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History essentially is the accumulation of events in any particular segment of life.

Presidents, Prime Ministers and other heads of States, out of necessity, must have the knowledge of the past or they are doomed to repeat the mistakes of their predecessors.

In my own profession as an Air Force fighter pilot, history meant everything. From the time I was eight years old I was trying to learn what the early great pilots had accomplished. Without realizing it, history was molding my future. I wanted to be like Eddie Rickenbacker—become a fighter pilot and, with a little luck and a lot of practice, maybe become an Ace in the U.S. Air Force as well.

I quickly found out becoming an Ace in the Air Force required more than just flying ability. The personalities of the Aces I read about could fill a history book two inches thick. Many great peacetime pilots lacked the determination and the aggressiveness so vital in any combat pilot. History, though, provides us countless examples where sheer determination won against impossible odds.

The history of Eddie Rickenbacker is an excellent example. The Army Signal Corps refused to accept him for pilot training but that didn't stop him. He took a job as a driver for a senior officer in France and because of his mechanical ability was recommended for pilot training. The rest is history. Great student, great Squadron Commander, great combat pilot and finally the leading Ace in WW1. The history of this man's accomplishments has inspired hundreds of young pilots, myself included, to do things that might otherwise have been thought to be outside their capability.

History provided me with stories of the personal abilities of the really great fighter pilots. They were not just good pilots; they were history students of the past. They knew the characteristics of opposing aircraft, how they turned and climbed, and their maximum speeds. Without this knowledge a pilot would be lucky to survive his first encounter with enemy aircraft. Now all the information is tucked away in history books that deal with aviation.

The tactics used in aerial battles are simply a recording of what works and why; again, it is the history of these tactics that shapes the fighter pilot's mind and fills him with the determination, the aggressiveness, and inspiration to become a master of his trade.

I love history because it provides the intangible item that separates the mediocre pilot from one who becomes a leader in his profession.

I tried to take advantage of every opportunity offered to me right up through my first combat tour in Korea flying P-51's and F-80's.

There were no enemy aircraft to engage on my first tour and it appeared to me that my dream of becoming an Ace was just that: a dream. I returned home and six months later the MIG-15's were challenging our F-86's. History plagued me daily as I read about the aerial battles in and around MIG Alley.

Against the advice of everyone I knew I felt I had to volunteer for a second combat tour in Korea. It was a decision dictated by history. History was being made and I wanted to be a part of that history. I went back. I got my wish. I became an Ace and in my own way maybe provided a little history for younger pilots climbing the ladder. I hope so.

My entire professional climb from beginner to Ace was the result of available history. I learned about fighter tactics, I learned how to handle my aircraft and I was inspired by the determination of Capt. Eddie to become a fighter pilot in World War I. All these things coupled with the action in MIG Alley forced me to volunteer for a second tour. History allowed me to accomplish my dream and become an Ace. How could I not love HISTORY!?!