

Q1: 'The role of Special Forces: Chindits, Commandos, Paras, LRDG, SAS - Do the results justify the expense?'

In the world's present state Special Forces are necessary for preparedness and justify their expense. It is important to emphasise that the possible results justify the expense, though such units have not always been successful in the past. There will always be a need for an outlying group, soldiers capable of exercising less conventional, less predictable tactics in military engagements. We cannot know what specific difficulties will be presented in future engagements. We must therefore prepare accordingly. It is certainly true that Special Forces groups have not always lived up to expectations. Consider, for example, the Chindits. While highly esteemed and respected, they are sometimes critiqued for having been under-prepared for the tasks set, and how much they might have contributed to the success of operations is sometimes questioned. These are certainly sound criticisms and if we look at direct results, there are some situations in which the costs of training, developing, and supplying a special operations unit may appear to be unjustifiable. However, we cannot always predict success or failure no matter how well-prepared we might suppose a group to be. I would argue, nevertheless, that some of the indirect results of a Special Forces group justify their maintenance and expense.

Foremost, the majority of Special Forces units are an elite group of men and women who present themselves as better than their peers; to borrow the cliché, they are often 'the best of the best'. This presents an ideal military standard of accomplishment to which many others can and should aspire. Special Forces units encourage other military personal to be better soldiers and aspire to an example set by elite fighting groups. While this is difficult to quantify, their presence does benefit the military generally, and contributes to a better military simply by providing goals, competition, and examples of ideal soldiering.

As costly and unfortunate as it might be, there is much that can be learned from failure. Some of the failures and less favourable results of Special Forces groups are not the result of the groups themselves, but of unpreparedness or misuse on the part of their commanders. This is a particularly important point because it is often much easier to lay the blame for shortcomings and set backs on those below in rank, suggesting the failure is the result of execution and not

leadership. But this does not take away the importance of special military units, but does point to the importance in leadership. Also, failures can point to learning experiences for future conflicts. Many of the Chindits were unprepared for the conditions in Japan and their health suffered tremendously. It is fair to say, however, that this is not likely to happen again and that their failure was instructive.

In conclusion, the results of Special Forces units can justify the expense, but the emphasis is on preparedness. Their expertise can be vital, especially when the problems of future conflicts cannot be exactly known. There are criticisms against the operations of groups, especially with regard to how much they directly contribute to overall military success. Nevertheless, there are indirect results that should also be considered. First, the elite nature of paramilitary groups set examples and give others something to which they can aspire. Second, their failures can also be part of an instructive learning experience and better prepare the military for future engagement.

Q2: 'Is quantity better than quality in tank warfare? Discuss with reference to WW2, for example the Battle of El-Alamein.'

During World War 2 the quality of the tanks seems largely to have been a less significant factor than the uses to which the armoured divisions were put and the number of tanks used. For this answer I will discuss two prevailing factors for tank success that reveal that the quality of the tanks is not as important as their use. First, with regard to French and German tanks at the start of the war, the German tanks were not as well built, but were better used. Second, quantity, along with sound strategy, can trump quality, with reference to the Battle of El-Alamein.

At the start of the Second World War tank use was still in its early stages and strategists were still trying to decide the best uses to which they could be put. In large part, they served alongside infantry, and until the Germans realised that tanks could operate on their own, and developed strategies for that purpose, it was not necessary to design tanks for speed, but strength. At the start of the conflict French tanks were designed for infantry support, had a general walking speed, but were stronger and better designed. The German tanks, on the other hand, were designed with *Blitzkrieg* strategy in mind, so while not better designed, they were faster and lighter, and most

crucially designed to be better coordinated. Thus all or most of the German tanks had radios for coordinating efforts, while the French tanks had few. This meant that German tanks could regroup faster than the French tanks. Quality, in this instance, was less important than use for initial success.

At the start of the Battle of El-Alamein the Allied forces had nearly 200,000 men and just over 1,000 tanks at their disposal. The Germans, on the other hand, had just over 100,000 men and slightly more than half the number of tanks. Ultimately, the Germans were defeated. There were some decisive factors in the victory, however, the British forces had access to fuel and supplies through allied partners, and would also receive the new Shermans from the United States. Rommel's supply routes were defective. Also, the Allies developed a number of deceptive strategies, codenamed *Operation Bertram*, to throw off the German forces as to where and when the battle would most likely happen. Another strategy, perhaps realising how coordinated tank strategy was for the Germans, was to prevent the tanks from regrouping after battle. By the end of the battle in November the British still had around 800 working tanks, while the Germans had just fewer than 300. While some of the tanks that the allies had were superior to the German counterparts, ultimately the numbers appear to have won the day.

Ideally, in a conflict one would have the greatest numbers and the highest quality of tanks. Nevertheless, it would appear that the overall quality of the tanks is less important than the uses to which they are put and the strategic use of their numbers. In the case of the French tanks at the start of the conflict, they had more or less superior tanks but did not use them effectively. At the Battle of El-Alamein the British had access to slightly superior tanks, but also had numbers and effective strategies to increase the odds of their success. Thus, using World War 2 as a reference, it would appear that the quantity of tanks (provided they are intelligently and strategically used) is more significant than the quality of the tanks.

600 word Revision Guide:

Question 1:

- This answer was developed around the idea of ‘preparedness’. Special forces units generally operate at the fringe of military engagement and are, in this regard, somewhat unpredictable in how successful they may or may not be. Nevertheless, whether or not they justify the expense is a problematic question. If a unit fails, we might argue directly that their failure did not justify the expense. However, there appear to be indirect arguments that suggest the unit is still justified, which I included.
- I do not believe an effective counter argument can be developed against the importance of ‘preparedness’; however, the client may wish to make more of how the units are used. Again, if research or sources are permitted, this is where I would develop my support.

Question 2:

There is a lot that can still be done here. Some ideas:

- If you can be specific and use references, I would develop the differences between the quality of the tanks more. There are some very strong positions regarding the relative merits of different tanks that could make for more specific discussion.
- It might also help to look at the evolution of tank design from WW1 to WW2 to see how strategies were developed and different purposes found.
- More helpful statistics between tanks used and lost over time.
- Specific to the Battle of El-Alamein, the numbers do not lie, and it was the number of tanks along with the other factors mentioned that enabled the British to win. However, one possibly revision strategy for the sake of thoroughness might be to discuss the overall quality of the different tanks used by either side.