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Learn, Prepare, and Execute

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Thesis: Although American Soldiers through their tenacity always figure a way to accomplish the mission, the military and its leaders should better prepare their Soldiers through proper training and providing the necessary equipment for the Soldiers to execute their primary mission.

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Abstract

The success of the military in operations globally depends on the level of training the Soldiers and leaders get prior to deploying in a hostile environment. Soldiers must be afforded the necessary equipment prior to deployment so training can occur on how to properly employ the equipment tactically and proficiently. The military must remain aware of how transformation affects the Army, especially, after every operation. The Army cannot allow transformation to cause shortcomings to needed manpower, equipment and training. The training and equipment is paramount to Soldiers if the expectation of success is met in the initial stages of the conflict.

Learn, Prepare, and Execute

Although American Soldiers through their tenacity always figure a way to accomplish the mission, the military and its leaders should better prepare their Soldiers through proper training and providing the necessary equipment for the Soldiers to execute their primary mission.

Throughout history, the military executed a broad spectrum of warfare whenever called upon to do so. Many of these excursions, operations, battles, or wars led the United States (U.S.) military to perform missions at the outbreak of hostilities with little to no required training or the wrong equipment to successfully ensure mission accomplishment.

The analysis of this paper is focused on the training, buildup and pre-deployment prior to the operation in Korea in 1950 with Task Force Smith and the battle at the Kasserine Pass in 1943. Each of these operations had a significant role in the history and how the military displayed specific shortcomings in preparation for these events. The examination of both of these operations will scrutinize the deficiencies specifically pertaining to the preparation and training of the Soldiers and equipment the military took into battle. Later, a review of what happened in these two operations is analyzed and considered in how the U.S. Army are doing in today's current operations globally.

The warning order for deployment of Task Force Smith did not come to fruition until the North Koreans decided to fire an artillery barrage across the 38th parallel on 25 June 1950. The North Koreans moved two divisions, a brigade and a regiment, across the border to delay the South Koreans. Surprised by the incursion, the U.S. government turned to the United Nations (U.N.) to agree on a political response. "General of the Army Douglas, MacArthur, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Far East Command, reported little hope of saving Korea unless the United States entered the fight. On 30 June 1950, he recommended the commitment of combat elements of the Eighth U.S. Army, stationed in Japan; without hesitation, President Harry S. Truman

approved” (Flint, 1986, p. 266). MacArthur immediately began to move Smith's battalion of the 24th Infantry Division to Korea.

The 24th Division prior to their alert notification had a primary mission of occupying an island in Japan and a secondary mission of training. The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Smith, was a veteran of the 7 December 1941 Pearl Harbor attack, and most of their officers and senior noncommissioned officers were veterans of World War II. However, the unit mission did not call for them to be conducting training for missions in Korea. These were issues not directly attributed to the leaders of Task Force Smith as much as issues with the direction the Army was heading.

At this point in history the Army was cutting back on the number of forces and forming a hollow force which would later create a major problem for the future of the 24th division. The majority of the divisions were sitting at approximately 66 percent of their peacetime manning. The 24th had 10,700 men, the first Cavalry had 11,300, and the 7th had 10,600 (Flint, 1986, p. 269). However, one of the most significant problems was the unit was deploying with less than their authorized equipment. Armor units were deploying with light tanks instead of medium tanks, and the artillery was at less than two-thirds strength with their equipment.

All units of the Eighth Army were in disarray when it came to having the required serviceable equipment to conduct operations in Korea. The 24th deploying first unit was lucky enough to get equipment pushed to them by their sister units. The rest of the divisions had old worn equipment and lacked .30 caliber machine-guns, spare machine-gun barrels, machine-gun tripods, mortar components, 57-mm recoilless rifles, all of their 90-mm antitank guns, and many radios (Flint, 1986, p. 274).

Task Force Smith deployed with a miniscule amount of much needed combat power and equipment. The unit had zero tank and antitank mines, only six artillery antitank rounds were

found throughout the division, and 2.36 mm bazookas which were ineffective; the Army had produced a 3.5 inch bazooka, but Task Force Smith did not deploy with any (Fehrenbach, 1963). These equipment shortcomings would later play a major role in success or failure of the operation.

Due to the mission the 24th division had, the importance of training was neglected. Across the division, the relaxed mission of occupation resulted in a lack of training for most units. Some units had an influx of new Soldiers that were straight from basic training and were entering the military to take advantage of the government issue (G.I.) bill. These Soldiers presumably never had any expectation of combat. These problems not only plagued the 24th division, these were problems across the entire Eighth Army.

