

The Exportable Virtual Staff Ride (VSR)—Stalingrad

I. Introduction/Background.

Since 2004, the Combat Studies Institute (CSI) has fulfilled the Army's need to conduct leader training and education utilizing staff rides with computer driven terrain in the classroom. During this time CSI, utilizing emerging 3D technology, developed multiple Virtual Staff Rides (VSRs) that allowed CSI to bring the battlefield terrain to the unit and tailor the staff ride to the needs of the unit. Also during this time, CSI (now part of the Army University Press) had taken a further step by creating an Exportable VSR. This version of the VSR contains all the material necessary for a unit to execute the VSR on its own, without CSI personnel to assist. This material is discussed in further depth below. The exportable VSR—like all staff rides, whether on the ground or virtual—follow the same principles laid out in CSI's 'doctrinal' publication, *The Staff Ride* by Dr. William G. Robertson (a pdf version of this is available on the Army University Press website in the staff ride section, <http://www.armyupress.army.mil/Books/CSI-Press-Publications/Staff-Ride-Handbooks/#the-staff-ride>). In its essentials, the Exportable VSR contains all the elements of a 'ground' staff ride, but with the terrain being presented with a computer in a classroom environment.

The Stalingrad VSR has three characteristics that make it a particularly powerful tool for leader training and education. First, like all VSRs, it allows for free movement within the terrain so that instructors and participants can choose to go to varied locations and look at the views as the combatants would have seen them. Second, the Stalingrad VSR is not only exportable (like some VSRs of the past), it is also downloadable, and thus more accessible to the Army and other services. Finally, this VSR is scalable—it can be tailored to meet the requirements of operational level commanders and staffs (such as corps and division) as well as junior leaders at the tactical level, and all levels in between.

II. VSR basics.

A. Definitions.

1. Virtual Terrain. The 3D terrain projected to the front of the classroom. This is the primary tool used to bring the battlefield into the classroom.

2. The three phases of a staff ride.

a. Preliminary Study Phase. This phase includes all forms of study of the battle or campaign that are conducted prior to seeing the terrain in the field study phase (which is discussed below). At a minimum, participants must read and understand the battle (for our purposes, the term 'battle' refers to any level conflict such as a larger campaign that may involve several tactical actions) before the field study phase when they will see the actual ground. If time permits, preparation can be more extensive to include classes and presentations, role playing with student briefings, movies, sand table exercises, and more.

b. Field Study Phase. During this phase, the participants see the terrain (in a VSR this is virtual terrain) and move to different locations on the virtual ground to discuss the actions in the battle and use the ground to enhance discussion. This phase is normally what people think of when they refer to a staff ride. All three phases, however, must be performed to conduct a proper staff ride and maximize the experience for participants.

c. Integration Phase. After completing the field study phase, the integration phase allows for the participants to integrate the first two phases in order to discuss how the terrain influenced their understanding of the battle and the insights from the staff ride that are relevant to the modern military professional. The integration phase can be done immediately after the field study phase at the same location, or it can be performed at a new location or at a different time.

3. Stand. The field study phase of a VSR is divided into stands. The stands are usually discreet chronological or thematic breaks in the course of the ride. They allow for discussion of key analysis points at appropriate times, and for the participants to get breaks during the course of the field study phase. Keep in mind that each staff ride and its participants are unique, and thus breaks can occur at any time as needed—the stands should be seen as guidance, not rigid stops and starts.

4. Virtual View (usually just shortened to “view”). A point on the ‘ground’ in the virtual terrain used to stop and discuss the battle. There can be many virtual views within a single stand in a VSR. The term is used in the instructor notes to help synchronize the movements and views in the terrain with the historical material being discussed.

B. VSR field study phase execution format.

1 As in a ‘ground’ staff ride, an instructor in a VSR utilizes instructor notes (included as a part of this exportable package and explained in more detail below) as a guide through each stand of the field study phase. These notes contain a description of, and directions for, the movements through the virtual terrain; an account of the significant events at each stand, and analysis questions. A staff ride workbook will normally follow a format of orientation, description, and analysis (ODA):

a. Orientation: identifies all the relevant information about the terrain to the student such as cardinal directions, topographical information, and key locations (bridges, buildings, defenses, hills, stream crossings, etc.).

b. Description: contains the actions, events, and decisions that pertain to that stand.

c. Analysis: contains questions that help guide the participants toward insights that can be gained from that stand. The intent is for the participants to bring out the insights they perceive from the stand rather than just have the staff ride instructor tell them what they should learn from it.

d. Note that the ODA format is a flexible model. There may be more than one orientation in a single stand, as well as multiple descriptions and analysis points.

