were made. (Chiarelli, 2007, p 14).

As the war against terrorism continues the road to succeeding in capturing Osama has not been without difficulties. Although an element of surprise exist with insurgents, the United States has first hand knowledge of insurgents and how they operate. The U.S has knowledge from the Cuban revolution, Panama conflicts and from the Vietnam War. The defeat in South Vietnam "is generally credited to the brilliance and military virtues of the pajama-clad Vietcong". But in reality the truth is that they were not brilliant, they were persistent and they got lucky due to the unwillingness of leaders to learn from previous failures.(Stoker, 2007, p 1),

LTG Peter W. Chiarelli, who was the Commanding General, 1st Cavalry Division, Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq, and also Commander of the Multi-National Corps in Iraq believes "that

strategic planning should include greater consideration of potential worst-case scenarios” (Chiarelli, 2007, p 7). Each day spent in Iraq, troops and leaders are trying to identify the best way to ensure success in the battlefield. (Slabodkin, 2006).

“History is not without genuine insurgents successes” (Stoker, p 2). Fidel Castro was triumphant when he fought and defeated the insurgents who were farmers and landowners against the communist government. Fidel Castro’s overwhelming force defeated the insurgents, by deploying thousands of troops against the small groups of insurgents. Castro sent communist leaders to clear the hills, to “comb the brush, elbow to elbow” until the rebels would surrender.” (Wikipedia 2007, p 2). Looking back at the past

The United States does not lack in knowledge because documented events and personal experience offers a chance for success. They have learned that failure to follow up with security during the clearing of areas in Baghdad allowed the insurgents to return and create havoc (Wikipedia, 2007).

Defeating the insurgents in Iraq is possible, but the United States must ensure among other things, that they take the information available and establish tactics and procedures. By far this is not an easy task, it requires time and manpower, but it can be done based on evidence and past history. One way that the Army is working to stay ahead of insurgents is through the use of knowledge management. In 2001 the Army Knowledge Management was launched. It is in an attempt to reduce the enemy’s advantage. The constant changing dynamics in Iraq-including insurgents’ rapidly shifting tactics—makes knowledge management and indispensable tool for U.S troops” (Slabodkin, 2006, p 1).

Military professionals can gain valuable information through the study of history which can reduce the possibility of past mistakes. History tells of past experiences that can be used as

teaching tools. General James N. Mattis who was chosen to lead Marines into Fallujah supports that “ultimately a real understanding of history means that we face NOTHING new under the sun” (Mattis, 2003, p 1). During his report to the House Armed Forces committee in March 2009, General Mattis spoke about the importance of history and how it teaches “us that the character of each individual war is always different and most certainly will change, the enduring nature of war as a human endeavor will remain largely unchanged. The enemy will misinterpret this nation’s intent discredits its values, and will continue to employ the “irregular” methods it uses today in the future. Irregular warfare must be part of the core competency. Such accomplishment can be obtained through Lessons learned from Iraq Afghanistan, and the second Lebanon War. (Mattis 2009, p 1). The Army knows that the ability to counter irregular threats is a challenge, and the cost of having two Armies is too great, which is the reason the Army is not changing the current forces. These forces must be trained to conduct conventional and irregular operations (FM 1, 2005).

General Mattis believes that lessons can be learned from history, but the future cannot be predicted and attempting to do so may be futile. The military must planned and stay focus and “have balance in its capabilities to deter both irregular and conventional threat in the future”. (Mattis, 2009, p 2)

Not every one is in agreement that Military Professionals should study military history. Some belief that military history is the past and the past cannot help with the present or in the future. Too much improvement in technology has occurred for the past to be of any useful information. Military history is simply details past accounts of wars that are meaningless. In 2002 Hanson reported that universities have decreased in offering courses in the study of war and have gone as far as deleting from their curriculum, classes in World I and Civil War.

In conclusion Military professionals should be required to take the time to study military history in order to increase their awareness and understanding of the past, to prepare them to make future decisions. The study of military history helps to understand military concepts. It also assists in the conduct of combat in the battlefield by looking back, reassessing and implementing new technology, tactics and rebuilding of nations. The information history provides is useful and in some cases critical in assisting military leaders to successfully face the present and future challenges. Past history whether it deals with Pancho Villa, Cuban or Panama's insurgents, there is always something to learn from it.

Studying military history helps to broaden existing ideas and understanding of the past and future. It provides insight to the to approach the challenges that faces this nation today and in the future. As leaders military professionals have the responsibility to learn from personal experience and by reading past historical events. This is beneficial to them and to the Soldiers they lead.

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