

Running Head: STUDYING MILITARY HISTORY

Military Leaders Studying Military History

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Class 58

18 March 2008

Abstract

America's military men and women are of outstanding caliber and must be prepared to effectively fight and defeat a determined enemy. Despite the constant claim of success by Military Leaders, we must analyze the forces that have inhibited the military from being ready to fight during the initial phases of wars fought throughout our nation's history. In this paper I will argue that the countless death of US Soldiers contributed to what the Military classifies as "nonhostile" fatalities is overwhelming evidence of this fact. As the death toll of America's fighting men and women reach unprecedented numbers due to "nonhostile" fatalities, studying military history is critical for today's leaders in the twentieth century.

In these troubled times, “there is no greater threat facing the United States and the American way of life than terrorism”. Therefore, it is imperative that the leaders of the United States (U.S.) Armed forces confront and not cover up the mistakes made by the military during the initial phases of wars within the past decade. When examining military history from the past, military leaders must utilize the lessons learned in order to control the future of the military and our country. Studying military history and adhering to the lessons learned is paramount for outstanding leadership. The importance of military history for leaders goes beyond all what we once knew prior to the horrific terrorist attacks on September 11 and now challenges every leader to study the mistakes of the past and not to repeat those mistakes on today's battlefield.

Military history lays the foundation for knowledgeable and adaptive leaders who gain invaluable insight by studying the past. Military history provides critical data about the problems faced by other leaders in a variety of areas that directly effect good order and discipline in a unit. Only a disciplined unit will fight, survive, and win on today's complex battlefield. “Studying military history helps leaders understand how recent, current, and prospective changes affect the lessons that are emerging or may emerge and the causes involved”. More importantly, studying military history saves precious lives by assisting leaders in establishing critical thinking habits that are vital for responsible leader's behavior, whether a combat arms, combat support or combat service support leader, an officer, Non-Commissioned Officer or a basic enlisted Soldier.

Leaders must assess lessons learned, both good and bad from conflicts of the past. The study of military history builds experience in dealing with and assessing various kinds of issues confronted by other leaders from the past. “The art of war is of vital importance to the state. *It is*

a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or ruin. Hence it is a subject of inquiry which can, on no account be neglected" (Sun Tzu). If we as leaders do not learn from the mistakes of the past, we are destined to repeat them; it is simply a matter of life or death. In this paper I will discuss one of the most critical issues that have claimed far too many American lives in combat. But unfortunately they weren't killed by the enemy, the military calls them "nonhostile" fatalities, deaths caused by something other than direct combat, they can be vehicle crashes, fratricide, suicides, heat strokes, or a number of reasons. As a result as of February 2008 at least "800 Soldiers killed while supporting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan but not officially counted by the military as combat deaths. Non-hostile combat deaths account for more than 22 percent of the deaths during both wars. About a quarter of the deaths during the war in Iraq, have resulted from accidents or other noncombat causes. During the Vietnam War, noncombat deaths accounted for 18.5 percent of all fatalities. During the 1991 Persian Gulf War, 62 percent of the deaths were from nonhostile causes. In Afghanistan, about 57 percent of the deaths are non-hostile". In more than 800 noncombat deaths in Iraq, Department of Defense news releases identify the cause in much the same way, using general terms such as "noncombat-related injury" without providing a specific cause. In a number of other cases, neither the families nor the military would discuss the specific causes. The military view non-hostile combat deaths as an inherent part of combat. But to the families of the heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice, the reasons and actions from the military concerning the death of their love ones is simply intolerable.

Cause identified in most cases

“About 100 soldiers in Iraq have died the way Lt. Col. Dominic Rocco Baragona of Niles, Ohio, did — in a vehicle accident. Vehicle crashes accounted for more than a third of all noncombat deaths. Besides vehicle accidents, the causes included helicopter crashes unrelated to combat, electrocution, fire, homicide and accidental falls. Non-combat deaths do not include so-called “friendly fire” deaths, soldiers accidentally killed by friendly forces; those are counted as combat deaths” (Russell Carollo, Mike Wagner, Mehul Srivastava and Ken McCall, *Dayton Daily News*).

