

Running Head: THE ADVANTAGE OF STUDYING MILITARY HISTORY

The Advantages of Studying Military History

MSG Mark A. Bartosch

United States Army Sergeant Major Academy

Class 58

SGM Feick

20 February 2008

Abstract

Soldiers should study military history throughout their career. The study of military history shows us that there are many lessons to learn from history and similar events to evaluate. We can connect these events to many parts of missions we conduct everyday. More importantly, we can use the successful techniques and tactics our predecessors used to avoid failures. Military history training should be a part of all Soldiers lives to include all noncommissioned officers education schools.

The Advantages of Studying Military History

People often think that history is only about things that happened years, decades, or even centuries ago, however this is not always the case. We must never forget to look at things that might have just happened only hours, days or weeks prior, as it becomes history too. We must remember that today's enemy has used this tactic in an attempt to counter our techniques, tactics and procedures. The military practices specific tactics and techniques to avoid incidents of improvised explosive devices and just as things are getting better for us the enemy looks at our past actions and throws something else at us.

The military has had many types of successful and unsuccessful operations, ranging from the Mexican War to our current War on Terrorism throughout the world. Leaders have used everything from historical, strategic and tactical level lessons learned from unsuccessful operations and then tried these to ensure better decision-making during training of current combat missions. We use historical facts and information to base and write our doctrine. No matter how old the information, we must study and evaluate the data, then include these lessons learned into our current techniques, tactics and procedures. These actions help prevent us from not making the same mistakes twice and learn by our actions, and exploit the successes into future operations. The leadership must look to those Soldiers that have fought in similar battles or have experience and use that to our advantage.

History and Military Operations

The military lacked lessons learned from the few battles with the Indians after the war with Mexico. The military could have used lessons learned or leadership experience and use them to more effectively fight the Indians, whose tactics were much different than those used or experienced in the Civil War. By not using history to assist in the planning and execution of

military operations, we risk changing the outcome or even prolong the war, with a higher cost to human life. Studying our military past provides us insight on our Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) background and roots. The past will inform and instill those values, Warrior Ethos and NCO pride that began so long ago in our military NCO history. Events in all past battles have shown just what a good NCO can do and represents. NCOs have more responsibilities and leadership requirements, and are leading our Soldiers on the battlefield with distinction. Roles filled by senior NCOs and Officers are now being performed by junior NCOs.

Responsibility at all Unit Leaders

During OIF and OEF, NCOs have seen an increase of these responsibilities and positions of greater responsibility at all unit leadership levels. Using the historical data, leaders must ensure we provide the training, education, and equipment to our Soldiers early in their career. We need to give them those tools in order to accomplish any mission and minimize the risk. The actions during the Global War on Terrorism shows us that Soldiers at the lowest level are having a major impact on overall mission success and constantly being put in situations that require immediate decisions to be made. In the past, Senior NCOs were required to make such decisions. For example, my experience in OIF their where times when on patrol the senior NCOs where filled by junior leaders because of injuries, mid tour leaves, or just exhausted from mission after mission. Not one time did the junior leaders let the Company down because of the Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) and the training that we have done because everyone knew everybody's position in the up-armor 1114 from the driver to the TC and gunner. Most of all you have to have confidence in your Soldiers and junior leaders to make the right decision at any given time in a war time situation lives depend on it.

Success on the Battlefield

NCOs should be proud of the heritage that binds us and provides us with some of our most important NCO lineage. Soldiers must begin learning, studying, and using actions learned from our past and present. This will ensure we continue our success on the battlefield. Soldiers should begin to read and study our military history from the start of their careers and receive formal historical lessons. We must use and incorporate military history and NCO lineage into every noncommissioned officer education schools, and throughout a Soldiers career and in their units. The training will not only give the Soldiers a sense of pride in what makes our military and NCOs the best on this planet. We have the responsibility to teach these past exploits and experiences of our best Soldiers, such as Medal of Honor recipients MSG Gordon and SFC Shugart. The professionalism that these excellent Soldiers and warriors lived by will ensure that the values, pride and Warrior Ethos displayed by these warriors will live on. Our Soldiers will see the importance of their actions, through the study of military history.

