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Staff Rides as a Pedagogical Tool in Professional Military Education (PME): Planning and Conducting Historical Staff Rides

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Abstract: The use of various practical pedagogical tools is an important part of officer training. This is also an area where there is a long tradition in the training of officer cadets and officers in staff colleges as well as in the Armed Forces more generally. This article focuses on staff rides aimed at teaching tactics and operational arts based on historical examples. This type of staff-rides aims to learn from history with a bearing on the present and the future.

The article is organized as follows: first, the article gives a short overview of the history of staff rides, followed by a discussion on different types of staff rides. Then the focus shifts to ways to planning and carrying out a staff-ride. This includes the planning phase, reconnaissance, and the different pedagogical tools that can be used and their implementation. The article concludes with a discussion of how to think when planning and carrying out a staff rides, both practically and pedagogically. The article here presented a

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schematic model of the pedagogical dynamics of the staff ride for different target groups based on their pre-understanding and the complexity of different field exercises.

Keywords: staff ride, PME, tactic, land warfare, teaching and learning in higher education

Introduction

An important part of officer training is the use of various practical educational tools. This article focuses on one of these tools: staff rides. Staff rides have long been an important part of the military profession, having been used in military training since the 19th century (Högström and Baudin, 2018, p. 299–300). A staff ride takes place in the terrain without the participation of troops. The purpose may vary, but it usually involves war planning or the development of organization or *modus operandi*. Staff rides may be based on a real or fictional scenario with the aim of assisting in war planning, testing battle plans, developing tactics and techniques, and providing training in tactics and operational arts. (Högström and Baudin, 2018, p. 296)

More specifically, this article examines staff rides for tactical and operational arts training, with a focus on historical staff rides, i.e., staff rides based on historical examples (on the role of history in Professional Military Education, see e.g. (Halewood and Morgan-Owen, 2020; Haycock, 2005; Howard, 1962; Kiesling, 2005; Sheffield, 2008). This type of staff ride is designed to help participants learn ‘...from history with a bearing on the now and the future’ by studying the ‘planning and implementation of historical cases’ (Melvin, 2005). This form of staff ride is implemented as a case study of a well-documented historical event in places where it is possible to visit and ‘move within the geography of the historical site’ (Knight and Robertson, 2020; see also Lasconjarias, 2014). The authors build on the understanding of staff rides and the development work carried out by the land operations division of the Swedish Defence University, which has a long tradition of developing and carrying out staff rides as part of the education of cadets and officers at all

levels (See also Caddick-Adams, 2005; Ender et al., 2021; Jacobs and Wassermann, 2021; Parton, 2008 for similar practices in other nations).

The article is organized in the following fashion. First, a historical background to staff rides is given before moving on to discussing definition and different types of staff rides. Following that, the focus moves to the planning and implementation of a staff ride. This includes sections on preparation and planning, the benefits of reconnaissance, and the actual running of a staff ride. The latter section includes a pedagogical toolbox that may be utilized when running staff rides to support the implementation and to increase learning. The article concludes with a discussion about the practical and educational aspects in which to plan and implement a staff ride. Here a schematic model of the educational dynamics of staff rides for different target groups based on their prior knowledge and the level of complexity of various staff rides is presented.

Historical Background

The period during and following Napoleonic Wars marks the advent of modern military theory. This period was also the beginning of an understanding of the relationship of war theory and practice. Since then, examples from military history have continued to be viewed as a good pedagogical tool in foundational officer training, for example, in illustrating concepts in military theory. From the second half of the 18th century into the 19th century, different forms of *Kriegsspiele* (war-games) were a very important part of the training and moulding of officers in the Prussian army. In military studies at the *Allgemeine Kriegsschule* in Berlin in the 1830s, what were known as ‘staff rides’ began to be developed; these were based on actual historical examples from earlier wars and gained an important role in the professional development of the officer corps.

The history of war assumed a natural place in training regimens for developing various skills. Because of Berlin’s central location, it was relatively

straightforward to visit a number of battlefields from, for example, the Napoleonic Wars while using Berlin as a base. The main purpose of these studies was to allow the students to use these historical events to learn how to assess situations and make quick decisions. The actual historical circumstances of the fighting were toned down in the teaching, and the focus was rather on getting students to make tactical and operational judgements. The students were encouraged to devise solutions and alternative courses of action for military problems, which could then be constructively critiqued.

