

THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY TO THE MILITARY LEADER

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Studying military history is paramount for senior military leaders' personal and professional development as well as mission success. Lack of knowledge about military history can doom leaders to repeat potentially deadly mistakes as has happened innumerable times over the millennia. Arming leaders with relevant historical perspectives before entering the battlefield pays immeasurable dividends in this era of persistent conflict.

Too often, military leaders fail to look at the hard-won lessons our predecessors have recorded for our benefit. Times change, weaponry changes, location changes. But, warfare has remained essentially the same throughout the ages. We, as a military culture, are far too quick to dismiss the lessons of history as just anecdotes in dusty books that can't possibly be of relevance to us. There have been, and always will be, regular and irregular warfare taking place simultaneously throughout the world. Many of the challenges from antiquity to this very day remain essentially the same at their foundations.

Contrary to some claims, transformation during time of war is not a new concept. During the American Civil War, the Union Army was in a near-constant state of transformation as it fought the Army of the Confederacy. Transformation was taking place in weapons, tactics, logistics, intelligence and many other areas throughout the war's duration. Although we may be more cognizant of it today than in the past, transformation has always been taking place in the military service during both times of peace and war. Leaders need to embrace this fact and maximize the use of the best available — and most current — systems, information, tactics and training in order to more efficiently subdue their adversary.

UPTON'S ADAPTATIONS

Emory Upton graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., in 1861 and began his career as a second lieu-

tenant in the 4th U.S. Artillery. Upton soon garnered a reputation for being a smart, charismatic and skillful combat leader following the outbreak of the Civil War. He was soon known by all as a fearless, competent leader and as a professional Soldier in all aspects. Upton began a rapid climb through the ranks due to his actions, leadership and intellect. Promoted to brevet major, Upton further distinguished himself near Rappahannock Station, Va., in November 1863. He utilized stealth, cunning and ingenuity in order to defeat a superior enemy force without firing a single shot.

Upton led a daring night raid on an enemy entrenchment to dislodge the Confederate infantry. As historian Stephen Ambrose wrote in his book *Upton and the Army*, "Darkness now covered the field. Upton left one regiment in reserve, then had the remainder of his men unslung their knapsacks and fix bayonets, gave them strict orders not to fire and to creep forward. When within 30 yards of the pits, Upton whispered orders to his men to charge silently. At the point of the bayonet, without firing a shot, the brigade drove the surprised Confederates from their works."

Unfortunately, his bravery, tenacity and mission success at Rappahannock Station did not serve any tactical advantage for the Union Army. His superior, Gen. George G. Meade, failed to pursue the Army of the Confederacy and to deliver what could have been a decisive blow to end the Civil War more than a year sooner than when it ultimately concluded.

In 1864, Col. Martin McMahon, the VI Corps chief of staff, handpicked 12 regiments of the best available troops and instructed Upton to take command and carry out his proposed experimental infantry tactics. He was to conduct an attack in column formations instead of the linear formations that had been the norm of the era. Upton gladly accepted both the command and the challenge, and was certain he would emerge victorious.

Upton's mission was to attack in column and dislodge entrenched Confederate infantry at Spotsylvania Court House, Va. The Rebels concealed themselves in robust fortifications that enabled their infantry to fire from the slits in the timber and earthworks they had constructed. This facilitated the Confederate



Maj. Gen. Emory Upton
Photo courtesy U.S. Army
Military History Institute



Art by A.R. Waud courtesy Library of Congress

Union officer Emory Upton led an unconventional night raid on a Confederate position near Rappahannock Station, Va., in November 1863. This illustration of the ensuing battle appeared in the Nov. 28, 1863, edition of *Harper's Weekly*.

Soldiers' ability to fire at any approaching enemy with near-impunity due to the fact that the riflemen were nearly impermeable behind by their fortifications.

Upton proved his theory was correct within the first five minutes of battle and ultimately achieved resounding success. He was victorious in driving the Confederates from their trenches while saving countless Union lives. Although he lost more than 1,000 men during the battle, he inflicted at least the same number of deaths on the opposing force and took more than 1,200 prisoners before relinquishing the ground his men so valiantly fought for (despite Upton's protests to his superiors). The results of his tactics surprised many of his superiors; some expected his ranks to be decimated in the charge.

