

RUNNING HEADER: IMPORTANCE OF NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICERS STUDYING
MILITARY HISTORY

Argumentative Essay

The Importance of Noncommissioned Officers Studying Military History

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Thesis Statement

History has taught us that if we neglect to learn from our mistakes of the past, we are doomed to repeat the same mistakes repeatedly. Therefore, it is imperative that Noncommissioned Officers make time to study military history to remain relevant leaders as we fight the Global War on Terrorism.

OUTLINE

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- a. Senior Leadership Failure

- b. Strategy and Doctrine

- c. Lessons learned

2. Vietnam War

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3. Victorio Campaign

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Task Force Smith

When one takes a long hard look at Task Force Smith, it is obvious the mistakes that were made that we can learn from. In the case of Task Force Smith, senior Army leaders failed the Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 21st Regiment, and 24th Infantry Division. Senior military leaders did not ensure that the Soldiers were trained to high standards and as a result, their readiness level was substandard. The Task Force was deployed without knowing how it was to be employed. General MacArthur deployed the unit on an ill-conceived plan that the North Koreans would cease their aggression when they realized they were fighting American Soldiers. Due to General MacArthur's arrogance the United States lost 150 outstanding young Americans. Task Force Smith was inexperienced when it came to being combat tested because of the Army down sizing after the end of World War 2. Task Force Smith was ill equipped and undermanned to handle the weapons and size of the North Korean forces.

The Soldiers that made up Task Force Smith were 20 years old or less and very few had any combat experience. Each Soldier was issued 120 rounds and two days of C-rations. This was not anywhere near what the Soldiers needed for the mission they were tasked to accomplish. Task Force Smith was named for Lieutenant Colonel Charles B. Smith, commanding officer, 1st Battalion, 21st Regiment, and 24th Infantry Division. It comprised 406 officers and men: half of the battalion headquarters company, two under strength rifle companies (B and C), a communications section, a recoilless rifle platoon and two mortar platoons. In addition to its rifles, the task force had two 75mm recoilless rifles, two 4.2-inch mortars, six 2.36-inch "bazooka" rocket launchers and four 60mm mortars. Nothing in Task Force Smith's arsenal

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could penetrate or slow down the North Korean tanks. The Army's senior military leaders failed to properly apply doctrine as well they failed to conceive the art of war. It is the responsibility of senior military and civilian leaders to maintain a strong national defense force despite budget constraints.

Intelligence or the lack of played a vital role in the failed mission of TF Smith. What little intelligence there may have been did not make it down to the combat commander and afford him the opportunity to make good decisions on the battlefield. Intelligence possesses no value if it does not get to the tactical commanders on the ground where the critical lifesaving decisions have to be made. It is imperative that leaders at all levels understand that operational tactics paired with technology is what makes the difference between victory and defeat. How in good conscience could our senior leaders have such disregard for our Soldiers lives as to send them in harms way on a half baked plan? As I stated in my thesis, as noncommissioned officers, we must know our history or we will allow the past to repeat itself repeatedly. With our doctrine and tactics changing everyday, we cannot allow another Task Force Smith.

Vietnam War

Now let us look at the Vietnam War and identify some lessons noncommissioned officers can learn. The United States entered the war against the North Vietnamese without a formal declaration of war. This was a major mistake by our civilian leadership because; they neglected to invoke or take into consideration or invoke the nations will. Neither senior military or civilian leaders defined or communicated the countries interest were as this would have given them a feeling how much the country was willing to sacrifice in defense of U.S interest. Another crucial

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mistake by U.S. leaders was to under estimate the will of the North Vietnamese. If our leaders had completed a thorough analysis of the situation, they would have realized that the Vietnamese were strong in their resolve and resistance to foreign domination. They also would have realized that the North Vietnamese were willing to accept a large number of casualties in order to protect their beliefs and ideology. The North Vietnamese had beaten the French at Dien Bien Phu so; they saw a conflict with the United States as just another attempt at foreign oppression.

