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Military Operations Successes and Failures

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### Abstract

Operation Just Cause and Operation Enduring Freedom paved the way for a more positive outcome for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Lessons learned from Operation Desert Storm improved mission accomplishment and culture awareness throughout our military forces. Rifle-fire and anti-tank weapons are not always the answer; it depends on the mission as well as the situation. I will discuss some of the successes and failures our soldiers endured during these operations. Preparation is always the main factor in any operations success or failure.

With every military conflict, there is a 'first battle'. The first battle is the proving ground for all the planning and strategizing that is done before the troops are sent in. Some question whether the troops are prepared enough for that first battle. Military strategists armed with gathered intelligence, playing out scenarios on a big sand table may not be enough planning; sending troops to desert camps for a few weeks of training may not be enough preparation for the challenges they face on the battlefield. Battles of the past have revealed various obstacles related to weak intelligence gathering. Troops went in unprepared for the extreme climate conditions. There were language barriers and an overall misunderstanding of the culture. Such as with the Vietnam War, battles were more costly and casualties were much higher than expected. The enemy was being aided by the Soviet Union with training and weapons. By 1968, intelligence reports were discredited because the unfortunate discoveries made on the battle field were not revealed beforehand (Vietnam 2007). One could question whether those who gather intelligence about the prospective enemy are spending enough time gathering the information or if the information is that difficult to get. The concerns over troop readiness were especially evident during the Vietnam War. Climate extremes found in jungles are far different than the typical training grounds of the United States.

Troop preparation is in the hands of the non-commissioned officers (NCOs). The NCO work to condition his or her troops to be ready for the obstacles they will face in the field. Battle techniques used by the enemy, information about the culture, conditioning for the terrain and climate are all things the NCO introduces to their troops. The NCO prepares their troops technically and tactically. They are leaders to their troops and the calling is their safety and success. Troop readiness is the preparation given the NCOs (Kennedy 1998).

This paper will examine the conflicts of Operation Just Cause and Operation Enduring Freedom. It will discuss shortfalls the U.S. Military has experienced during these battles in executing its primary mission. It will identify root factors affecting the performance of the U.S. Military and examine the readiness of the troops before being sent into battle.

### Operation Just Cause

On December 20, 1989 an operation was executed to invade Panama. The objectives of this campaign were to “a. protect U.S. lives and key sites and facilities, b. capture and deliver Noriega to a competent authority, c. neutralize PDF forces, d. neutralize PDF command and control, e. support the establishment of a U.S. –recognized government in Panama, f. restructure the PDF” (Global 1 2007). The mission began with paratroopers, joined by other troops already in Panama. They quickly seized the airport, shortly after followed air strikes to Panama City and areas nearby. Infantry forces worked within the cities to secure areas such as fences, barred doors and other building structures with the use of grenades, rifle-fire, anti-tank weapons and direct fire support from short distances. Some of this proved to be ineffective and overly destructive. The campaign was considered to be successful and on December 27, 1989 troops were withdrawn. Noriega was no longer in power and is now serving a 40 year sentence for drug trafficking (Global 1 2007).

Some advantages that may have contributed to the success of the campaign would include the fact that there was already a U.S. occupation in Panama. The U.S. government and military were already familiar with Panama, its people and the enemy they were up against. Much of the intelligence needed to carry out the campaign had already been laid out. Some of the U.S. supplies and equipment was already available. Strategists planned effectively to have plenty of fuel tankers available for the airplanes. The campaign had been planned for nearly 2 years.

The only truly negative thing said about the campaign was that the amount of civilian homes destroyed was excessive. Panama is an area with dense population and buildings closely set together. Such destruction was inevitable. Civilian casualties amounted to 450, a number considered conservative but regrettable (Yates 2002). Operation Just Cause is an example of a military operation that went well and had good planning. The troops were ready and the results were as was expected in its planning.

### Operation Enduring Freedom

On October 7, 2001, in response to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, Operation Enduring Freedom was launched. The objectives of the campaign according to President Bush in his September 20<sup>th</sup> speech "...include the destruction of terrorist training camps and infrastructure within Afghanistan, the capture of Al-Qaeda leaders, and the cessation of terrorist activities in Afghanistan" (Global 2 2007). Donald Rumsfeld in his October 7<sup>th</sup> news conference gave some additional insight to those objectives when he stated that harboring of terrorists would not be tolerated and that efforts to develop relationships with forces opposed to the Taliban were going to be pursued during the conflict. The operation began with air strikes, eventually supplemented with ground troops. The 169 day campaign ended January 10, 2002. There were 2 U.S. lives lost to enemy fire and 12 due to accident. Afghan allied forces lost nearly 600 lives. It is believed that most of those were lost in a lengthy battle with Al-Qaeda leader, Mazar-i-Sharif. The war cost an estimated 3.8 billion dollars. There were 1000 - 1300 deaths due to aerial bombardment, 800 troop deaths in conflicts that arose after the initial war, and an estimated 3000 civilians died because of the massive destruction resulting from the aerial campaign. Much of these occurred because of lack of shelter and food in an area that was already ravaged with poverty. Things that were achieved in the conflict included the killing of nearly

4000 Taliban troops and nearly 7000 imprisoned, 8 of the 20 Al-Qaeda leaders were presumed dead and the Taliban have been driven from power in Afghanistan (Conetta 2002).

The objectives were achieved at a great cost to the public in Afghanistan. The benefit to them is they are no longer under the control of the Taliban and the activities of Al-Qaeda. Initially the troops were well prepared to do battle in the desert. Lessons learned from Operation Desert Storm were proven to be beneficial in this operation. Troops were trained in desert training camps and given some exposure to the culture of the enemy. Language was still a barrier, as it is with most wars. The transport of equipment was of great concern as it had to be shipped overseas from the U.S. This proved to be a very costly and time consuming affair (Global 2). Some question whether or not another plan of action would have been more effective. A plan less costly to the infrastructure of civilians could have been implemented; One that could have involved spending more time studying the movements and habits of Al-Qaeda and its members. Special Forces could have been more effective in tracking them down and destroying individual cells. Such an action may have been more successful, even though Operation Enduring Freedom weakened Al-Qaeda, it didn't succeed in eliminating it. Taking the Taliban out of power was beneficial but it will not prevent Al-Qaeda from re-grouping. We are still dealing with Al-Qaeda today and they get smarter as we get closer. The Soldiers are focused, alert, and putting together a pretty mean charge forward on daily bases. And we all know they are led by some of the most highly trained, dedicated, and battle tested Officers and NCOs in the military.

## Conclusion

Both Operation Just Cause and Operation Enduring Freedom are good examples of campaigns that fortunately did not suffer a long duration. Research and strategy carried on for nearly 2 years with Operation Just Cause. Much was known about the area and few lives were lost. The enemy had little ability to defend themselves against a full attack from the U.S because of the existing occupation of military forces there. The objectives were achieved leaving the people free to instill a new democratic government. With Operation Enduring Freedom, initial research and strategy lasted approximately 6 weeks. The campaign started with an objective to destroy Al-Qaeda and evolved into a strategy to destroy the Taliban. The objective to destroy the Taliban was achieved, but the original enemy, Al-Qaeda, though weakened at the time, remains at-large (Conetta 2002).

In the case of Operation Enduring Freedom, the root cause of our inability to achieve the initial objective is entirely based on the lack of planning and strategy. The lack of desire to commit more time to the task of gathering intelligence and training Special Forces troops to infiltrate the area. If even half as much time had been spent on Operation Enduring Freedom as it was with Operation Just Cause, the U.S. would have realized more success and victory in the conflict.

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