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Running head: Is it Important for Military Professionals to Study Military History

Argumentative Essay

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Is it Important for Military Professionals to Study Military History 2

Outline

Introduction - Debate the quote of George Santayana, which is "those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it"

Compare the British National Debt to our present day national debt

Compare the types of medical treatment given to wounded Soldiers from World War I wounded warriors returning from Operation Iraqi,

Enduring Freedom and Noble Eagle

Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

The question that has been asked over the ages is the reason to study history. Why is it important to know the past? The tradition of writing history runs to the ancient ages. Herodotus in 5th century BC Greece wrote that he wrote his history in order to capture the glorious deed that the Greeks and the Barbarians had done, so that in later date their glory or follies are not forgotten (Kelley, 1991). Therefore, the main purpose was the glorification of the deeds of the past along with the follies. However, Thucydides stated that history should be studied to interpret future better.

Similar idea had been reiterated by George Santayana who often said, “Those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it” thus, stressing on the idea that history enables men to make choices that are more informed. As William Cabell Rives has mentioned in his *Discourse on the Uses and Importance of History* has stated that history helps to “enlighten and direct us by the recorded experience of past ages and other countries” (Rives, 1847, p. 11). Therefore, the importance of history in understanding and interpreting future is important. This idea has been reflected throughout the ages by well-known philosophers like Machiavelli, Hobbes, Voltaire, Macaulay, et al.

Thus, the importance of history has been established by many people and its utility to demonstrate the future path has been revalidated. Therefore, for all fields of study knowing of history has become important in order to ascertain the future path. History as a discipline of study is important to many fields but there are arguments both supporting and against the study of history. This essay is an argument, which states that the study of history is important for the military personnel as it demonstrates to them the way a situation should be handled. The essay will enumerate the importance of history through comparison of events like the British National

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Debt to the present US national debt, medical treatment given to wounded soldiers from World War I and that in Operation Iraq, etc. This will give a clear picture as to what we have learnt from history and how it can change our strategic outlook to future events.

MILITARY HISTORY

Michael Howard in his essay titled *The Use and Abuse of Military History* has noted that the problem of drawing conclusions for the future is interpreting history wrongly. He thus states, “The lessons of history are never clear. Clio is like the Delphic oracle: it is only in retrospect, and usually too late, that we understand what she was trying to say.” (Howard, 1983) Howard notes that even when military history has shown that excessive concern over security was a mistake committed by the Austrians against Napoleon in Italy (1796-97), the same mistake has been repeated by the British in the desert operations in Rommel (1941-42). A classic situation demonstrating the misuse of history is the case of French General Staff applying the lessons from World War I “trench warfare” to defend themselves against the Third Reich (Gray, 2005). With such, elaborate examples of failures of history to demarcate the right track to the military personnel, the question lingers that if the discipline is a required field of study? Were all the philosophers and the historians ignorant enough to see that history did not help the military personnel?

The military personnel believe that the study of history is not useful at all:

“To many military men and women, the benefits of the allied disciplines of doctrine, strategy and military history could either be summarised on the back of the proverbial cigarette packet, or more likely consigned to a broom cupboard at the end of a corridor only to surface when a search is undertaken for some arcane piece

of memorabilia that had once been donated by a venerable senior officer now scheduled to revisit the haunts of his former glory.” (Gray, 2005, p. 152)

The problem that can be identified in historical study and application of military history is in its collection and amalgamation of the primary documents and their analysis keeping in mind all their allied aspects. This is a gigantic endeavor. Nevertheless, history seems indispensable to the strategic study so what can be argued is that military personnel need to recollect history of only the recent past, as the technology, geo-political situation, culture etc. remain the same. So there arises the debate why study military history?

Gray suggests that history should be studied for the pure “entertainment value alone” (2005, p. 157). It is considered a duty for most servicemen to have some knowledge of history. This can be in the form of taking natural pride in their regimental or squadron history or an occasional need to pass through a service exam, which spurs the desire to learn military history. Military history can be inspirational, descriptive and informative (Gray, 2005). The problem with historical accounting, according to Gray is that military historians talk about strategic implications through the enumeration of one particular military event, which is erroneous. He states, “...this process is fraught with difficulties if the wrong lessons of history are even identified, let alone learned and then internalized” (2005, p. 158).

The importance of history is often cited by many decision makers. For instance, Winston Churchill wrote and was influenced by history in his decisions. People like Anthony Eden were determined not to follow the Appeasers, which was clear in his approach to Nasser during the crisis in Suez Canal in 1956. Thus, the study of history should not be constricted to a single event, which makes the chances of drawing the wrong conclusion even more.

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Now we consider the events from the recent past in the history of United States military history.