The term ‘staff rides’ comes from the fact that when the Prussian General Staff conducted them in the 19th century, they were actually conducting mapping exercises on horseback. Despite the fact that these activities frequently overlapped, they serve different purposes. A battlefield visit is primarily done to examine a historic military campaign and can involve both military and civilian participants. The purpose of a staff ride is mainly to make an overall analysis of a military operation rather than to provide a historical portrayal of an event, thus making it a primarily military activity. The concept of the staff ride has continued to develop, and today, we also see tactical exercises without troops that are conducted on actual battlefields but are usually based on more hypothetical scenarios, although they involve modern operational arts, tactics, and materials. As battlefield visits, staff rides, and tactical exercises without troops can overlap, it is possible, depending on the participants, to skillfully combine them and, depending on the desired study area, highlight and discuss certain subjects (Melvin, 2005).

Staff Rides

A historical staff ride addresses a historical case, focuses on garnering as much participation from students/participants as possible, has clear learning goals, and includes an integration phase after the implementation, which is of major importance for successful learning.

Typology of staff rides

Staff rides can be based on 1) a hypothetical mission that is to be carried out, 2) a case study based on historical examples, 3) a situation that may happen in the future, or 4) an applied fictional learning situation (see *Table 1* below) (Högström and Baudin, 2018, p. 300).

Type of Staff Ride	Fictional or historical?	Type of scenario
Staff Rides based on hypothetical case study (Hypothetical Staff Rides)	Both	Hypothetical mission that is to be carried out
Staff Rides using a historical example as a starting point (Historical Staff Rides)	Starting point in a historical example, but limited to that example	Case study based in a historical example(s)
Staff Rides using a possible future situation as its starting point (Forward looking Staff Rides)	Both	Situation that may happen in the future
Staff Rides based on an applied fictional learning situation (Applied Staff Rides)	Both	Fictional learning situation

Table 1: Typology of Staff Rides

Historical staff rides should not be confused with other types of exercises or methods for researching historical examples through the lens of military history (see *Table 2* below). A battlefield tour involves a visit to the site of a historical campaign or operation with little or no prior research by the participants before the visit. (Knight and Robertson, 2020, p. 6) A tactical exercise without troops (TEWT) involves a hypothetical scenario played out on the terrain, normally with the use of contemporary principles without any relation to historical events. It is the terrain, not the history, that serves as the educational tool in this case (Knight and Robertson, 2020, p. 6).

	Battlefield Tour	Staff Ride	TEWT
Historical background	YES	YES	NO
Level of participation	Passive	Active	Active
Teaching objectives	No	Yes	Yes
Lessons learned	No	Yes (integration phase)	Yes (after action review)

Table 2: Methods for studying historical examples. This figure is based on (Lasconjarias, 2014).

The Three Phases of a Staff Ride

A staff ride contains three phases: 1) preparation, 2) visit, and 3) synthesis. First, prior to implementation, there is some form of preparation related to the historical case and the objectives of the staff ride. In the second phase, there is a visit to the historical case site. Finally, in phase three, there is an integration and synthesis of the learning are drawn from the first two phases (Knight and Robertson, 2020; also see Lasconjarias, 2014). It should be noted that integration and synthesis could also beneficially be integrated into the implementation of the staff ride to facilitate formative learning.

There is no one way to divide these three activities, and this division depends on a range of variables, including everything from the pedagogical approach used to the resources and time available. Both the division of time and what is done within the framework of the three phases are key to maximise learning. Thus, when planning a staff ride, the allocation of time between the different phases should be understood as a key mechanism for optimising the staff ride in order to achieve its objectives.

In principle, none of the phases should be omitted, but beyond that, everything depends on conditions and objectives and not least the participant group. The amount of preparation is required is determined by the level of prior knowledge in the planning team and the complexity of the staff ride. More complex staff rides require, *ceteris paribus*, more extensive preparation than less complex ones, and more experienced participants require less

extensive preparation for the same staff ride than less experienced participants do.

Preparation and Planning of Staff Rides

The planning of historical staff rides normally requires extensive preparation and a review of the literature. To successfully conduct a staff ride, a very good understanding of the historical example is needed – both within the framework of the case being studied and in the wider context of the case. It is also necessary that the case in question is well documented and researched so that we know what happened. This includes knowledge about both sides of the case.