Supporting points

During the attack on Pearl Harbor, leaders ignored past knowledge and doctrine that influenced aircraft response capability. Commanders were aware of the risks of parking aircraft close together on the airstrips, but in an attempt to secure the aircraft with a smaller force they moved aircraft to consolidated areas. This was a poor decision that did not use lessons learned from the past and when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor they were able to destroy the aircraft with fewer bombs due to secondary explosions destroying aircraft.

Operation Just Cause, Rio Hato Airfield, Rangers from the 2nd and 3rd Ranger Battalion seized the airfield in five hours. “At Rio Hato, the Americans killed 34 Panamanians and captured 405 plus a huge inventory of weapons, themselves losing 4 killed, 18 wounded, and 26 injured in the jump. The fighting had been confusing and brutal but brief and decisive”

(Stewart,2005). Good intelligence, with a well planned and rehearsed operation delivered a victory for United States forces against a numerically similar enemy that knew the US coming prior to the assault. During the conflict a Ranger squad was hit with friendly aircraft fire when this happen they new they had a problem with command and control with special-operations aviation. As a specialist on the airfield, and lessoning to the company net, I could tell there was confusion between higher and the little bird pilots over identification of friendly and enemy personnel. After this incident the United States Army Special Operations Command formed bringing better command and control to special-operations forces wide.

Special Operation Forces leaders during the initial planning of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) used historical events from the Afghan and Soviet war to develop strategies. The information provided a background on the persons that we could work with to defeat the Taliban regime. The war allowed us to identify several Afghan leaders that would we could most likely form an allegiance with during the war and conduct unconventional warfare against the regime. We are constantly increasing the roles and responsibilities our junior NCOs are conducting now, and using history to enhance our military training to better prepare future senior leaders.

Conclusion

Military history can provide us with many outlooks of past successes and failures. Evaluating these historical events allow us to learn and use certain actions in future operations to maximize our chance for success. Looking back during the attack on Pearl Harbor, Commanders new the risk of parking aircraft close together on airstrips and still made a poor decision and when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor they used fewer bombs to accomplish their mission. Because of this, we space out our aircraft on any airfield that we occupy. At Rio Hato, with good Intel, and a well planned and rehearsed operation the Rangers seized the airfield in five hours. Even

with communication problems with the special-operations aviation and with casualties, the fighting had been confusing and brutal but brief and decisive. Operation Enduring Freedom using the Afghan and Soviet war strategies help provide information on persons we could work with to defeat the Taliban. This proves looking back in history can assist us in recognizing and defeating our enemies. We not only need to look at our military history, but the history of our allies and enemies alike. We have much to learn from our potential enemies to assist us in their destruction. Studying the enemy will give us a clear understanding on what makes them tick. History can gives us a look at their culture, religious background, their will to fight and so many other aspects of their military capabilities. Studying our allies' history increases our ability to work more closely with our allies. Their history also gives us insight on their culture and commitment whether or not to stay the course.

History will assist in the development of operational plans, strategies, and courses of action. The failure to study history puts our Soldiers at undue risk. We owe it to the American people to do everything in our power to ensure that their sons and daughters have every opportunity to accomplish the mission and return home safely. They are our nation's greatest asset and we need to use everything in our power to protect that asset. Our kids need not make the same mistakes our fathers and grand- fathers made. History used properly will keep them from making these same mistakes. Finally, we must instill the importance of history by educating our Soldiers. This will also help reinforce the Warrior Ethos, professionalism, and Army values that our past warriors demonstrated and lived by. Our past military history is rich with both success and some failures. We need to use this information to ensure that our past heroes actions were not done in vain. Several gave the ultimate sacrifice, and we owe it to them to carry on this tradition.

References

Stewart, R. W. (2005). AMERICAN MILITARY HISTORY VOLUME II THE UNITED STATES ARMY IN A GLOBAL ERA, 1917-2003. Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army.