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Argumentative Essay

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Abstract

American military forces were successful during both the American Revolutionary War and the Boxer Rebellion of China. The American military forces set strategic goals and attained those goals in both conflicts. They were successful due to their flexibility and adaptability on the battlefield; their light and noise discipline and diversionary tactics enabling them to attack with the element of surprise; their use of joint and allied military forces; and their employment and transition to new battlefield tactics. Though these conflicts took place over one hundred and two hundred years ago, we, the modern military forces of America, can gain insights that are applicable in today's Global War on Terrorism.

The American Revolutionary War, also known as the American War for Independence took place from 1775 to 1783. It was a war between Great Britain and the thirteen British colonies. The goal of Britain was the suppression of the American Revolution and continued British rule. The goal and of the colonies and the mission of the American forces was to defeat Britain militarily, overthrow British rule and gain their independence.

American military forces attained many successes in their battle for independence. Logistically, the American forces experienced success due to the locality of supplies, while Britain had to wait for supplies to be shipped from England. In the realm of communication, the American forces were also successful, because the colonial and continental leaders were relatively close by. The British again had to wait upon shipping, causing British communication to be out of date. The American forces were made up of few professional soldiers, with the majority of soldiers being farmers and regular townsmen. In spite of this, their early battles against a supposed superior force brought about success on the battlefield. "A force of farmers and townsmen, fresh from their fields and shops with hardly any semblance of an orthodox military organization fought on equal terms with a professional British army" (The American Revolution: First Phase, 46).

American military forces experienced some difficulties and failures, however they were able to overcome these setbacks and gain overall victory. Britain held naval superiority over the American Navy, through most of the war, giving them access to all coastal cities. It was not until France and Spain entered the war that the naval superiority shifted to the American allied forces. Maintaining a full time army proved very difficult for the Americans. They had the Continental Army which was augmented by militia and minutemen when the need arose. There was no regularity to personal weapons or uniforms and they as soldiers had little or no military experience. Leadership was another area of difficulty and at times failure. The British had professional military men in charge of the military and many

members were seasoned veterans of war. As mentioned earlier, most of the American forces, especially those in leadership were not professional full time soldiers and had limited combat experience.

The strategic goals of the British were to defeat the Americans in every facet of the war and suppress the rebellion. Normally, the British would capture the capitol of a country and defeat the nation. This was not the case with the colonies. There was no central area of strategic importance, no capitol to capture as they would in European wars. The British captured New York and Philadelphia and still the revolution continued. The Americans sought to defeat the British when at all possible, usually striking back quickly after they had lost a battle, thus gaining a victory.

The Boxer Rebellion began in January 1900 in the Northern provinces of China, then moved throughout the country, eventually moving to Peking. It began as a rebellion against the presence of western countries trying to exert control in China, specifically in the area of missions and the Christian church. Gradually the acts of violence began to include all things foreign. Tzu Hsi, the Empress dowager of the Manchu Dynasty was publicly anti-boxer, but did not want her country divided among the western nations. In addition to the Christian influence, they had other worries. "Hunger, poverty, and dissatisfaction were a way of life. Frustrations ran high in many communities, and conditions were ripe for a rebellion" (Lowe, 44). The eight countries represented in China were: the United States, Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan and Russia. These countries had interests in China and maintained legations in Peking. In May of 1900 the foreign missionaries and Chinese Christians moved to Peking to escape persecution by the Boxers. The Boxers then destroyed multiple railroad stations and damaged the tracks preventing an escape of the foreigners. The legation guards were reinforced by 450 troops from various nations to help protect the foreign citizens.

The mission of the U.S. military was to rescue the trapped U.S. and foreign citizens in Peking. They joined what became an international rescue effort with each nation providing forces. Most of the American forces came from units serving in the Philippines.

“Additionally, some units trained and conducted operations together for some time, and this fact assisted in the general positive performance of the U.S. Army during the Boxer Rebellion” (Lowe, 63)

To accomplish their mission successfully they needed to capture the city of Tientsin. “Tientsin’s size and importance as a commercial center astride the Pei-ho and the railroad that connected it with Peking and Tongku made it the ideal location for an allied assembly area to prepare for the eventual attack on Peking” (Smith, 36). To do so, they had to take two Chinese forts at Taku and proceed inland. They were successful, however China declared war on the allies, increasing the number of enemy troops greatly. The international force defeated the Imperial army and secured Tientsin for resupply and reinforcements prior to pushing to Peking. The international force made their way to Peking with a force of 20,000 troops. They faced skirmishes along the way, but entered Peking on the 14th of August, to end the siege fifty-five days after it began.

The American forces did experience some difficulties and failures, however just as in the Revolutionary War, the Americans gained overall victory. Coordinated leadership was a difficulty faced by the American forces. “During this time frame, the U.S. War Department consisted of two parts: a departmental staff and the Army in the field. Unity of command through military chains was nonexistent and coordination between the Army in the field and the departmental staff elements was ineffective” (Lowe, 55). Another failure was the Admiral Seymour’s relief column. They failed to reach Peking due to a lack of preparation and attacks by the Boxers. They were able to capture a Chinese arsenal in Hsiku and were able to hold it until they were rescued and resupplied, though they had suffered 300

casualties. Logistics and communication were also difficulties faced by the international forces. One major communication problem took place during the attack of Yang Tsun in which 4 Americans were killed and 11 wounded by friendly fire. “The Russians were given the range estimation by the British in yards, but the Russians operated on the metric system and adjusted fire in meters” (Lowe, 81).

The strategic goals of the American and allied forces were to provide reinforcements to the legation guards, defeat the Boxers and the Chinese Imperial army, and free the legation from the siege. They were successful on all counts.

