

To be successful at the NTC (or in war), all units, from basic infantry squads to armored brigades, must be prepared for it. With a competent staff, a commander can be sure his guidance will reach down to the lowest level, and *executing the mission will therefore be easier*. And if the staff can produce a coherent operations order in a short time, *it will have more time to concentrate on the most important staff function, which is supervision.*

Overall, by adopting Army doctrine

in staff planning and by following the process and changing the behavior of the staff members, a battalion task force staff can produce a good plan in a short time. Although the plan may not be flawless, its execution will be successful *if the units, all the way down to the individual soldiers, understand the commander's intent.*

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After Action Reviews

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The after action review (AAR) has been an important training tool for several years, but many leaders still find it difficult to conduct an AAR without slipping into a traditional critique.

It is not unusual for unit and functional area evaluators to go through an entire series of task force ARTEP AARs describing accomplishments and weaknesses to a mute, captive, and passive audience of commanders and staff members. It appears that the average reviewer either feels obligated to demonstrate the thoroughness of his own observations or does not have the experience and patience to be a good interrogator and an active listener.

An effective AAR is nothing more than a structured, but informal, self-appraisal by unit members. It provides a wide range of mission-related, performance-oriented feedback and positive reinforcement. Although an AAR is an excellent format for making on-the-spot corrections if time permits, it must not be a one-way critique or a spur-of-the-moment lecture.

The goals of an after action review are to reinforce effective training, motivate soldiers to train, and identify a unit's training strengths and weaknesses. To accomplish these ambitious goals, an AAR must be well planned and must cover both mission requirements and the resulting tactical events. In addition to reviewing the action that was taken, an AAR should also explore alternative courses of action that might have been taken.

A good AAR is essentially a group discussion of a mission's key points—who, what, when where, and why—in which the important lessons learned from the "how", or the execution, are discovered by the soldiers themselves. An AAR does not need to evaluate the operation's success or failure explicitly, but it must analyze the way the training events occurred and their effect on the accomplishment of the mission.

Some soldiers are concerned about the extra time, patience, and effort they must devote to conducting an effective after action review. Active, direct, task-oriented

people tend to believe that it is more efficient and effective to use their own experience and knowledge to tell the others the way things went and then go on to the next mission. If everyone involved in the training had perfect knowledge, equal interest, and similar capabilities, the traditional critique might be appropriate, but for the typical tactical training event, this is not the case.

The AAR method is important primarily because of the nature of training. A training event does not unreel in front of an attentive audience in a uniform, focused, sequential manner like a television program.

Instead, a training exercise is constructed from individual and group efforts much the same way a large building goes up behind a safety barricade on a busy street. The sidewalk spectators and construction workers—or the soldiers, in our case—watch only a small portion of the building process in uneven broken increments. Alone, each person sees little of the total progress of the effort, other than the building's eventual completion.

If, on the other hand, the architect or general contractor conducted a question and answer session at the base of the new building, the construction workers and onlookers together, with enlightened coaching, could probably talk their way through the entire building process.

Another useful analogy might be to compare a training mission to a football game, in which the offensive and defensive lines, backs and receivers, or even the coaches for that matter, see only a partial view of the game at a time. It isn't until the head coach shows movies of the game several days later that the players can see themselves act out their roles in each play and understand that play's effect on a particular series of downs.

No one would think it inappropriate for the coach to ask the key players what happened or for them to suggest a way they could have run a play or carried out their assignments in a better way. The same principles apply in training when soldiers are allowed to expand their field of vision, even after the fact.

CONDUCT

An AAR should be conducted immediately after the training period is completed for the chain of command, or by platoon, or in some special cases, for an entire company. It should be conducted, if possible, on the objective or a piece of terrain that overlooks a critical part of the training site. Equally important, it must be conducted in a non-threatening and non-judgmental professional environment. Coffee, soup, or hot cocoa is appropriate and greatly appreciated at the start of an AAR, but trying to conduct one during a meal is not productive.

Humor is an effective way of focusing group attention and maintaining interest, so long as it does not detract from the pace and tone of the AAR or embarrass the participants. After the troops have relaxed and laughed at themselves a little, the AAR leader, or facilitator, should have the leader of the opposing force (OPFOR) briefly describe his situation, mission, and plan of execution. The friendly unit leader should then do the same, but his plan of operation should be

limited to his intentions; it should not be a premature tale of what actually happened.

The AAR presenter should then ask questions of the group about the training activities, following roughly the sequence in which they occurred. While doing this, though, he must be careful not to tell what he saw or what he thought of an action. The AAR leader's job is only to guide the soldiers through a discussion of what the unit was supposed to do, how it accomplished the task, and how the task could have been done better.

Although the AAR setting may be relaxed and casual, the activity itself must be well planned. The AAR leader should work from an outline of notes and a list of the functional areas or operating systems to be covered.

HEART

The heart of an after action review is the interrogatory discovery technique. The AAR leader must word his questions so the soldiers cannot answer them simply "yes" or "no" but must explain or elaborate on them. The questions "Who attacked the right-hand fighting position?" and "Did you destroy the machinegun?" will get only limited answers from one or two soldiers. On the other hand, saying "How did the squad breach the obstacle?" or "One of you describe how you marked the passage lane," or "Explain how you secured the far side" will engage a greater number of minds and elicit more imaginative answers.