In case of operation Noble Eagle is the name given to all homeland security operations and support provided to federal, state and local agencies after the 9/11 terrorist attack on WTC. Operation Enduring Freedom is the operation of the US military forces against terrorists in Afghanistan, and other countries.

Medical care for the soldiers in the battlefields in the US was almost rudimentary in the earliest phase of the American Civil War. However, during the World War I army made significant improvements in the medical care provided to the soldiers in battlefields. New medical advances were slowly used in the battlefields like the triage concept or blood transfusion, X-Ray, treatment for shock, etc. In addition, various orthopedic surgery as well as bacteria caused diseases was also treated during the World War I. there were better medical assistance organizations and transportation available to sped the wounded to the medical care centers. Even though during this there were increased medical facilities, the numbers of deaths due to non-battle causes were higher (Greenwood & F. Berry Jr, 2005)¹. Following this, the US military during the Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003-05 deployed the forward surgical teams, which consisted of a team of 20 medical personnel including doctors (Wright & Reese, 2008). These were self-contented surgical suits, which were deployed in Iraq. A soldier when wounded received a first aid from his partner or by a soldier trained to be a combat lifesaver. Further medical instruments like improved bandages were also available which would stop blood loss from severe wounds. The important lesson from the military history was that during the World War I fatality was higher due to non-combat conditions, which could have been stopped if medical facilities were better at the battlefield. Nevertheless, it should be considered that during that time the medical technology and science was not as advanced as it is today. Therefore, during the recent operations Iraqi, US

¹ The reason was mainly due to flu pandemic in 1918, p. 76

military was equipped with all possible health facilities that could save a soldier's life. This is the lesson we gather from history.

The aim of the Operation Noble Eagle and that of Operation Enduring freedom were two operations being fought for the same purpose. For instance, Noble Eagle used high technology logistics in order to "provide security, positive movement control, and in-transit visibility" (Knight, 2003). Nevertheless, this was not provided adequate attention in the Operations Enduring Freedom where "Many military occupational specialties and organizations that are important (high demand)...are of low density based upon previous strategies. Force structure must be reevaluated and adjusted...Notable elements of the force requiring increased emphasis includes Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF), Military Police, and logistics." (Crand & Thompson, 2002, pp. 3-4)

A data study presented by Knight would show that the ratio of civilian to army contractors was reduced considerably after World War I, which was 1:1 in the Balkans war. However, during Operation Enduring Freedom and Noble Eagle, the ratio increased considerably indicating military historical data not being considered. This indicated that there was considerable negligence existing on part of the US military in taking in information from military history.

Military strategy is considerably inclined on the study of military history, which has been observed in case of Operation Noble eagle and Enduring Freedom. There have been many scholars who have dealt with the art and science of strategic military operation. One such scholar is Brian Holden Reid who believes that this is founded in the definitive principle of law (Reid, 1998). Such works have sparked an interest to understand the art of war through the works of eighteenth century philosophers.

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There are authors like Clausewitz and Jomini who have concentrated their attention on Napoleon. They have defined strategy being used for various purposes in different terms. Some scholars like Clausewitz and Jomini have been taught in the military colleges for many ages, but the true understanding of the implication of the works has been limited. Therefore, in military colleges the concentration is more on strategic content of the events, which are studied rather than true history of the event. Thus there are various events in history from which we can derive lesson and others which cannot be applied because the gap in space and time.

CONCLUSION

So what is the answer to the question we asked in the beginning of this essay? Should military personnel study military history? The answer to this is there should be the study of history that is limited to the strategic side of the history. Therefore, military history should be termed as strategic military history. If history is an interpretation of the past wherein the myths and legends are not included then history becomes a very important discipline for the military. As history of men has shown that there has been ever increasing resilience on force to shape policy, past military operations will gain increased importance for the military personnel. Therefore military history must be studied but in a better form wherein the myths and fable are filtered out.

History is an unavoidable tool for all disciplines. Historical know how is necessary to build the store of knowledge that the thinkers of the past had gathered. It is the source of knowledge sharing through time and space. Thus, it is important to study history, especially in the military. The reason being human history is full of accounts of battles and wars. Military personnel can derive strategic insight from the description of the battles. However, these descriptions should be precise and not full of mythic story telling. Such decorative history is not of use for a military

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person who might get confused in all the descriptions. Rather the insights drawn from the events should be delivered to the military personnel along with a crisp description of the facts.

Further history, which is taught in army college should, not only be constricted to the events of the battle. It should also relate the medical, technological history in order to help future to understand the implications it had on the lives of the people fighting the war. For instance, the case of the case of lack of medical help during the World Wars was an indication for the US army to increase its battle line medical help, which had saved so many lives. Thus, military history is important. However, this history should not be confined solely to the narratives of the war fables, but should dwell further inside into strategic, operational, logistical, and other implications.

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