

Running head: THE IMPORTANCE OF SOLDIERS TO STUDY MILITARY HISTORY.

Study of military history prepares military professionals to face future challenges

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Thesis: Military professionals are better prepared to face the challenges of the tomorrow by taking time out of their busy schedule to study Military History. The American military has been rapidly expanding and becoming more complex with continuous involvement in both peacekeeping and combat operations. Soldiers must learn the role played by military institutions, its leaders in the light of national security threats facing now and in future.

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Introduction

Military history is not just the story of armed conflicts of military campaigns and battles. Military history educates us how societies establish its military systems and institutions for their national security and how these establishments function in time of peace and war. Relevantly strong arguments exist to study or not to study military history. Military history has been expanding rapidly and becoming more complex with continuous involvement in both peacekeeping and combat operations. This essay will present both points of view to study or not to study military history. It will then present arguments based on irrefutable lessons learned and imprudent mistakes made in the military to support the argument that Soldiers are better prepared to face the challenges of tomorrow by taking time out of busy schedule to study military history.

Importance of studying military history

When we put forward the question, why should we study military history? A simpler and commonly quoted reply is ‘we need to understand the past to avoid making mistakes in the future’. This reply would make sense and be relevant if the reader is in influential military position, and knowing the past experience in combat would certainly assist to comprehend and conquer enemy. Margaret Atwood’s poem “The Loneliness of the Military Historian” suggests:

Confess: it is my profession

that alarms you.

This is why few people ask me to dinner,

though Lord knows I do not go out of my

way to be scary.

Military historians are not for the most part thrilled about writing history either. When the public gets tired and sickened by the awfulness of war, then peace movement initialized. Military history fans may find wicked enjoyment from reading the misery and devastation of human life. Our current Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) has been going on for more than seven years, and almost four thousand American Soldiers have died in this conflict. Additionally, there are more than 50,000 injured; these statistics have negative impact on War and War history. One of the reasons for the love of military history could be from reading killing and suffering. Those who oppose reading military history would probably make a case to forbid war because of loss of life, property and distress. Study of strategies and military tactics during historical battles and fights is another great reason why it is important to study military history. Some folks would like to study military history because of their interest in military weaponry, and technological advances in military systems from old cannons to sophisticated guns, others may be interested to find out why some win and others lose.

Since the onset of Global War on Terrorism and combat operations, the offensive nature of our tactics has been extremely effective and successful. As we know it, 9/11 attacks on our soil, and the mass casualties were the direct result and planning of Usama Bin Laden (UBL). Our Commander-in-Chief, President Bush, personalized our GWOT with Usama Bin Laden declaring that the USA will capture UBL “dead or alive”. Unfortunately, we did the same mistake of personalizing a conflict, and repeated the same mistake. According to some historians, comparable to 9/11 attack in NY was the attack by Pancho Villa. On 9 March 1916, Poncho Villa, a warrior to some and a bandit to others, with 500-men crossed into U.S. territory and assaulted the small town of Columbus, N.M., three miles north of the Mexican border. This contingent killed 10 civilians and some US Soldiers from 13th Cavalry troops. This random

attack on sovereign U.S. soil was the 9/11 of its time. The United States launched its penalizing mission into Mexico. President Woodrow Wilson directed General John Pershing to head an expeditionary force into Mexico to capture Poncho Villa. President Wilson used the term, 'dead or alive to capture Poncho Villa. Yet American forces did not catch Poncho Villa. The expedition continued for nearly 11 months, almost bringing both, the United States and Mexico to the brink of war. US forces could never capture Poncho Villa; Villa evaded capture each time, and later established to control northern Mexico. In both conflicts, against Poncho Villa forces in Mexico, and UBL in Afghanistan, US forces attained their military objectives. However, historians may arguably state that the US did not meet the objective of President Bush to capture UBL 'dead or alive', in spite of many successes on different fronts. Study of history gives us the perspective to learn and not to commit the same mistakes again. We did not learn to attach an enemy personality to a bigger military goal, eventually giving the impression that our successes may not have fully captured our stated goals.