To extend the group discussion in a logical and useful direction, the AAR leader must also be prepared to use the answer to one question as the basis for another question.

Each question should be addressed to the group even if the reviewer will eventually single out a certain soldier or leader to answer it. An effective questioning technique that complements and encourages group participation is to allow four to six seconds after the question before asking for a particular person or a volunteer to answer it. Even though this is difficult to do without practice, the long

pause gives all the participants an opportunity to think over their possible responses and anticipate being called upon to explain it.

In addition to group oriented questions, individual soldiers should also be asked about their specific jobs or actions as they contributed to the operation.

Regardless of the questioning style used, either directly to an individual or to the group at large, the responding soldiers should be given an opportunity to demonstrate their answers on a simple terrain model. This sandtable or terrain model must be made up ahead of time to show key terrain features as well as important graphic control measures. It does not have to be fancy, just conveniently at hand and useful.

The OPFOR and friendly leaders should be questioned occasionally to bring the focus of the discussion back to the mission and the basic sequence of events. The leader might ask them to describe their plans and personal actions at key phases of the operation, as they are brought out during the AAR.

ELABORATE

It is critical that an after action review not be allowed to deteriorate into an adversarial confrontation between a few vocal or angry soldiers. The AAR leader must control it so that most of the participants have a chance to contribute. He must also avoid tangential issues that are not related to the major training objectives, and he should downplay excuses for poor performance.

The AAR should end on an upbeat note. At its conclusion, several soldiers should be asked to repeat their unit's mission statement. The group members themselves should be asked if they believe they accomplished their mission, and time should be devoted to briefly discussing again why or why not. The soldiers should also be asked to restate a few of the ways in which they could have done a better job with fewer casualties, breakdowns, or problems if they had used the ideas brought out earlier during the AAR.

To conduct a successful AAR, the leader must overcome his natural tendency to "take charge"—that is, to evaluate, correct, or just talk. Instead, he must develop the ability to maintain control both of himself and of his group, to ask questions, and then to listen careful-

ly to the answers. Soldiers benefit more if they are prompted to learn from recalling and retelling their common experiences than if they are told what they did.

A good after action review makes the difference between training lessons learned and training lessons lost.

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Another Look at Phase Lines

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A phase line, according to FM 101-5-1, Operational Terms and Symbols, is "a line used for control and coordination of military operations...usually a recognizable terrain feature extending across the zone of action."

Thus it is that we define one of the most basic graphic control measures. In wooded terrain, or rolling terrain cut with ridges, streambeds, distinct roads and trails, this is a more than adequate definition and description. But only a part of the world has terrain that fits this description. How do we as professionals adequately phase operations in wide open expanses? How do we phase desert operations? How can we best enable our subordinates to recognize phase lines? And do we think of night operations when choosing phase lines?

I would like to propose another way of planning phase lines that gives commanders some alternatives to the usual terrain-following method. It is simple; it can easily be adapted for night operations; and it allows the accurate transmission of graphic control measures to subordinates by radio, something our present system does not offer.

Phase lines can be straight. If there are no recognizable terrain features that extend across the zone of action, a leader

must look outside the boundaries and select prominent terrain features that are clearly visible from the zone of action. These include peaks, valleys, draws, spurs, and saddles. He can draw straight lines across the zone that join two such terrain features and thereby produce a pair of points (called a point pair). The actual phase line is the portion of the line connecting the points that falls within the lateral boundaries of his zone.

This kind of phase line is easy to recognize. By simply raising his arms and pointing at the two features, a soldier can gain a good appreciation of his position in relation to the phase line. With peaks and saddles that are clearly visible against the skyline, even night navigation to and identification of the phase line is simple.

Valleys, draws, and spurs can also be used effectively in the daytime or with lunar illumination, but these are harder to identify under low-illumination conditions.

One method of overcoming these difficulties is to plan illumination marking rounds down the sides of the planned advance route. Firing illumination beyond the ridgelines, thus backlighting the horizon, also allows for a clear determination of prominent terrain features.

It also avoids illuminating friendly troops, reduces the highlight cutoff or washout of night vision devices, and may well act as a partial deception measure. If these marking fires are planned as part of an overall harassment and interdiction fire plan, even their intent can be concealed from the enemy.

Obviously, this system isn't perfect. It won't work when smoke, fog, or clouds obscure the features. In these conditions, though, pace count or odometer readings—along with time travelled, speed, and azimuth from the last identified phase line—can help to locate positions through dead reckoning. And, if breaks in the smoke or fog allow extended visibility, this system allows for rapid, positive position identification. Helicopters can also use it.

Of course, it won't work in wooded terrain or extremely rolling terrain with no prominent peaks. But the usual identification of terrain features can be used in this kind of terrain.

The technique works best in large valleys and on small plains with mountains as boundaries. The terrain at the National Training Center is a good example. Where no distinct features are visible on one flank, a modification using the magnetic azimuth to features on the other