A good starting point is often published ‘battlefield guides’, which are generally very detailed. Even though varying in quality, these guides provide a good starting point for early-stage planning. They usually also have a good selection of maps that can be used for planning as well as implementation. For example, Osprey Publishing produces a wide range of guides and other publications aimed at members of the general public who are interested in military matters. As of the time of writing (September 2022), their Osprey Campaign series had a total of 383 titles covering ‘military history from the ancient world to modern times’ including Napoleonic battles, American Civil War battles, World War I & II battles.¹ Another example is Casemate Publishers, who have a range of publications, particularly on the topics of WWI and WWII.²

The guiding question for developing a staff ride is, of course, what its purpose should be. What do the planners want to achieve? What should the participants learn? Importantly, staff rides are *not* study trips or battlefield tours, the purpose of which is limited to visiting a historical place and tracing

¹ See Osprey Publishing. (2022) Browse by Series: Campaign. Available at: <https://ospreypublishing.com/store/military-history/series-books/campaign>, Accessed: 15 September 2022.

² See Casemate Publishers. (2022) Homepage. Available at: <https://www.casematepublishers.com/>, Accessed: 15 September 2022.

the narrative of a historical event, as discussed above. Even if some background reading needs to be done, regardless of the goal, it is advantageous to clarify at an early stage what the learning objectives are to save time and be more effective and to ensure the quality of the staff ride.

There are a number of other tools that can be useful in planning a staff ride, to varying degrees, depending on the aim of the exercise, who will be participating, and what case that will be studied. The availability of these tools differs. On YouTube, for example, it is now possible to find clips that look at various historical examples. These include everything from historical documentaries from well-known producers such as the BBC to videos from niche producers. One can find everything from general documentaries about war and campaigning to specific videos targeting people interested in military matters that trace historical operations, campaigns and individual battles in detail can be found. It is also often possible to find references to useful maps, books and video clips that can be both practical and instructive. These learning aids have the potential to be a good foundation for participants, depending on their background, prior knowledge, and preparation time.

Reconnaissance

After desk research has been carried out, it is time for step two in the planning process: reconnaissance. This is where one takes what one has learned to the site of the historical example to develop and test one's plan. This is where it can be determined whether the developed ideas will work, what can be improved or altered, and not least, whether the logistics work.

Although we may live in an online world, not everything can be done remotely.³ Carrying out reconnaissance is key to a successful staff ride, where the teachers are on top of things, there are sufficient parking spaces, the training site still exists, and the open field has not been overgrown, the

³ Of course, digital aids such as Google Maps, Google Earth and Google Street View can support planning, and both improve and streamline reconnaissance in many ways. They also make it possible, for example, in a time-efficient way to find possible new venues and get a reasonable picture of what they look like even beyond what the map says. Services like TripAdvisor and other guides are also useful in this respect.

observation site is not now in a forest, and the waterways are still there. Changes happen, which is obvious and inevitable, but by thinking them through and planning in advance, these changes can be managed, sometimes even leading to improvements.

Friction can be avoided by conducting reconnaissance. To give but one example from a staff ride, the authors conducted in 2021 based on Operation Market Garden. The idea was to study the assault on the Waal River on 20 September 1944 standing at the Monument de Oversteek to look at where the troops of the 82nd Airborne division paddled across the wide river before advancing over a large field near the memorial of those who fell, exactly as one of the authors had done previously. However, it was discovered that the entire north side of the town of Nijmegen was being developed, and that a three-kilometre-long area, including the site where the monument stands, was a construction site. Furthermore, there was an environmental project covering five kilometres of the riverside was being carried out to increase biological diversity at the same location where the crossing had taken place. Not only would it have taken hours to get to the intended exercise site due to fencing, but the value of visiting the current site would have been negligible. Additionally, the schedule for the day would have been impossible to follow. Thanks to our reconnaissance, not only were the problem avoided, but we also found a better exercise site on a promontory along the river below the Waal Bridge where British forces attacked across the bridge in conjunction with the water crossing mentioned above.