The defeat of the French by the Vietnamese should have provided the United States lessons on how to plan the right strategy for fighting in Vietnam. In addition, the United States did not learn from the country's war against North Korea. A study of the Vietnamese way of life could have provided valuable information as well. The Vietnamese culture was to live for country, land and state. The customs of the Vietnamese people was to live and die on the land as generations before them had done. The Vietnamese were smart in that they understood the political ramifications of the United States entering the war without a formal declaration. The Vietnamese saw this major vulnerability because the people of the United States were not fully behind the war effort. The Vietnamese exploited the lack of will by the public to their advantage. We claimed victory after a long hard and costly fight against the Vietnamese. There are many lessons to be learned from the Vietnam War but noncommissioned officers cannot and will not learn them unless we take the time to read about and talk about the Vietnam War with those who served.

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Victorio Campaign

The last combat operation to be discussed is the Victorio Campaign. The Victorio Campaign was the Army's efforts to capture an Apache chief and his warriors. The Army was called upon to place the native Indians on reservations to protect settlers as part of the expansion west. The Mimbres Apaches were one of the many tribes placed on reservations disrupting their nomadic way of life. Chief Victorio was the leader of the Mimbres and refused to live his life on any reservation. The government in its haste to protect the settlers did not take the traditions, customs, and feelings of the Indians into consideration.

Chief Victorio and his people were placed on a reservation with a hated rival and expected to get along. This is an example of the government not recognizing the culture and intertribal conflicts. In an effort to consolidate the Indians onto larger reservations to improve manageability, culture awareness was nowhere to be found. Highly upset Chief Victorio and his warriors left the reservation and began killing, stealing, and terrorizing the settlers. This happened because as in the Vietnam War the government did not understand the will of the Apache Indians to live as they always had. The army was sent to the southwest to fight Chief Victorio and his warriors. The Civil War had just ended so; the Army was in need of more soldiers as units were small due to a downsizing of forces. The Army leadership though battle tested had no formal doctrine for fighting the Indians.

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Army found itself in a foreign land despite being within US borders. One major problem facing the Army was the fact that Chief Victorio and his warriors knew the land like the back of their hands. The terrain was rugged and made chasing Chief Victorio a difficult task. Chief Victorio had several supply points scattered throughout the land consisting of water, food, and fresh horses. The Army was so spread out its logistical system was ineffective. The Army traveled slowly due to their use of long lines of supply wagons. To make matters worse the leadership was young and inexperienced despite having the veterans of the Civil War. The nature of this war conducted in an asymmetrical manner quite different from the linear manner of the Civil War.

The Army's horses were bigger and stronger but lacked stamina because of the changes in their diet and this made it hard to keep up with Victorio. Junior officers made up the bulk of the operations against Victorio with minimal guidance. Communicating was difficult due to the distance between headquarters. Field units were unprepared for this type of warfare, which lessened their chances of success. Chief Victorio made good use of Mexico's border by crossing over to rest and supplies his warriors while the Army had to sit and waited for him to come back across the border.

The tactic of chasing Victorio all over the desert southwest was not effective considering they knew very little about the terrain. The Army experienced tremendous frustration in their efforts against Victorio despite using rival Indians as scouts to assist in locating Victorio. It was not until the tactic of placing Soldiers at the primary watering holes used by Victorio and his

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warriors. The tactic proved to be the right one as Victorio was caught off guard resulting in his forces suffering significant losses.

Conclusion

Similarly today, the Army has been asked to serve in countries where the terrain is rugged and vast. We have had to adjust our tactics in this asymmetrical battlefield. Today's enemy like Victorio, know the terrain and making it difficult to locate them. We have the best equipment in the world but without a change in tactics and finding other ways to employ that equipment we would not be as successful as we are right now. We also try to win the hearts and minds of the locals to assist us in accomplishing our missions. Our leadership is more experienced from top to bottom and they possess excellent knowledge of current doctrine. We have a logistical system that has changed the way it supports our fighting forces allowing supplies and personnel to be delivered wherever needed. We have effective communication despite being spread out and we are relaying valuable information across the armed services. We are more aware of our enemy's capabilities and are able to counteract them effectively. Most important is the fact that Soldiers on the ground are affecting change in Army doctrine everyday as they discover ways of defeating the enemy. We are learning everyday from our lessons learned in the war on terrorism and will continue to do so. If we failed to incorporate lessons learned, we will repeat the mistakes of the armies of the past. Therefore, we as professional NCOs must make time to study our history to remain the backbone of our Army. We must also

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ensure that we are teaching history to our young Soldiers who will one day take over as leaders
in our army.