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History Essay on the Importance for Military Professionals to Study Military History

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Abstract

History provides a perspective on current events and an understanding on how the military force structure continues to change and develop based on the past and future. While technology and equipment continues to develop, there are many factors from the beginning of time that continue to present challenges. As military professions, we have a duty to learn from the past to anticipate what conditions our Soldiers may experience in the next fight. What we learn from the past could save lives in the future.

History is the legacy of military professionals. It provides a perspective on current events and an understanding on how the military force structure continues to change and develop based on the past and future. History also provides the tools for military professionals to develop higher-level thinking skills.

General Peter W. Chiarelli, the current Vice Chief of Staff of the United States Army served as the 1st Calvary Division Commander while I served in Iraq with the 256th Infantry Brigade Combat Team during the period of 2004-2005. His bottom line was that we cannot win in Iraq by staying solely focused upon combat operations and establishing security operations. To win, we must achieve a political, economic, and military victory. Part of the reason he came to that conclusion was by viewing the current situation from a historical perspective.

Sadly, the price of failure is paid for with human life and suffering. After the Civil War ended, the failure of Reconstruction emphasized that without the support of the people, military power is limited in accomplishing goals of government.

One of our past great presidents, John F. Kennedy tells us that it is incumbent upon us as professionals in the military to have knowledge of logistics, tactics and strategy. Additionally he proclaimed that we must also know about history, politics, politics and diplomacy. We must be able to understand military power and the limits of such power. As professionals serving in the military we must know that upon final review, there have been very few issues of great importance that were resolved by only military power. It is only by understanding history, politics, diplomacy and people is the correct solution applied to a problem requiring military solution.

There are limitations of using military power to effect social, political, economic, and cultural change. Efforts of Federal Soldiers to impose cultural change in the former Confederate

states during the Reconstruction Era from 1865-1877 ultimately failed. This provides some relevant insights for modern Soldiers engaged in operations in support of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). General Peter W. Chiarelli studied the lessons learned from this period of our history to apply the appropriate strategy in Iraq; by doing so he honored the legacy of our past and ultimately saved lives in current war.

Confronting and fighting Native Americans offers more important insights from the past. From that period, we learned that military commanders who were able to achieve cultural understanding of their potential foes were better able to achieve the resettlement of Native Americans with a minimum of bloodshed than those commanders who believed that a policy of extermination was the only viable way to accomplish their mission. Only by studying history can we see how un-Christian people who claimed to be Christians were towards the Native Americans during the “Indian Problem”. People who had been in this country for only a few hundred years considered themselves to be superior to Native Americans and as a result, were able to violate international law. At the time, West Point taught that since savages did not abide by those laws they were not subject to their protection. International law was not a concept that was known or understood by the Native Americans; therefore it would have been impossible for them to observe any of our laws. As a result, Soldiers were able to use any cruel methods to gain compliance or submission. During the Battle of Little Bighorn, General Custer and his 258 Soldiers that were massacred paid the ultimate price for the failure of negotiations with Native Americans.

The present is a result of the past; this in turn is the future. To know why something happened in the past, we have to look back that the factors that triggered the series of events. Sometimes, we only have to look back a few years or decades to see a direct result of our current

condition. Sometimes we have to turn a few more pages in the history books and go back a few centuries to locate the catalyst for change. However, we look we will find a roadmap that leads us from where we are standing to day back to the past.

Compare the current attitudes toward self protection with that of Soldiers that were assigned to the 507th Maintenance Company during 2003 when they deployed from Fort Bliss into Iraq. One of the Soldier's that served in the 507th reported that another element had the responsibility to protect them, but the responsible party failed in that mission. It was shocking to senior leadership that these Soldiers did not have basic self preservation instincts. Since some members of the 507th Maintenance Company clearly found themselves unprepared to provide their own protection, there was an aggressive campaign by the senior Army leadership immediately following that incident to develop the combat oriented focus of our Soldiers. The original Soldier's Creed from 1993 was updated in 2003 to include the Warrior Ethos shortly after this incident with the 507th. For decades, if you talked to any Marine and ask them what they do, they would simply say "I'm a Marine", while a Soldier would state their Military Occupational Skill. Today, if you ask someone in the U.S. Army what they do, they will reply "I'm a Soldier". This shift in attitude as resulted in a force that is more self reliant and professional.

Some may argue that history is never the same; it is often false, exaggerated, and unimportant. It leaves us to believe what the past rulers wanted us to believe. In some cases it may be true there were abuses of military history. Past efforts, whether failed or successful all have lessons to teach. History should not be taken at face value, but evaluated and interrelated for lessons that may be learned.

While technology and equipment continues to develop, there are many factors from the beginning of time that continue to present challenges. Some of those challenges throughout history include environmental and cultural considerations. As military professions, we have a duty to learn from the past to anticipate what conditions our Soldiers may experience in the next fight. What we do today becomes our legacy. It is only by studying past history can we understand how things change. It is only by studying history can we understand the factors that result in change. It is only by studying the past that we can truly understand what elements of a society remain the same, regardless of continual change.

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