Reconnaissance provides a good opportunity to meet the local population, build relationships and let them know that in some number of weeks, there would be a group coming to study what happened there. This is particularly appropriate if the exercise will be conducted in uniform. This kind of conversation not only increases the likelihood of a successful staff ride, but it can also generate suggestions about better sites and where artifacts taken from the area can be viewed, among other things. For example, we learned of the existence of a bunker in a nearby field. Reconnaissance also makes it possible

to check the travel time, accessibility, and similar practical concerns about a site.

During a reconnaissance trip, investigators endeavour to gain an understanding of the general layout of the intended sites. It is advantageous to have a number of possible sites for each ride, which can then be investigated *in situ*. The importance of this activity cannot be overestimated; it is not simply a matter of randomly placing oneself in a good spot somewhere close to a battlefield. Certain angles offer better views of the terrain. For example, from one spot, one can see how the Allied troops passed through Hochwald Gap heading towards Xanten, and from the same spot, one can see the top of the cathedral, beyond which lies the final goal, Wesel. This is completely different from simply being in the area where something happened. Done poorly, one will be unable to take full advantage of the staff ride.

There are many other ways to facilitate the implementation of staff rides, not least by improving the experience during the exercise. For example, Reconnaissance gives an opportunity to gather useful material in advance such as maps and documentation about the location, including tourist maps of towns, roadmaps, and the like.

Running a Staff Ride

There are many ways to run a staff ride depending on the desired objectives, location, learning goals, participants, time, and budget. There is not enough space here for a detailed account of a full staff ride beyond providing an example of how a typical setup might look at the Swedish Defence University, as the focus here will be on presenting a pedagogical toolbox from which it is possible to select pedagogical tools according to needs, preferences and taste. It should here be noted that a toolbox is not the same thing as a handbook of the exercise; the latter is important and is one of the pedagogical tools as outlined below.

Example Staff Ride

The traditional way to run a historical staff ride at the Swedish Defence University is for the participants to be divided into smaller groups or pairs

(depending on the number of participants, exercise sites and instructors) who each takes charge of one site and are assigned a theme. Then, they make the necessary preparations, both individually and in groups, in the form of literature studies about the specific site they will be in charge of as well as the wider context of the relevant historical example, military science research, and Swedish regulations and manuals.

The activity at each exercise site pertains to a specific theme. Each group has to prepare a seminar on their theme as well as a presentation of the historical events at that particular site. Often, some kind of text is required, and the team has to prepare a number of seminar questions for discussion with other participants on site.

Each exercise site usually begins with a short terrain orientation (5 minutes). This is followed by a brief overview of the historical events at the site (10-15 minutes). Sometimes, an accompanying military historian or one of the instructors provides an introductory presentation. Then, the team presents what they have come up with regarding their theme (10 minutes), after which the seminar questions are discussed (20-30 minutes). Before departure, there is a brief joint closing (5 minutes). Normally, one hour is allotted per exercise site. Visits lasting less than 45 mins should generally be avoided.

In addition to the seminar, time is set aside for the participants to observe the site and visit local monuments and artifacts, as well as to review informational material (e.g., exhibitions, information boards, and signs). Exactly how much time is devoted to this is dependent upon the exercise site; certain sites require more time, but others may offer less to look at. If there are many things to see, it can be a good idea to combine visiting time with breaks, meals, and so on, to allow space for individuals and groups to decide for themselves how much they want to see. For example, *Ouvrage La Ferté* at the Maginot line or *Pointe du Hoc* require more time than at a site where the crossing of the river Meuse or the traversing of the Ardennes in 1940 is being studied.

Pedagogical Toolbox

When conducting a staff ride, there are several pedagogical tools that can be used to support the implementation and increase learning. Below, we discuss a number of tools that can be useful during historical staff rides. Of course, this is not an exhaustive list, but it does provide a selection of useful tools for staff rides.

Maps and exercise handbooks are two crucial tools for a successful staff ride. It is for example good to use **large format maps**, mounted on boards or the like or to provide a **detailed map book** to the participants. At a minimum, good maps of the examples studied is essential. A **handbook** of the staff ride is a good resource for both teachers and students. It can take many forms depending on the specific needs for the exercise in question and participant pre-knowledge and experience. There can be a shared handbook, or one handbook for teachers and one for participants. If the handbook is shared, there is often a need for additional guides for the teachers who lead the exercise.

