

Running Head: Unprepared for Combat Operations

Preparedness is the Key to Success During the Initial Phases of Combat

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SGM, 21Z50

20 March 2008

R-14

Class 58

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### Abstract

We are the best trained and equipped Army in the world. We have fought and struggled during many wars and conflicts. Although we have a record of success in most conflicts we have often stumbled out of the starting block due to our training, lack of foresight, and often because military planners or politicians miscalculated. This paper will convey that importance of preparedness in time of peace, which will enable quick military successes in the future.

## Korea

The military has always trained to with the nation's wars. From the revolutionary war to Operation Iraqi and Enduring Freedom we have always insisted that we train for the next fight. Unfortunately we can usually not predict what the actual next engagement might be with too much accuracy. At the conclusion of World War II we did not foresee that Korea would be our next conflict. Training and our forces was not a huge priority after our Victory over Germany and Japan. Our military leaders at the time focused on the occupation of Japan and Germany and concentrated our efforts to rebuild those nations. Most tasks were associated with nation building and not for the next big fight. Our military leaders and Political leaders were more focused on Europe and containing the Soviet Union. When we entered the Korean Conflict we initially had problems many of which were due to training, and dealing with the tanks used by the North Koreans. Initially we sent a task force that was under trained and not equipped or manned to ensure quick success. The initial task force that was to delay the enemy fought bravely but our military did not set them up for success. They were not manned to proper strength levels due to the fact that demobilization after WW II had reduced our military strength from 12 million to roughly one million military members. The Army went from ninety-one Divisions to 10 which contributed greatly to its initial failures in Korea. The regiment only had two of its three Battalions. The equipment that they deployed with was no match for the North Korean T-34 tanks. The 60mm Bazookas were ineffective weapons against these tanks and led to the initial failures of the operation. Not only were the weapon systems not effective the lines of communications also were

unsatisfactory. Combat Service and Support units supporting the operation were at only at 25 percent strength which also contributed to the failures at the onset of the conflict. During the initial phases of this conflict it was very apparent that we were not prepared to stop the enemy quickly which might have resulted in a more timely end to the conflict.

### Vietnam

This conflict again saw that our military struggled early in the conflict. There again was a training issue as our military members were not well trained in fighting in the type of terrain were they found themselves. Some of the military equipment was not well suited for this environment such as the M16 and some of our communications equipment. After several attacks on our Air Force base at Denang 3,500 Marines were deployed to South Vietnam on March 8, 1965. By December of 1965 200,000 ground troops were in Vietnam as a defensive force. This was contrary to what our commanders training had been over their careers which was offensive operations. Our commanders were not prepared or trained for this initial strategy. The military as well as politicians underestimated the enemy early in the conflict. They did not understand the Vietnamese people and their resolve in fighting for their country. This was a serious miscalculation on the part of the military. Another indication of early failure was the Presidents ability to sell this mission to the American people. Military policy also led to early failure and would eventually contribute to our eventual withdraw from the conflict. The military policy of only requiring 12 month tours of duty meant that there was almost a constant turn over of leaders in units, which contributed to some moral issues in some combat units. If the military and our national leaders would have considered the before

mentioned issues we may have been more successful early in this conflict and again we may have ended the conflict years earlier.

### Downsizing of the Military

As the Gulf War ended and we successfully removed Iraqi forces from Kuwait there was a major push to downsize the military which has had a negative impact on our military forces preparedness for future conflict just as it did during our conflict in Korea. Policy was instituted that required the military to down size. This resulted in a smaller military but did not take into account that this is an all volunteer force. With limited numbers of combat divisions our ability to win conflicts overwhelmingly early has been diminished. This also resulted in funding shortfalls during the 1990's which required units to do more with less. Training in some cases was simulated rather than actually conduct. Commanders fought battles using simulation rather than fighting a more realistic battle on the grounds of our National Training Centers. Equipment modernization was slowed and training was reduced due to budgetary concerns. Headquarters and Staff continued to grow in size while combat squads decreased in size and were routinely under strength. During this period the military strategy was to have the ability to fight and win two regional wars at the same time. With less combat capability the two war strategy looked good on paper and briefed well but in reality would be almost impossible to achieve if needed. The downsizing of the military has made the chances of early success in major combat operations difficult at best.

### Operation Iraqi Freedom

Initial combat operation in this theater seemed to go very well. Although this might seem like the facts on the surface there were underlying failures. There were major

training deficiencies with several units which deployed for the initial stages of the conflict. The 507<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Company undoubtedly is the best known failure of the initial phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Although this unit suffered from many failures at different levels, these failures were not unique only to this unit. Many units deployed at less than 100 percent strength and many were untrained in their battle drills.

Training deficiencies were noted in several units' especially Combat Service Support units. Soldiers were not trained in marksmanship, weapons maintenance during desert operations, as well as vehicle maintenance and a multitude of other tasks. Leaders in some units were unprepared for leading maneuver units over desert terrain which resulted in some units not staying on the prescribed routes. Training deficiencies were also noted in some Soldiers to use their communications equipment effectively. Logistic failures during the initial phases contributed to a degradation of combat power. Class IV in many cases was not available to fix the aging fleet of our military's equipment at the time. Many combat systems such as Bradley Fighting Vehicles and M1 Abrams tanks waited several weeks to get repair parts. Along with combat vehicles repair parts were unavailable for many of our systems from vehicles to night vision devices. Again, we were not prepared for initial operations in Iraq.

### We Spend Too Much

Some will say that the military is too large and that we spend too much on defense. The money that we spend could be used on social programs in our own country. Why do we spend our resources on our war machine when we always get it right in the end? Why can't we just negotiate with dictators and evil doers? If we speak and bring folks to the bargaining table we can avoid confrontation and the world could live in peace. We

are just a bully country that dictates our will on other less fortunate countries in order to take their resources. Technology has evolved to the point where we don't need the foot soldiers just more advanced standoff weapons systems. We need to become isolationists and just worry about what is happening in America and forget the rest of the world issues.

### We have to get it Right from the Onset

If we want to have success in early phases of conflict we must invest in our military and ensure that our end strength numbers can support the National Military Strategy. We must have visionary leaders that can predict the needs of our armed forces and equip our forces for success in future conflicts. We cannot sit back and try to fix deficiencies in or training, equipment, and policy after we are in an engagement. If Iraq has taught us anything it must be that our force levels must be commensurate to the threats that we face. We can no longer wait to field equipment until after our service members are already in the fight. The sheer number of Rapid Fielding Initiatives that have been undertaken in the past few years should indicate to our policy makers and leaders that the way we do business must be changed. The right equipment must be available to military members from day one of the conflict. Our force levels must continue to increase in order to decisively engage and destroy the enemy from the onset of military operations in a specific theater. Future military budgets must fully fund unit training at National Training Centers and reflect the current threats we face. The world has changed and may threats exist which may force our nation into military confrontation. There are nations who are spending a substantial part of their GDP on modernizing their militaries. Our government and military must prepare for and ensure that our military is trained, equipment, and has all resources



needed to face the challenges of the future. The future of our country depends on a military that can defeat any threat that may be contrary to our national interest.