Upton's ingenuity and relentless pursuit of the enemy earned him great respect from his Soldiers and superiors. Subsequently, no less than 15 general officers petitioned for Upton to be promoted to brigadier general. Indeed, by the end of the war, the 25-year-old Upton was a major general.

Upton's tactics proved to be revolutionary and necessary due to the increased lethality of the weaponry of the day. He was truly a visionary who knew that tactics must evolve as warfare did. Ultimately, Upton would be known for far more aggressive changes that took place in the Army during the Civil War. He wrote the doctrinal and tactical changes that were later begrudgingly adopted by senior military leadership. History would subsequently prove the vast majority of his theories and changes correct.

Our forces today face similar challenges in conducting counterinsurgency operations instead of the conventional war missions

the U.S. military has trained for since the onset of the Cold War. Military leaders today would be wise to invest the time required to study how leaders of the past conquered the unique challenges presented to them.

Upton's changes in tactics were not always understood or warmly received. Just as tactics in Iraq and Afghanistan have evolved and changed since the Global War on Terrorism began, senior military leaders must continue to seek sound solutions using personal experiences, training, intellect and historical examples of what succeeded, as well as what failed, to better enable mission success.

THE VICTORIO CAMPAIGN

Victorio was an Apache chief known for his intellect, warrior skills and ruthless pursuit of his vision of a better life for his people. He was among those affected by a U.S. government plan that forced the relocation of various Native American tribes to the American Southwest.

Victorio rebelled and fought to reclaim rights and territory for his people. Highly regarded by his people as a visionary and protector of their culture and way of life, he garnered a grassroots following from other tribes in the region as well. However, he would be classified as a terrorist by our standards and definition today.

Victorio began to conduct savage attacks indiscriminately throughout what today is New Mexico, western Texas and northern Mexico. He ruthlessly attacked white and Mexican settlers in the area in order to gain supplies and equipment for his people,



Photo by Edward S. Curtis courtesy Library of Congress

Four Apache warriors on horseback pause under storm clouds in this 1906 Edward S. Curtis photograph titled, "Before the Storm."

and did not hesitate to attack other tribes if necessary. As a result of his actions, his men were often equipped with better weaponry than the armies that pursued him.

The U.S. Army began a campaign to end Victorio's reign of terror. But, the Army was at a distinct disadvantage due to a variety of factors. For instance, the U.S. Army's rearming and resupply routes covered vast distances in an inhospitable and "foreign" land. Conversely, friendly Apaches in the area often resupplied Victorio. It stands to reason that Victorio and his men were often given safe passage and at times aided by sympathetic tribes. Victorio also made good use of all captured weapons, horses and supplies in his campaign. Additionally, the Army was not well trained in counterinsurgency operations.

Victorio also utilized the scarcely defended international border to his advantage since he knew that the governments of the United States and Mexico had difficulties sorting through each other's bureaucratic channels. Both nations had a general distrust of each other, which further hindered any unity of effort against the chief. Many times after a raid, Victorio and his men would simply slip across the border to elude pursuit by the Army of either nation.



Victorio

Photo courtesy Library of Congress

The campaign to hunt down Victorio is not unlike the campaigns coalition forces are conducting in many places around the world today. Osama bin Laden, like Victorio, is probably hiding in an inhospitable, remote area. He receives aid from the local populace, who are either sympathetic to his cause and beliefs, or frightened into compliance for fear of the lives of their families and themselves.

"The Victorio Campaign bears many parallels to ongoing operations against Islamic terrorist movements," wrote Kendall D. Gott in a Combat Studies Institute paper titled, "In Search of an Elusive Enemy: The Victorio Campaign." "Victorio was a charismatic leader who many indeed considered a terrorist. On the other hand, his followers considered him a freedom fighter and gave him their unswerving loyalty. These warriors were fanatical in their support and willingly endured extreme hardship ... in the fight against their enemies."