The value of **visual aids** should not be underestimated, particularly when the participants are less experienced and need support in understanding and visualising the events. If the group is not too large, **video clips** at the exercise site from both feature films and documentaries can be used (an iPad works well). For example, we have used footage from 'A Bridge too Far' to visualise the British troops' attack across Waalbrug in Nijmegen. Simulations of historical events can also be shown, though this might be more appropriate on a large screen. **Historical photographs** can also be used when expanded to a large format to create an understanding of exactly how the area looked. This is particularly suitable when the site has changed, such as after new construction or infrastructure work, and can show how the site appeared after large-scale fighting. When following Operation Market Garden, for example, observers arrive outside Elst, where it can be helpful to show an enlarged photograph of the water-soaked terrain on the battlefield.

Well-planned visits to relevant **local museums and exhibitions**, which are often adjacent to monuments and locations where key events took place, can be very helpful. For example, a visit to the exhibition in the Church of the

Nativity of Mary by the Polish monument in Driel is highly recommended. Even 'then and now' books can be beneficial as well. Contacting local guides and museums may also be a good idea; a combination of expertise is good. For example, when the land operations section ran a staff ride in Kobarid in Slovenia under the leadership of Lt. Col. Patrik Lidbeck, we greatly benefitted from a guide from the Kobarid Museum, who was knowledgeable about the history and geography of the area.

Another useful tool is various **laws of war quizzes** and other ways that international and national laws can be integrated into a staff ride. The idea of a laws of war quiz is that during the staff ride, the participants are given short questions about what happened or asked what they can learn about and/or do in the future at such sites — for example, whether certain activities are legal, illegal, or 'it depends'. It is important for international law to be an integral part of the staff rides as it is a central part of war and an important dimension studying one's own tactical thinking and manoeuvring. For example, how should we view the way Germans allowed large areas of land to be flooded to give them more time in Normandy in 1944 and in the Rhineland in 1945? What about destroying important bridges in an operational area, or blowing up dams to achieve the same effect as in Normandy and the Rhineland?

In the same spirit, it is a good idea to include other types of **quizzes**, e.g., on terminology, technology, and leadership.

An **all-encompassing subject perspective** in which one examines the broader implications beyond the subject that is the main focus of the staff ride by providing other subject perspectives or focus areas. To give an example, in the study of crossing a waterway, shorter talks about technical perspectives, logistics, tactics, leadership or international law may be given. These talks may cover how bridges are constructed, what load-bearing capacity they have, and how they can best be destroyed. They may also cover the capacity of assault boats, the best way to defend a bridge, what locations allow the commanding

officer the best vantage point to defend the bridge, and the circumstances in which a bridge should be blown up.

Another good method is **development discussions**, in which participants reflect on and connect the *then* with the *now* with their prior knowledge, other perspectives and viewpoints as well as consider individuals' views of reality and daily activities as a natural part of the formative learning that a well-run staff ride entails.

In a **terrain exam**, the participants reflect on an issue or problem set by the course leader alone or in groups on site. It is suggested in such activities that the participants write one page on the topic. It need not necessary be one page, but this is a good benchmark since it is feasible to accomplish in situ in a short amount of time and in conjunction with the particular exercise. Of course, there is room for flexibility, such as setting a task to be completed while travelling between two locations or perhaps during a break. However, the point is that this task should be completed and reviewed in conjunction with a specific part of the exercise and not be a major task that the participants work on outside of the exercise itself.

Another helpful method is to consider the **'consequences of battle'**, where actual events are considered. An organiser can speak about for example a historical figure, an event, or an example of leadership. Another area that can be the focus is the human dimension of conflict. One could, for example, read letters that soldiers sent home from the front. This allows for direct contact between the historical example being studied and the human dimension.

Short games are brief exercises in which the staff ride participants practice decision-making by based on a predetermined rationale. These games can be built up through a three-step process: 1) establish the tactical situation (time, place, and units), 2) describe the events that led to the focal phenomenon (the dilemma), and 3) conduct reconnaissance on the site, its terrain and its characteristics. In the end, the decision is reviewed and discussed. When such short games are conducted, it is important to adapt them according to the size, experience, and composition of the group.