The United States Marine Corps disreputably got the label of an extension arm of State Department, due to its overseas police actions and work as quick response team to promote State Department's motives. During the early years of the 20th century, the Corps was widely viewed as the nation's overseas police and initial response force. After long involvement with small wars, the Marine Corps started to analyze its involvement in small conflicts so that lessons learned can be passed on to future Marines. This effort started in 1921 in a formal report format, eventually converted into The Small Wars Manual in 1940. During our current efforts to build Armies both in Iraq and Afghanistan, we face with challenge of great number of desertions. Desertions and discontentment is due in part are because of poor pay, and lousy equipment. Poor pay to these recruits was due to US officials concern that they would be sending wrong message

by paying recruits more than average Iraqi or Afghani. US rectified desertions issue by raising their salaries. If we had studied military history, or “The Small Wars Manual”, we would have avoided this mistake, and Iraqi /Afghan Army may be in better position than today to take security control of their respective country. "Small Wars Manual" clearly states, "In establishing an organization of native troops, attempts should be made to provide better clothing and shelter and food than native civilians of the same social class. This is ... an important morale factor,”

Cold war era began soon after the end of the World War I and II and sustained for approximately fifty years. During the Cold War period, Western military forces planned, trained, and equipped for long-term conventional war. We ignored the lessons well written in our military history books of the battle for Stalingrad in World War 2. In Stalingrad, battle transitioned from huge German attack to hand-to-hand combat in individual streets. The German forces took control of most of the city but failed to claim completely their authority. The Russians re-took areas back in the evening those captured during the day. Lessons learned from this battle was that unless big Army is trained to fight Urban Warfare, it should not engage in such offensives. US military suffered significant casualties at the hands of insurgents in Iraq because of lack of Army-wide urban warfare training program. Soldiers ought to be trained to lead other Soldiers through the slender streets in rough, risky urban warfare in order to succeed and minimize casualties. Terrorists and insurgents are known to take the battles to congested streets and take good advantage of traps, surprise assaults and quick redeployment. In case of Task Force Ranger's at Mogadishu in Operation Serpent in 1993, we observed reluctance on part of some Soldiers to engage with the enemy's tactic, to engage in street fighting. This unwillingness at different echelons prevented us to develop a joint doctrine for low intensity operation. These enemy fighters extensively utilized low-tech weapons like shoulder-fired

Soviet-era RPG-7 rocket propelled grenades, AK-47, land mines and grenades in urban warfare and took advantage of surprise attacks in Baghdad's slim alleys.

In recent military history, United States took a historic and bold step to help Bosnian Muslims when they were threatened and were at the brink of ethnic cleansing by the Serbs. News of Bosnian Muslims reminded the world of the evil "abandonment of the Jews" in the forties when more than 6 million Jews and other minorities was killed on a mass scale. U.S and western countries realized quickly, took bold step to intervene militarily against Serbs to save the improvised Bosnians in the name of universal human rights. Allied forces of U.S. and Western Europe bombed Yugoslavia in the spring of 1999 and provided that much needed military, moral and economic assistance. Western powers had learned lessons from military history that the action against usurper must be taken swiftly and decisively. There was immense human tragedy when the military powers of the time took delayed action against Hitler's brutal operation against Jews.

War is an ugly state of affair however, as long as we live on the earth there will be fights, battles and wars. Not all conflicts are bad because these may cause short-term fight but usher in long-term peace. US have been playing a constructive leadership role in many parts of the world because of its economic and military superiority status. Main objective of US foreign involvement has been to promote end of tyranny, justice, freedom and democracy however, US took action when its or its allies' interests were in jeopardy. US Soldiers stay trained, vigilant and poised for success. The study of military history is extremely important so that the successful techniques and tactics are applied repeatedly as necessary and previously mistakes are avoided. It is essential to conduct realistic training, have update situational awareness and take time out of our busy schedule to study military history.

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