

History 225

Re: Notes w/ Mitchell essay "Perseverence"

My own personal interest in this from point of view of 25 years of teaching and reading in American history especially of the 20th Century. And a year I spent in a war zone.

For example, Mitchell makes a few interesting points in passing in his essay.

He notes that during WW II that the military leaders (JCS) decided to place a ceiling of 100 Divisions on the manpower pool to fight this war. Feeling that this was all the public would tolerate. There was dire consequences in arbitraily limited the US ground forces to 100 divisions. (Make point about the ETO and the possibility that the war could have been over in Europe in 1944 rather than dragging on until 1945. The longer this ETO contnued the higher the American casualty rates were).

The point is that FDR and his military advisers did not want to sour the American people on the war by what they might come to regard as unacceptable casualties.

We know from out experience in Vietnam that once the casualty rates started to inch toward 30,000 to 40,000 KIAs that the home front began to turn against the war--that many Americans began to demand Washington make clear what the American war was in Vietnam and began to raise questions about the way the administration was fighting the war. When Nixon became president he had to deal with the dissent over the war by changing the color of the bodies--Vietnamization, and to start a rolling rotation program of bringing American combat troops home. Of course the war continued for another four years and another 20,000 names would be added in time to the Vietnam Memorial. Some would call these four Nixon years the most savage and bloody retreat in the history of modern warfare.

We saw the same sensitivity to casualties in Dessert Storm.

Samolia was another case in which the loss of 18 American troops in an ambush by the reigning warlord in that fractured country was the deciding factor for Clinton in ending US involvement in trying to pacify the civil war in that African country.

Then we have the Civil War. The total for both sides was 620,000 dead.

We just looked at Grant's campaigns against Lee in front of Richmond and Petersburg. Grant sustains 55,000 casualties in 7 weeks. That was almost one half of the Army of the Potomac; and 60% of all the casualties sustained by all the Union armies since the

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First Manassas.

The Three days of Gettysburg costs both sides 50,000 casualties.

Twice as many casualties as the US suffered in D-Day plus the first 10 to 20 days.

The same amount of casualties, 50,000, that the US suffered in three months of figthing to take the island of Okinawa in the summer of 1945. For the forces involved the battle for Okinawa was the bloodiest in WW II for American forces.

And yet by comparison, these were fewer casualties than Grant's Army of the Potomac experienced during May-June 1864--Wilderness, Spotsylvania to Cold Harbor. Seven weeks of combat.

Its important to remember that while US marines and the American Tenth Army was facing the most fierce resistance by The Japanese defenders in the Pacific war, the new president Harry Truman was being sworn into office after the sudden death of FDR. The campaign for Okinawa convinced the new president that he did not want another Okinawa, as he put it to the JCS, "fron one end of Japan to another." The American people would not tolerate these kind of loses in bring the war in the Pacific to an end.

It was at this time that the Truman administration began the debate about how to bring this war to an end, and quickly. The trump card that was in the works--if it worked--was the Atomic Bomb.