There are several critical factors that led to the success of American forces attaining their goals and victories in battle. I would like to look at four factors that I feel were critical.

In both the American Revolution and the Boxer Rebellion, American forces were successful due to their flexibility and adaptability when faced with overwhelming odds on the battlefield. During the American Revolution, General Washington had been promised a Continental army of 20,000 troops to fight the British with. In reality, he had less than half that amount, approximately 8,000. Although it was not the ideal answer to his need, he employed local militias to meet the need for additional troops. Washington himself was flexible and adapted to the difficulties that came his way. He knew his weaknesses, and was always willing to learn from his experiences. After some early mistakes, he learned his enemies strengths and weaknesses and did his best to exploit them. During the Boxer Rebellion, American and allied forces were able to adapt and defeat the Boxers and the Chinese Imperial Army. They were able to learn from mistakes and adapt to bring about victory. During the battle for Pei Tsang, Japanese forces had fought against the Chinese in a closed order formation and suffered many casualties. The next day at the battle of Tang Tsun, allied troops fought in an open order formation to prevent the heavy losses experienced by the Japanese the previous day. The allies were victorious and sustained only light

casualties. They were also flexible when it came to communication and the varied languages represented by the 8 nations. They determined that the commanders of all the national armies could speak either English or French and were thus able to communicate in those two languages. Each nation had their own army and commanders. Since there was no centralized commander, the international force adjusted to command by council.

In both the American Revolution and the Boxer Rebellion, American forces were successful in maintaining noise and light discipline, as well as diversionary tactics enabling them to attack with the element of surprise and gain the victory or escape to fight other battles. On several occasions during the American Revolution, the American forces were able to accomplish the moving of troops and equipment without the knowledge of the enemy. In Massachusetts, the American forces were able to occupy Dorchester Heights on a single night. To divert the enemy and drown out the noise of work parties, they had nightly barrages of artillery, while 20 cannons were moved into place. This granted them control of Boston Harbor and forced the British to abandon Boston. During the Battle of Brooklyn, the Americans were facing sure defeat, but 9,000 American troops were able to escape across the river to safety, because of noise and light discipline. When the American forces attacked the Hessians in Trenton, New Jersey, the battle lasted only 45 minutes. The brevity of the battle was due in part to noise and light discipline and the element of surprise. "Twenty-one Hessians had been killed, 90 wounded. The prisoners taken numbered approximately 900" (1776, 281). During the Boxer Rebellion, the majority of the battles were direct. The International forces did employ night attacks and multi-pronged attacks including deceptive feints coupled with main attacks.

In both the American Revolution and the Boxer Rebellion, American forces were able to gain victory over the enemy through the use of joint and allied forces. During the Revolutionary War, the American forces had the benefit of France, Spain and the Netherlands

joining them in the fight against the British and Hessians. Spain and France came to the aid of the Americans to help weaken British power and provide money and supplies to keep the American war effort going. General Washington saw that with a joint effort by the Continental Army and the French and Spanish Navies he could defeat the British. During the Boxer Rebellion, the American forces operated jointly with a multinational force of Army, Navy and Marines. It was America's first opportunity to conduct multinational operations since the Revolutionary War. These eight nations strove to achieve a common purpose, to rescue their citizens held in Peking. This coalition force began a trend in war that continues still today.

In both the American Revolution and the Boxer Rebellion, American forces were successful in transitioning to and employing new battlefield tactics that brought success in each campaign. The British were used to fighting in the typical European wars held on an open battlefield. The Americans adopted a new battlefield tactic of guerilla warfare in which they could hide, hit the enemy and then evade the enemy. The land of the colonies with its plentiful woods, hills and swamps was suited this type of guerilla warfare. Though the American soldiers did not have a consistency in their personal weapons, the men from Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia used long barreled rifles instead of muskets. The effective range of a musket was 100 yards, while the long barreled rifles were effective at distances of 250 yards. This weapon became an effective tool in the guerilla warfare against the British. Transitioning to new battlefield tactics took place in the American forces as they dealt with the Boxer Rebellion. "By the 1880's astute army officers recognized that fighting indians was about over. Further, these officers believed that the long years of constabulary duty rendered the army ineffective for large scale (European style) warfare. These officers believed the primary function of the army in peacetime was to prepare for war" (Lowe, 56). Information secured through professional education and unit training prepared American

forces to fight in the Spanish-American War, counterinsurgencies in the Philippines and the Boxer Rebellion in China.

There are differing views regarding the effectiveness of American forces who served in the American Revolution and in the Boxer Rebellion of China. There are those who propose that American forces were ineffective in transitioning between past and future battlefield tactics, that the leadership was unprepared for victory due to poor intelligence and false assumptions, and that joint and allied forces were more concerned with their own agendas and glory instead of a joint/allied victory.

Though American forces did at times experience difficulties in transforming and employing new battlefield tactics, they were able to learn from these difficulties and adapt accordingly. Though there cases of inept leadership in both campaigns, their ineptness was dealt with by peers or superiors, causing overall leadership at all levels to be successful. Though there were some instances of bickering and self serving attitudes among the joint and allied forces, their ability to work together for the common good brought about victory in both campaigns.

The insights gained from American forces in the American Revolution and the Boxer Rebellion provide us with lessons still applicable today in our fighting the Global War on Terrorism. Today, we can still benefit from flexibility and adaptability in combat. We still need to enforce noise and light discipline. We still need to implement diversionary tactics and the element of surprise. Finally, as we continue to wage the Global War on Terror, we need to learn from our combat experiences and employ new battlefield tactics.

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