Many of the units fell short meeting training requirements at the battalion or higher level because they did not have sufficient land to maneuver. Training focused mainly on some individual and squad level exercises. The artillery units were forced to do dry fire missions and not have the opportunity to shoot in support of maneuver. The battalions of the Eighth Army tried to progress to the Army Training Test by the time war broke out. Unfortunately and not surprisingly, many failed because they could not adequately prepare (Flint, 1986, p. 274).

Preparation, training, and equipment are key factors and are at the forefront when planning and resourcing prior to an operation. “In 1939, at the beginning of World War II, the U.S. Army found itself back in a position where the need to conduct modern warfare was lacking. Although many dedicated individual professional Soldiers had during the 1920’s and 1930’s conscientiously studied to be ready for the next war, decline, neglect, and stagnation marked Americas military force” (Blumenson, 1986, p. 226).

The Army had undergone a transition where equipment was deteriorating and the force was cut significantly. The military had loss attention of the people especially during the

depression, and the development and procurement of weapons was significantly overlooked. The U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General Malin Craig, wondered if it was too late. He warned that at least two years were required to transform funds into military power. “Time is the only thing, that may be irrevocably lost (Blumenson, 1986).” Once again the military had allowed itself to be in a position that could result in the loss of Soldiers because a lack of equipment and training.

In order for the military to be ready to accomplish future missions at a much larger scale the transformation had to happen immediately. The Army had to expand, create better equipment for a different type of fight, mass produce equipment, and commanders and Soldiers had to be trained to execute in a combined arms effort. At this point, the standing Army was at 110,000 men in 1936, but lacked airplanes, tanks, combat and scout cars, antiaircraft artillery guns, search lights, fire control equipment, .50cal machine-guns, and other vital material (Blumenson, 1986, p. 227). Again the military had allowed itself to get in a state where as an armed force was not ready nor prepared for combat operations.

This was a time in history when our economy was so stringent that defense expenditures were keeping the military from conducting the much needed training to prepare them for what they would endure at the Kasserine Pass. Once again in preparation for yet another operation Soldiers were not getting the opportunity to train individually, as a unit, and as a combined arms team. Leaders were also missing out on the much needed experience at coordinating and organizing large forces. By 1939, the Army had virtually forgotten how to conduct training on a large scale. Few officers could handle organizations larger than a battalion (Blumenson, 1986, p. 229).

Finally, in 1940 the Army realized the significance of the transformation, the need to outfit the military with better equipment, and most importantly to train the Soldiers for the type of mission they would be called upon to execute. The Army started conducting large scale

exercises including two or more divisions. The Fourth Army planned and executed an amphibious exercise involving the Army, Navy, and Air Corps elements. General McNair restated the importance of training and training with new equipment. He added prophetically, the results “might not be all that could be desired” (Atkinson, 2002, p. 237). General McNair’s statement was accurate due to the minimal time for training while executing operations of this size.

Even General Eisenhower noted that American commanders had shown a great tenacity for applying combined arms by integrating armor, infantry, and other combat units. “That art, like fighting on the defensive and operating within an allied coalition, had been given short shrift in the stateside training; Soldiers were forced to learn where lessons always cost most, on the battlefield (Blumenson, 1986, p. 392).” Again, it is reinforced that Soldiers and leaders have to train at all levels with all combat forces in order for them to be proficient in their duties and capable of employing their equipment.

Although Soldiers have great tenacity, and are adaptive thinking leaders the U.S. Army must provide them with the necessary equipment and the opportunity with all available resources if the U.S. Army wants to minimize the losses of our greatest asset, the American Soldier. Noncommissioned officers at all levels have to take the lead with ensuring the Soldiers are trained to the best of their ability and capable of employing their equipment on the battlefield. The U.S. military continues to make great strides with implementation of force readiness training before deploying units abroad. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, replied to a Soldiers comment about the lack of equipment in theatre: “As you know, you go to war with the Army you have. They're not the Army you might want or wish to have at a later time” (Rickes, 2004). However true this statement might be, the military can not afford to deploy without the right equipment, unless there is no other choice.

The action Task Force Smith engaged in cost them 150 men killed, wounded or missing.

The action in the Kasserine Pass cost the Allies about 10,000 men, of which 6,500 were Americans.

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