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History Essay

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MSG Vivian L. Grant

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

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Abstract

Is it important for military professionals to take time out of their busy schedules to study history? As leaders in both the past and present have realized, the past serves as a predictor of the present and the future. Successful leaders are able to analyze past events to determine a plan of action for present and future events. If it is deemed important for military professionals to devote time to the study of history; when and where would it be inserted into their busy schedules? Do we allocate time in the curriculum of military service schools or is it delegated to unit level to conduct such training? If the study of history is mandated, how can it aid in the professional and personal growth of military professionals?

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Merriam-Webster defines history as “the chronological record of significant events, as affecting a nation or institution, often including an explanation of their causes.” The study of history not only provides us with knowledge of events, but also allows us the opportunity to repeat or avoid repeating events. While the study of history is mandatory for all school aged children in the United States, beyond high school history is only studied by those with an innate interest in the subject. Is it imperative that military leaders study military history? In *Guide to the Study & Use of Military History*, General George S. Patton, Jr., wrote on 6 June 1944 to his son, a cadet at the United States Military Academy, as the allied forces began the invasion of Normandy, that “to be a successful soldier, you must know history.”

Must a leader know history to be considered a good leader? Are those who do not find it necessary to study history destined to repeat past mistakes and errors? Some accuse historians of focusing too much in the past and not enough on current and future events. While the study of history is beneficial, leaders must be aware of the dangers of focusing too much on the past. While history can provide important information and a perspective of past events, I would caution leaders to use the past as a lesson learned and not an “iron clad” template of what actions should be taken. Leaders can learn from the past to avoid mistakes in the present and in the future. Throughout history military leaders have studied past military campaigns in order to determine an effective strategy or plan to aide in mission success.

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Henry Kissinger quoted in *The White House Years*, "History is not, of course, a cookbook offering pretested recipes. It teaches by analogy, not maxims. It can illuminate the consequences of actions in comparable situations, yet each generation must discover for itself what situations are in fact comparable."

Contrary to popular belief, the study of military history involves more than just the discussion of human losses or strategizing on how to kill or destroy the enemy. By studying history military leaders can learn how that by going to war aided in the saving of thousands of lives and how the decision not to engage in war has caused the death of thousands. An example of both would be in Rwanda and Iraq. In the article *Why Study War?* Hanson writes, "The first Gulf War took few lives in getting Saddam out of Kuwait; doing nothing in Rwanda allowed savage gangs and militias to murder hundreds of thousands with impunity." In Rwanda in April of 1984 a massacre began and in less than 100 days approximately 800,000 people were killed in an act of genocide while the world watched. Resolution 260 of the Geneva Convention states that "The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war is a crime under international law." How would events in Rwanda been different if the United Nations had deemed what was happening as genocide rather than a civil war? If faced with a similar event today or in the future, would studying what happened in Rwanda effect the actions that the military professional take or recommend be taken? Perhaps by taken a different course of action and intervening, thousands of lives would be saved.

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If military professionals are expected to be not only be soldiers, but historians also, will history be added to the curriculum of all military service schools? Considering the fact the military is a true “melting pot” of people of all races, ethnic groups and educational levels, it would be unreasonable to expect all soldiers who enter the military to have the same knowledge of historical events. While it would be nice to have the ability to teach each and every soldier, at a minimum, United States history, this would be a costly endeavor. Therefore, it would be a more realistic goal to ensure all senior military leaders are well versed in the study of history. While the teaching of history is a part of the development of Commissioned Officers, the teaching of history is not mandatory for Non-commissioned Officers until they reach the Sergeant Majors Academy. Military academies do have the capability of reaching a large number of people in a training environment. Perhaps soldiers should at least be taught the history of their particle branch of service during their initial basic training. By planting the seed early in Soldiers’ careers, some may take the initiative and seek to farther their knowledge of military history. Senior military leaders should also apply their knowledge of military history and battle analysis to the professional development of themselves and to the professional development of subordinate leaders. By encouraging subordinates to embrace history, leaders arm them with tools that can be used in both their professional and personal lives to assist them in the decision making process.

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Colleges and universities across the country have seen an increased demand for military history courses. The increased demands for these courses come not only from clients in the military and diplomatic communities, but also from those in the business community. A primary source of teaching leadership comes from the study of military science. The study of military history is also a leading source in the teaching of diversity in the workforce. The United States military is the largest organization in the world with a diverse population of employees. On July 26, 1948 President Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9981, Establishing the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and opportunity in the Armed Services. The first paragraph of this order states, "It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all person in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly a possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale." As senior military leaders we must know where we have come from, in order to avoid repeating the errors of the past. The transformation of the military into a diversified organization was not an easy task. The walls that had been erected by years of racial prejudices and stereotyping would also take years to tear down. In order to continue the successes attained in this area military leaders must understand what past challenges were overcome.

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Is it important for military professionals to take time out of their busy schedules to study history? As leaders in both the past and present have realized, the past serves as a predictor of the present and the future. While the study of history can serve as aide in the decision making process and provide military leaders with tools of comparison, it is imperative that leaders not become too focused on the past. The knowledge gained from the study of history can provide leaders with the foundation needed to assist in both the planning and decision making processes. Leaders who are well versed in the study of history are an asset to their organizations and subordinates. By investing funds to include history courses at all Non-commissioned Officer educational courses would be an investment with a high rate of return. Leaders exiting such courses would return to their units not only more versed in their occupational skills, but also in historical events. Leaders must build their knowledge base in order to become more well rounded leaders with the ability to analyze any given situation and arrive at a solution. Knowledge of past events can be a part the foundational base that is used by successful leaders in leading their organizations daily. Is it imperative that military leaders study military history? In my opinion, yes it is important that military leaders study history, to avoid repeating mistakes of the past, to build on past successes, and to pass knowledge to subordinates.

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