The irony of the Victorio campaign is that the U.S. Army never captured him. He was eventually cornered in a remote mountainous area in Mexico and killed by the Mexican Army. A similar opportunity exists for the government of Pakistan today in the hunt for Osama bin Laden. Many other nations also hold the keys to defeating global terrorism within their borders. It is

simply a matter of whether they will step forward for the greater good of the world, or turn a blind eye in order to protect their own vested interests, whether physical or ideological.

DOES TIME FAVOR THE INSURGENT OR THE COUNTERINSURGENT?

“The successful insurgent declines combat when the occupying power has overwhelming force available, withdrawing, dispersing and possibly harassing the main body with hit-and-run operations designed to impose casualties and slow down the operation,” wrote George Friedman in his article, “Strategic Calculus and the Afghan War.” “The counterinsurgent’s main advantage is firepower, on the ground and in the air. The insurgents’ main advantage is intelligence. Native to the area, insurgents have networks of informants letting them know not only where enemy troops are, but also providing information about counterinsurgent operations during the operations’ planning phases.”

Time indeed nearly always favors the insurgent. Although the insurgent may not ultimately be victorious, he simply has to maintain pressure and persevere until his adversary tires of the conflict and retreats to a friendlier domain. The insurgent attacks when possible, retreats as necessary, reconstitutes when able and continues to wait out his pursuer in order to fight another day for his objective. History, time and location are generally always on the side of the insurgent.

Ironically, our War of Independence from Great Britain bears many of the same aspects as our war on terrorism. The colonists seeking independence simply had to “tie” in order to win the war. Winning battles was secondary, although not without some measure of importance. The occasional victory was most desirable for the effects it had for the infantryman on the ground. Residual effects of a battle won meant renewed populace support for the fledgling nation as well as continued funding by the Continental Congress. It is important to note that the colonists often favored guerrilla tactics when faced with a superior military enemy.

These illustrations of military operations in American military history show that insurgency and counterinsurgency operations are not new challenges faced by our military forces. Many of the problems we face today as a military, our forefathers in uniform also faced in past engagements. The U.S. military has faced insurgencies, counterinsurgencies, transformation, changes of tactics and weapons, and countless other dilemmas and issues during times of peace and war.

We can save valuable time, resources and our most important commodity as a nation — the lives of our service members — by simply looking at history for the answers to many of our quandaries. If leaders embrace the historical truisms that have played out in the past, they will be more successful planners, implementers and leaders of our forces. Many of the most important lessons in warfare are available for those willing to simply open their minds, lose their preconceived notions and learn from the history of those in the profession of arms from years past.

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Why NCOs have their own *Journal*

Editor’s Note: The following editorial was first published in The NCO Journal’s inaugural Spring 1991 issue.

Over the years, your Army has invested heavily in building a strong corps of noncommissioned officers. The publishing of this noncommissioned officer leader-development journal is a sterling example of the strong, continued, dedicated commitment to this critical endeavor.

The primary purpose for this journal is leader development. It serves as a training vehicle by communicating leader development lessons learned, programs, policy and standards to our noncommissioned officers Armywide.

We are expected to maximize the potential of this training opportunity by ensuring every noncommissioned officer has access to the *Journal*, by using the provided information for leader development training sessions, and by providing constructive feedback that will increase the *Journal*’s effectiveness.

Additionally, we must energize ourselves to writing and submitting recommended topics for publication. Within our corps of noncommissioned officers, we have talented Soldiers who can provide written information for the benefit of our total Army. Again, we must tap this talent by energizing ourselves and encouraging our fellow noncommissioned officers to put pen to paper.

As the first *NCO Journal* edition rolls off the press, we should recognize and appreciate the untiring, selfless service of our chief of staff of the Army, our chain of command, the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy and the *Journal* staff for making this leader development opportunity a reality.

The future, the effectiveness, and the success of our journal now rests with us. The ball is in our court. My fellow noncommissioned officers, it is time for us to run up the score.

*Julius W. Gates
Sergeant Major of the Army*



Julius “Bill” Gates served as sergeant major of the Army from 1987–1991.

Submit your article!

E-mail your article, art or photos for *The NCO Journal* to ATSS-SCN@us.army.mil. Submissions will be edited for length, style and content.