- Causes do not identify suicide

“*The Dayton Daily News* searched more than 1,000 Department of Defense news releases and found none that identified suicide as a cause of death. Military representatives often will not confirm suicide as a cause, even when families already are openly discussing the circumstances” (Russell Carollo, Mike Wagner, Mehul Srivastava and Ken McCall, *Dayton Daily News*).

- Weapons accidents take toll

“The *Daily News* examination found that numerous cases termed noncombat deaths by the military involved Soldiers shooting Soldiers. In those cases the Department of Defense press releases don't identify a specific cause” (Russell Carollo, Mike Wagner, Mehul Srivastava and Ken McCall, *Dayton Daily News*).

- War underlying cause of deaths

“In virtually all cases examined by the *Daily News*, the causes of the noncombat deaths were directly or indirectly linked to the unusual circumstances and pressures created by the war. “I

think the reality is that a large percentage of people serving in Iraq never thought that they would have to go to war, didn't prepare to go to war or go to war for so long," said Jonathan Becker, dean of international studies at Bard College in Annandale, N.Y." and the effects of that are tremendous in terms of whether they can handle the military engagements in Iraq" (Russell Carollo, Mike Wagner, Mehul Srivastava and Ken McCall, *Dayton Daily News*). There is no greater example than the tragic outcome of the attack on the 507th Maintenance Company in An Nasiriyah, Iraq on 23 March 2003. "The element of the 507th Maintenance Company that bravely fought through An Nasiriyah, found itself in a desperate situation due to a navigational error caused by the combined effects of the operational pace, acute fatigue, isolation and the harsh environmental conditions. The tragic results of this error placed the Soldiers of the 507th Maintenance Company in a torrent of fire from an adaptive enemy employing asymmetrical tactics "(Attack on 507th, 2003). Several measures were available to mitigate the risk of such an event, but were either not employed (Brief-back rehearsal) or were ineffective (Traffic Control Point-TCP). The bottom line is Soldiers fight as they are trained or prepared to fight.

It all adds to the pressure of what is happening in Iraq and Afghanistan today. The military is concerned that a lack of basic safety and the lack of discipline, both of which is enforced by Leaders, particularly Non-commissioned Officers, is claiming too many troops; in May alone, half of the U.S. military's 18 non-hostile deaths involved vehicles. "Since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the loss of lives and equipment, and the numerous injuries, from both tactical and not-tactical, has contributed to a decrease in combat fighting capabilities," Sanchez wrote. "This trend is unacceptable." Leaders can and must utilize the tools at their disposal to reduce the number of accidents and injuries." Despite his plea, the non hostile deaths still continue at an even larger rate. "War deaths are difficult for all families, but a combat

death usually comes with some sense of clarity and honor. For families of soldiers who die of illness, in accidents or at their own hands or the hands of fellow soldiers, the suffering can be made worse by the uncertainty of what occurred and the difficulty of getting information from the military” (“ (Russell Carollo, Mike Wagner, Mehul Srivastava and Ken McCall, *Dayton Daily News*).

Lessons learned that we must utilize today to make a difference:

- Provide a strong fighting force that is highly motivated, well trained, and able to adapt to harsh environment of combat prior to deploying into combat.
- Position strong and adaptive command teams able to lead by example and earn the trust of their subordinate leaders and Soldiers.
- Ensure that Commanders are given greater latitude to identify and eliminate Soldiers who are unable to handle the rigors.
- **Battle Command, situational awareness, and common leader and Soldier disciplines and skills--the “fundamentals”--down to the lowest levels become critical, perhaps more than ever before.**
- **The flexibility and agility required by the Objective Force calls upon the Army as an institution to ensure balanced investments between the advanced capabilities that allow commanders and formations to concentrate effects, and the development and retention of skilled Soldiers who are at least equally adaptive but more versatile than the threats they are likely to face in this century.**

Despite the constant claim of success by Military Leaders, we must analyze the forces that have inhibited the military from being ready to fight during the initial phases of wars fought

throughout our nation's history. Why senior leaders should study military history is a profound, yet difficult question? The answer however is very simple; we must study military history because too many Soldiers are dying needlessly on today's battlefield. When we study the actions rationally and acquire some methods of the mind, as well as some basic information about the enemy and friendly forces that affect our military lives, we emerge with relevant skills and enhanced capacity for critical thinking and simple awareness. Studying history can help us develop some accurately advanced skills that will help us succeed on today's and future battlefields.

References

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