

Military History Study: Relevant For Today's Soldier

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Abstract:

The importance of military history is important today as it was 20-30 years ago. The basis of this essay will contain facts and observances I have made throughout my nineteen-year career. My career has been filled with numerous deployments and encounters over the years. Each deployment has given me the opportunity to glean more information and be able to compare and contrast to that of my forefathers. I have been able to formulate my decisions based on this knowledge.

I understand some people do not have the same beliefs that I do. I hope this essay reaches them.

Introduction

- a. Background information: Military history has always been a topic of conversation amongst Officers and NCOs. Do we need to learn from military history to avoid mistakes made in the past? I believe all soldiers must have a basic knowledge of military history to become effective leaders on the battlefield. Being an Non-Commissioned officer in the United States Army has been a hands on experience from the dawning of our military. We have embraced the Be, Know, Do culture of our society and have passed it down to our young soldiers for generations. Leadership courses are just one phase of our military culture. There are numerous other ways we learn and teach military history to our soldiers and peers alike. We study military history to learn from our mistakes of the past. Sometimes this is not the case though.
- b. Thesis or Argumentative Statement: War has been with man since the beginning of time. It has always been this way and it will always be. The question has always been: should military professionals take time out of their busy schedules to study military history? Soldiers and leaders alike have a duty to study military history. This paper will reflect my argument with the reasons that military history is important to all military personnel. We live in a tumultuous world where war follows war. We know not when this will end. It is a continuing cycle we will be perpetuating for years to come. The advent of the Global War on Terror is upon us. It is up to the senior military Non-Commissioned officers to step up to the plate and

ensure our young soldiers are mentored properly. This can be done by the study of military history.

II. Reasons that Support the thesis or Argumentative Statement

A. Reason/Argument 1

1. The repeat of history throughout our military engagements has been well documented over time. The ability to study history can have a more positive lessons learned impact for our military commanders. We can read the papers daily to find out what is happening in the current conflict overseas. It is a story for the ages, a soldier killing innocent civilians for unknown reasons, a soldier killing innocent comrades for selfish reasons. We can turn the clock back to any given conflict in our history to see the story is always the same. The story never changes. It is only the key players and time that change. The one consistent thing is history. And we have the advantage. We can learn from it. We can better prepare our soldiers. We can better prepare ourselves. The current conflict gives us such headlines as Abu Gharib. It leaves the Senior Non-Commissioned Officer of our generation shaking their heads. Can we change this? Will the study of history change the facts as they are presented to us? The images the pictures have conjured up leave a grown man shaking his head and wondering where we went wrong. There have been plenty of studies conducted on just such events over the last 50 years. The Stanford experiment comes to mind. The Stanford prison experiment was a study of the psychological effects of becoming a prisoner or prison guard. The experiment was conducted in 1971 by a team of

researchers led by Psychology Professor Philip Zimbardo at Stanford University. Twenty-four undergraduates were selected out of 70 to play the roles of both guards and prisoners and live in a mock prison in the basement of the Stanford psychology building. Those selected were chosen for their lack of psychological issues, crime history, and medical disabilities, in order to obtain a representative sample. Roles were assigned based on a coin toss. There are very close similarities between the experiment and the Abu Gharib incident. It took the Stanford students just 6 days to show signs of weakness and develop sadistic tendencies. In the future, our leaders can use Abu Gharib and experiments such as these when considering how to deal with the ever-changing battlefield we deal with on our deployments.

2. Information is paramount when planning operations and strategies that will be applied against our enemies in a time of war. The more we read on enemy tactics during previous engagements, the more knowledgeable our leaders will become and enable our military to put together a more refined plan for offensive or defensive operations. Our tactical operations when dealing with prison like environments is critical to the way our military is evolving. With ever present liberal media and politicians imposing their will on our armed forces, we must be ever vigilant in the way we conduct our business. This is why we must learn from the mistakes we make. Abu Gharib is the prime example. I am confident that the lack of leadership played a prime role in the incidents that took place. The actions that took place set us back several

years in our relationships with countries of that region. It made us look like barbarians. How do we learn from that? We teach our soldiers the humane way to treat individuals. We reinforce those standards during training. We live those standards as a daily way of life. Mistakes will always be made. We must make our adjustments and drive on.

3. Some of the keenest minds in the military have always stated that military history has played a big role in their successes. Most of the best and brightest leaders I have dealt with have possessed this attribute. That being said, military history alone does not make a great leader nor tactician. It is a culmination of military history and personal experiences that make us stronger as leaders. We follow those which we feel are well versed in experience and in education. The combination of both makes us the deadliest adversary on the planet. We stress this in our young soldiers on the battlefield at all possible levels. As we study leaders of foreign nations, we can learn their thought processes. This gives us the opportunity to see how they engage their militaries in conflicts. Thus, by studying their previous engagements, this may give us the tactical advantage we need in certain situations.

III. Counter Arguments and responses to them

- A. There are individuals that believe that history is in the past and has very little to do with today's combat operations. The thought process is that we should be focusing on the future, and future alone. Individuals believe that focusing on the future will help us be a more professional fighting force. The argument is we should spend more time working our current Techniques, Tactics, and Procedures (TTPs). To this response, I would say, it is quite evident we get our current TTPs from studying the battles of yesteryear. Essentially, multiple agencies are responsible for working current/future TTPs and refining them for the current fight. But, most of this is based off of past battles. So I believe their argument is counter-intuitive. How can you actually create TTPs without the knowledge of previous encounters? By studying the conflicts of the past, we are allowed to move forward. It is the duty of every NCO to understand and learn from previous engagements. This information can be passed down to the younger soldiers. It therefore perpetuates a cycle of learning and education that should not be broken.
- B. When the Soviet Union decided to invade Afghanistan, they evaluated their chances for success upon their experiences in East Germany, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. Unfortunately for their soldiers, as well as the people of Afghanistan, they ignored not only the experiences of the British in the same region, but also their own experience with Basmachi resistance fighters in Central Asia from 1918-1933.

As the military started to prepare for Operation Enduring Freedom, key leaders took the time to read *The Bear Went Over The Mountain*. This book became priority for most individuals. We actually were reading what happened to the Soviets and studying the tactics of the Taliban. This allowed Special Operations to establish more relevant TTPs to seek and destroy the enemy. This is a clear cut case of studying the past to prepare for the future.

IV. Conclusion

In allowing our military leaders to study history, we set a path for success in future conflicts. Military history is an important aspect of the planning and the military decision making process. The lessons that can be learned from studying history can be the difference between victory and defeat. We must continue to analyze our enemies' tactics. This is done through the proper research of current information and previous history.

Bibliography:

Author: Binnendijk, Hans. Publication: The Bear Went Over The Mountain: Second Printing, August 1996