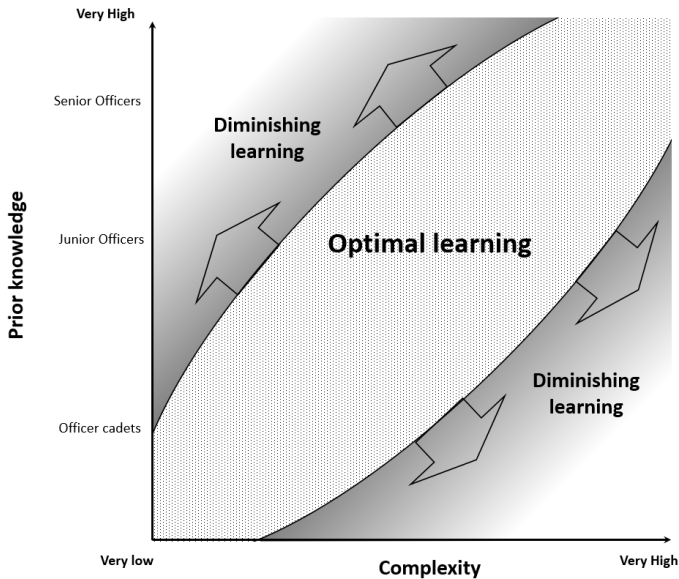
Various types of **war games** can also be played during a staff ride. Here you draw on traditional rule-based games but execute them on-site in the terrain. You normally utilise a specially designed map over the battlefield or a rudimentary terrain model, utilising counters representing the different units. The game can be based on the historical case, aiming to draw conclusions relevant for contemporary and future contingencies and conflicts. It is also possible to play a hypothetical contemporary scenario in the same setting (such as a geographical or tactical situation or dilemma). A good example is Ponte Dirillo in Sicily. Here you can study how the Allied forces on 10 July 1943 tried to move through the restricted terrain of a hilly area fortified by Axis bunkers. This is an ideal location not only because the Sicilian terrain is here basically the same as it was in 1943, but also because the site is shaped like an amphitheatre. You here find one concrete gun emplacement of about 5 x 5 meters perfect for a map and game master. Behind it is a huge hillside where even a large number of participants can stand with a good view over the 'game board' as well as the surrounding terrain.

Pedagogical Approach and the Setup of the Staff Ride

A successful staff ride requires a clear objective and pedagogical approach. This could be based on war planning or on course or educational learning objectives. The staff ride must also be tailored to the prior knowledge of the target group, particularly considering their knowledge and skills, prior history, experience, and training. Obviously, time and resources also play a role and are an integrated part of the planning and running of a staff ride.

One key aspect to consider in planning and developing a staff ride is the prior knowledge of the participant group. It is crucial to examine what the participants know and what previous experience they have when deciding what level of complexity to build into the staff ride. For participants with a lower level of prior knowledge, complex exercise would lead to suboptimal learning, and in the same way, overly simple exercises would be suboptimal for a very experienced participant group. Based on the prior knowledge of the

participants, there are areas where maximum learning can be achieved, beyond which, the benefits of the learning decrease (see Model 1).



Model 1: Diagram of prior knowledge of the participants and the setup of the staff ride.

Prior knowledge is, of course, specific to individuals and not directly measurable. Obviously, a senior officer has more education and experience and thus more prior knowledge than an officer cadet; hence, it may be assumed that a group of brigade commanders is at a higher level than a group of platoon leaders. It makes sense here to think of participants as being on a spectrum from officer cadets to senior officers.

Once the level of the prior knowledge of the group is identified, the complexity of the staff ride needs to be adapted to the participants in order to conform with the objectives and pedagogical approach. A variety of factors make a staff ride more or less complex. For example, planning a historical staff ride may span a number of management levels and operations at different levels and with varying complexity; input from different branches of the armed forces may be necessary, as the complexity of the exercise is determined by active pedagogical choices and limits. A more general approach to a wide-

ranging historical example, such as Normandy 1944 or the landings in southern Italy in 1943, results in a complex staff ride that creates requirements for greater prior knowledge than does an exercise focusing on a single tactical event, such as the 14th Army's offensive in the Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo in 1917. It is also possible to select a specific event from the Normandy landings and thus reduce the level of complexity.

Other variables that can impact or be adjusted to change the complexity include how high the requirements are at each level, the extent of the reading required, how many and how advanced the learning goals are, how much responsibility is placed on individual participants, and the extent of and requirements for the participants' contribution to their exercise area during the staff ride.

