Learning from Decisive Battles Prerequisites to Define and Identify Them. The legacy of Sir Edward S. Creasy for the imagination and predictions of war

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Summary/Abstract: The idea that wars can be ended with a single blow has hypnotised generals and military thinkers for centuries. However, it seems that the notion of "decisive battle" was firmly established only in the middle of the 19th century by the British author Edward S. Creasy. Creasy's book The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World inspired a tradition of historiography seeking to define the most important battles in the history of mankind. Importantly, Creasy noted not only the short-term strategic, but also the long-term social and political consequences of the decisive battles of his choice. This essay analyses the original concepts of Creasy, and also the later changes and additions to the tradition, created by Creasy, by the late 19th century and the 20th century Anglo-Saxon and German historians and writers. It argues that "decisive battle" is a concept of hindsight and a tool for historians, as the importance and the decisiveness of individual military engagements can only be gauged from a temporal distance. This has probably been never as true as in the ongoing "war on terror."