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“Military History: A Leadership Educational Training Tool”

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### Abstract

There are many tools that are used to develop leaders in today's modern Army. Whether we are training Officer's or NCOs, the key is that we receive the best possible training that will enable us to train, develop, and lead Soldiers. This is extremely important, as we need to be successful in leading Soldiers in peacetime as well as in war.

In this paper, I will examine the leadership style of two historic leaders, George Washington and Braxton Bragg, their successes as well as their failures. I will compare the two leaders and demonstrate how future leaders can benefit from studying history and using it as an educational and possibly a training tool.

### Military History: A Leadership Educational Training Tool

A lot of people will argue that history repeats itself, and things that are happening now, have happened before. While many would argue that this is true, history does not repeat itself, it really only parallels the events that has taken place in the past. For this reason it should be important to use history as a leadership educational tool in the development of all our military leaders. For anyone to fully understand where we are going as a country, or as a organized military we must examine our past.

There are a vast number of different leadership techniques that has been developed in today's modern Army. The developments are from the result of analyzing the failures or successes of battles in the past, and the leaders who led those battles. We must also study the process used to make operational and strategic decisions by the past leadership. Whether you are a skeptic of history, or a analyst of history, history as a leadership educational training tool has proved to b a success in today's Army.

### George Washington at Valley Forge

George Washington, the first president of our country and also known as the founding father of the United States of America, has supposedly had the most impact on our country's history. Known as one of the best battlefield commanders, he faced many problems and obstacles which ultimately lead to decisions that would change the course of military history.

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While in Valley Forge, faced with diminishing morale of troops, depleted supplies, and regardless of the many attempts of appeal to the continental congress for support, he no longer could watch his Army suffer.

Under the training of Baron Von Stueben, he increased discipline and instilled pride among his troops. George Washington inspired true leadership and truly desired to improve conditions of his troops which led to development of the Continental Army at Valley Forge. Additionally this would eventually serve as the forerunner for the Army we have and serve in today.

During the harsh winter at Valley Forge, George Washington's Army faced a lot of problems. The Army, which consisted of over 12,000 Soldiers suffered due to the lack of adequate food and clothing. The deaths of over 2500 troops due to disease that spread quickly throughout the ranks cause the morale to drop tremendously. When Soldiers started nearing the end of there initial commitment, they displayed no intentions to reenlist.

Eventually acknowledging that his Army was destined for failure, he pressured the Continental Congress to provide him with desperately needed recruits and supplies. With the arrival of new recruits, adequate food and new clothes, George Washington transformed his quickly failing Army into a well-disciplined Army who displayed a sense of pride and a lot of motivation. George Washington's Soldiers respected him as a good leader with a genuine concern for the health and welfare of his troops.

Soldiers in today's Army can thank the leaders and Soldiers of the past for the advancements of today. History has been an enabler for us to develop equipment and technology to serve our Soldiers in any conditions they may face. Because of the Failed systems such as those in Valley Forge, it has led to the development of Logistical systems of today that re-supplies units quickly.

Additionally, today's Army is characterized by the good discipline we project throughout the world today. The dedication and leadership of the great commander, George Washington, and a former member of the Prussian Army, Baron Von Stueben paved the way for the greatest Army in the world.

#### General Braxton Braggs, the Battle of Chickamauga

General Braxton Bragg, a commander of the Tennessee Confederate Army, considered to be one of the worst commanding officers in American history. General Bragg, a strict enforcer of regulations and rules and never followed rules himself. He argued constantly with his higher chain of command as with his subordinate officers also. Experts have said that General Bragg's personality was not suited for command.

General Bragg did not encompass the balance of stability and character necessary for good leadership. Bragg was a petty, indecisive, suspicious, and a vengeful man. General Braxton Bragg, was blamed for the loss of Tennessee because of his lack of trust and constant arguments with his subordinates. General Bragg's lack of strategic planning caused the retreat and ultimately destroyed the morale of the entire Tennessee Army.

Soldier's morale and relationships with the leadership was terrible. The Tennessee Army well clothed, well equipped, and the army eventually gained strength in recruits and returning deserters. Even though it seemed that these Soldiers morale was good, the constant quarrels between the commander and unit leadership, General Bragg, destroyed all esprit. Soldiers spirits were often crushed by General Bragg, and they were often scapegoats for his mistakes and failures.

Whether it is the Army of today, or the Army of the past history provides us with outstanding leadership training. The Army of the past was well disciplined, and well equipped with soldiers, arms, and equipment. Most would think that this unit would have had high morale, but in fact the morale was very low. This was due to the constant bickering and arguing amongst the leadership. Today's Soldiers rarely experience these problems, and this is due mainly to the studies of history, the failures and mistakes of the past.

#### General Bragg and General Washington

In comparing the leadership of these two Generals, it is evident to see that General Washington prevailed as the better of the two leaders. George Washington, with low supplies, lack of troops, and lack of support from the continental congress rebuilt his failing Army. Through dedication and untiring efforts of taking care of his Soldiers, he raised the morale by instilling pride in his Soldiers. This increased recruitment and retention, winning numerous

battles that ultimately changed the outcome of his unit. His victories at Valley Forge, Princeton, and Trenton were against unbeatable odds and this propelled him to the Presidency.

General Bragg, equipped with a well discipline unit, numerous recruits, and an abundance of supplies did not have the respect of his Soldiers or leaders. Once again, he consistently used his Soldiers as scapegoats for his failures. General Bragg crushed the spirit of his men at every and all opportunities. Because of his lack of planning ability and tactical knowledge, often he would retreat, and this was evident during the loss at the Battle of Chickamauga. General Bragg's severe lack of leadership and numerous failures led to him being relieved of command.

History being used as an leadership educational tool is important. In this essay, I identified how on one hand a person can have virtually no supplies, no troops, and low morale, but through leadership, win battles. On the other hand, a person can be fully equipped with everything needed, but totally lack the leadership to command and lose all battles. As history is reviewed, we learn of our failures and successes, not to prevent history from repeating itself, but to ensure we improve the previously failed systems. We owe it to all Soldiers as leaders to give them the best equipment and leadership to lead them to victory in war.

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General Braxton Bragg

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