The relationship between the prior knowledge of the participants and the complexity of the staff ride may be described schematically as in the diagram of the prior knowledge of the participants and the staff ride set up provided above. The central lightly shaded area is the area where maximum learning can take place. Outside of this area, the learning will be suboptimal, with the benefits diminishing as the distance from the shaded area increases. This occurs in both directions, i.e., if the complexity of the staff ride is too low or too high for the target group.

The logic of this model also works as a pre-developed staff ride that must be adapted to a new participant group. Then, just as with the development of a new staff ride, it is necessary to identify and understand the participants' prior knowledge and to change the setup and implementation to achieve as much learning as possible. Another situation that may arise is that the participant group has varying levels of prior knowledge. If the disparities are too great, it will be difficult to achieve maximum learning, even if this is the goal.

As previously stated, regardless of who is participating and the level of complexity, the exercise consists of three phases: preparation, implementation and follow-up work. There is no correct answer to how these three should be

divided up, but this division depends on a range of variables including everything from a pedagogical approach to resources and time. The division of time and what is done within the framework of the three phases is critical in achieving maximum learning. How during the planning of a staff ride you divide up the time between these phases should thus be understood as one of the key tools for optimising the staff ride in order to achieve its objectives.

In principle, none of the phases should ever be omitted, but everything else is dependent on the conditions and objectives, not to mention the participant group. The amount of preparation required is a function of the level of prior knowledge and the complexity of the staff ride. Complex staff rides require, all else being equal, more extensive preparation than less complex ones, and more experienced participants require less extensive preparation than less experienced participants for the same staff ride.

High levels of prior knowledge mean that a successful exercise *can* be conducted with relatively speaking less preparation (not that it *should*). However, even if these participants can be thrown into the deep end and quickly adapt, it is often the case that the staff rides conducted at higher levels are of a much higher complexity and generally require a not insignificant amount of preparatory work.

Even if in principle it is possible to conduct a staff ride without any time set aside for follow-up work, this is seldom to be recommended as some form of synthesis is required in order to achieve successful learning.

In terms of percentages and time needed, this is a combination of conditions and pedagogical choice. One week of preparation for one week of staff ride may be a good rule of thumb, though a shorter period may work, particularly for the more experienced participant groups. Regarding implementation, this depends on the site and objectives, but experience shows that it is possible to conduct successful staff rides lasting anything from a few days to over a week. Follow-up work is important as this is where a synthesis of what participants have learnt is created. It can be done partly on-site, but if possible, it should be done after the exercise.

Conclusion

The use of various practical pedagogical tools is unquestionably an important part of officer training. Staff rides have been used in military training since at least the 19th century for a reason. In short, there is a long tradition in the training of officer cadets and officers in staff colleges as well as in the Armed Forces more generally in this area. The focus of this article is on staff rides teaching tactics and operational arts based on historical examples, aiming to learn from history with bearing on the present and the future through the study of the planning and implementation of historical cases.

For such staff rides to be successful, the overall purpose of the staff ride and what one wants to achieve must be clear. Moreover, and not least, what should the participants learn? We contend that such a staff ride must include three phases: preparation, visit, and synthesis. While the allocation of effort among the three may vary, they must always be included.

We also argue that reconnaissance is a crucial part of developing and planning a staff ride. Desk research is, of course, essential, but it is during reconnaissance that you take what you have learned to the site of the historical example to develop and test your ideas. This is where you can determine whether the ideas developed will work, and what can be improved or altered. As we have seen above, while we may live in a connected world, but not everything can be done remotely.

While there are many ways to run a staff ride, depending on the desired objectives, location, learning goals, and participants, any staff ride requires a clear objective and a deliberately thought-out pedagogical approach. You must also be adaptable to the prior knowledge of the participants, taking into account their knowledge and skills, prior history, experience, and training. When all the above have been considered and laid out, and it is time for operationalisation, the pedagogical toolbox offered in this article hopefully will be helpful. A good idea and clear objective, combined with a smart pedagogical toolbox, maximises the possibility of optimal learning.

The staff ride is an excellent tool for achieving many learning goals, not least those critical to the work of an officer. Furthermore, the staff ride is an exceptional tool for studying important experiences and developing tactical skills. Last but not least, during a staff ride, the officer corps can also be developed, building networks and developing a positive *esprit de corps* and common identity.

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