



History 7042
Additional Specimen Question Paper 1E (A-level)
Question 03 Student 1
Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0

Specimen answer plus commentary

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

Paper 1E (A-level): Additional specimen question paper

03 'Peter the Great was a lucky rather than a skilful military leader.'

Assess the validity of this view with reference to the years 1695 to 1725.

[30 marks]

Student response

Peter has earned the reputation of a skilful military leader, largely thanks to his success in the Great Northern War and the myth that was subsequently built up about him as the founder of Russian power. Since his triumph over Sweden enabled Peter to establish a new capital in St Petersburg, construct a Baltic fleet and set Russia up as a 'great power' of Europe, he became a military hero in the eyes of many Russians (and, to some extent, his reputation as a military leader was applauded in other countries of Europe too.) However, he also experienced a numbers of failures in his foreign policy and it might be argued that, in view of these, his success against Sweden was more a matter of luck than due to his skilled military leadership.

Peter's first success was at least partly down to luck. The Russians were able to capture the Turkish fortress of Azov on the Black Sea in 1696 because the Turks had not been expecting the attack and were unprepared for it. However, it would be unfair on Peter not to suggest his leadership had some part in this. Although he was not personally involved, it was thanks to him that a fleet of galley ships was constructed at Voronezh on the River Don and serfs conscripted to man this. Peter authorised the expense of this new development and ensured it was properly commanded (unlike earlier expeditions against the Turks). He was rewarded by victory, although the Turks still held Kerch on the Crimea blocking Russian access to the Black Sea. This campaign was not entirely the result of skilful military leadership but Peter's determination and interest in the use of ships was certainly important.

A failure of military leadership brought defeat, in 1700, in the Great Northern War against Charles XII of Sweden at Narva. Here, luck was not on Peter's side because although he had more men and the support of a coalition with Saxony, Poland and Denmark, he was outmanoeuvred by Charles. At this stage it would be wrong to describe him as a great military leader as he had embarked on a campaign without full understanding of his enemy and of the military techniques used by the great European armies. However, he did have some luck after his defeat because Charles decided not to follow up his victory and instead pursue his war against Augustus, king of Saxony and Poland.

Perhaps Peter was lucky that Charles was only young and perhaps over-confident but before 1700, Peter had done nothing to suggest he was an exceptional military leader. The defeat at Narva, however, brought about a huge change and Peter's determination to avenge the defeat coupled with a range of practical measures to build up his armies helped build his reputation.

Peter had inherited an army that was much inferior to those of the more advanced European states. To improve this he set about reorganising his forces, creating a permanent standing

army in 1699. From 1705 on, both nobles and serfs could be conscripted for life long service in the army and there were massive annual levies imposed to maintain numbers. he also established new chains of command and recruited experienced foreign officers and generals. He improved weaponry and imposed new standards of discipline to deter evasion and desertion. This reorganisation was eventually brought together in Peter's 'military regulation' of 1716, which was partly based on European manuals and shows the degree to which he learnt from the West. These emphasised obedience, proper dress and behaviour and the need for physical fitness as well as laying down penalties and punishments,

Skilful leadership also depended on a well-equipped army and he encouraged the mining and metal industries and improved weaponry by introducing the fixed-ring bayonet. The issue of bayonets meant that he was able to abandon the traditional division of troops between pikemen and musket-bearers and so doubled the fighting power of his infantry. This was used to good effect in the Great northern War. A new central arsenal was established and Russia began to manufacture heavy cannon. The numbers of men in the army was also increased to reach around 200,000 infantry and cavalry plus irregulars, cossacks and sailors.

Peter also built up a naval , produced naval manuals, hired foreigners with naval experience and sent young Russian nobles abroad for training. He established 'colleges' to take responsibility for financial and military affairs and experimented with new taxes to finance his war machine including the 1719 poll tax. 85% of royal income was used for military expenditure and wars. The combination of Peter's own ambition and determination backed by his readiness to reorganise his country to support war thus helped to make him a skilful military leader.

Peter was lucky in the sense that Charles got himself bogged down in the fight against Augustus after 1700 and this enabled Peter's armies to make gains around the river Neva and along the Baltic coast. However, this could also be applauded as a skilful strategy on Peter's part. The Russians captured the Swedish fortress of Noteborg In 1702 and Peter was able to establish the fortress of St Peter and St Paul, the first stage in the building of his new capital city of St Petersburg. The Russians were both skilful and lucky in seizing other Swedish fortresses on the Baltic which had been left under-manned by Charles, but it is to Peter's credit that he used this opportunity and began the construction of a Russian Baltic fleet.

'Luck' meant that Charles could not stop the Russians while he was busy elsewhere but in 1706, following the treaty of Altranstadt with Saxony Charles invaded Russia again. Peter showed a good understanding of strategy in preventing Swedish support forces from Riga joining up with Charles in 1708. He was also lucky that Mazepa, a cossack general who supported Charles because he hoped for Ukraine independence, was poorly supported and easily defeated by Menshikov. Peter also made good use of scorched-earth policies in this campaign and so prevented Charles from supplying his armies. Thus superior military leadership meant that Peter was able to win a great victory over Charles at Poltava in 1709 and Charles was forced to flee to Turkey.

However, Peter did not enjoy total military success and this would suggest that his victory over Charles in 1709 was as much due to luck as to his skilful military leadership. When the Turks declared war in 1710, Peter rashly invaded without the resources he needed and was defeated at Pruth in 1711, He had made himself very vulnerable although he had luck on his side as the Sultan allowed him to withdraw, although the Russians had to abandon Azov and other frontier posts. He was thus able to continue his war with Sweden until 1721 when the Treaty of Nystadt was signed and the campaigns went in Peter's favour, thanks to the way he was able to match

his opponent's strategies. Peter also enjoyed marginal success in a war against in 1722-23, and he authorised an exploration of Siberia and the annexation of the Kamshatka peninsula and Kurile islands, which have been added to his reputation as the man who expanded the Russian Empire.

Overall it is fair to say that Peter was a lucky leader but he was also a skilful military leader. He understood the need to reform his military forces after Narva and he carried through these changes with great determination and effectiveness. He was therefore able to win important victories, such as Poltava, and change the future course of Russian history.

Commentary – Level 5

This is a very effective response. It assess, in detail and analytically, the extent to which it was skill or luck which led to the success of Peter's campaigns and foreign policy and it reaches a clear conclusion. The assessment of the reforms which Peter made may be seen as slightly beyond the scope of the question, with its emphasis on military leadership, but such assessment is made relevant and is wholly convincing. It is a Level 5 answer.