2. The VSR instructor notes also contain other elements found in typical ground staff rides such as vignettes (human interest stories), lists and cues for the use of visual aids, and ‘directions’ in the terrain. The visual aids (mostly maps) and directions in a VSR, however, are used in a slightly different way than in a ground ride as noted below.

a. Visual Aids (henceforth referred to as visuals). VSR visuals are in PowerPoint format rather than the hard copies on mounted boards used in a ground staff ride. The VSR instructor notes list the visuals for each stand and gives details throughout the stand on when to present them.

b. Directions. For a VSR, movement and stand directions are somewhat different than the directions in a ground staff ride. The directions in a VSR not only get you to a location in the computer terrain, they also must show other movements and views to help the computer operator controlling the movement in the virtual terrain. This person who controls the movements on the computer is called the computer operator.

C. Classroom Setup.

1. With the need to show the participants the virtual terrain and the visuals simultaneously, the classroom requirement is to have two screen views. Thus, it is also necessary to have two computer-projector combinations, with the virtual terrain projected in the center and on the biggest screen if possible, and the visuals projected off to the right or left. The recommended typical class size is about 30 participants or less (optimal is about 15). The smaller class size allows for increased participation and a better view of the virtual terrain for all the participants. Larger groups are possible but the staff ride instructor should understand that it will likely result in a significant decrease of discussion among the broader group of participants.

D. Personnel.

1. Staff Ride Instructor(s). You need at least one instructor for the Stalingrad Exportable VSR. If you want, you can have two instructors who can divide up the stands and lighten the teaching load. The instructor must be the expert on the campaign and know the workbook in depth in order to be able to conduct all phases of the staff ride. Rehearsals between the instructor and the computer operator are essential.

2. VSR computer operator. This is the person who does the ‘flying’ to navigate from one view to the next. This person must be somewhat familiar with VBS3 and must practice the movements with the instructor so that the two can work together.

III. The Stalingrad Exportable VSR contents.

A. There are four links on the Stalingrad VSR page of the Army University Press website that contain the products (materials) needed to conduct the staff ride. Each of these is discussed below.

B. Stalingrad VSR Introduction. This link contains the document you are currently reading. Please finish this entire introduction before accessing other materials. This will help you better understand the products.

C. Virtual Battlespace 3 Instructions. The Stalingrad VSR runs off the Army's games-for-training platform, VBS3. Only a government employee on a CAC enabled computer can download the program. Linked are step-by-step instructions on how to access the Army's Milgaming site and how to complete the necessary steps to download VBS3. Also included are instructions on how to download the Stalingrad terrain and model files from the Milgaming VBS repository for upload into VBS3.

D. Preliminary Study Materials. These materials help prepare staff ride participants for their virtual visit to the campaign area.

1. The participants' Read Ahead (common reading). This is the recommended minimum reading for the participants in the preliminary study phase, and they are linked to the site. The instructor may add additional readings if he or she desires. The two required readings are:

a. "The Battle of Stalingrad" by S. J. Lewis from *Block by Block: The Challenges of Urban Operations*, William G. Robertson, General Editor, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press), 29-62.

b. Various excerpts from *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East*, by Earl F Ziemke and Magna E. Bauer (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, US Army, 1987), 382-397, 441-445, 458-477.

c. As mentioned earlier, it is highly recommended that participants—and particularly instructors—read *The Staff Ride* by Dr. William G. Robertson (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, US Army, 1987). A pdf version of this is available on the Army University Press website in the staff ride section, <http://www.armyupress.army.mil/Books/CSI-Press-Publications/Staff-Ride-Handbooks/#the-staff-ride> .

2. Character Packets. If the unit chooses to do so, they can enhance the educational value of the staff ride by having the participants play the role of various commanders in the battle. The linked character packets provide material to help the role players prepare to discuss their commander in more depth in the staff ride.

3. Bibliography. A Stalingrad bibliography is provided to help participants—and particularly instructors—study the battle in more depth.

4. Instructors can conduct any additional preliminary study that time permits (e.g., classes, student briefings, movies, etc.) with materials that they find on their own.

E. Field Phase and Integration Phase Materials. These resources are for the staff ride instructor. The notes are the materials the instructor uses to tie the terrain, the historical narrative, and the visual aids together.

1. Instructor Notes (sometimes called a Walkbook).

a. The instructor notes are in two volumes. There are 7 stands in volume I and 8 stands in volume 2. Also at the end of volume 2 is guidance for the conduct of the integration phase of the staff ride. The stands are written in an outline format (roman numerals, then capital letters, then Arabic numerals and so on).

b. Each stand is built on the orientation, description, and analysis (ODA) guidelines. However, there are variations to this pattern as needed. Also note that the description part of the notes in each stand often contains a strategic overview, an operational level narrative (often a look at events on the Eastern Front outside of Stalingrad), and a tactical account of the fight in Stalingrad itself.

c. In addition to ODA, there are the directions for movements in the virtual terrain, which are highlighted in yellow, and instructions for the use of the visual aids, which are highlighted in blue.

d. Finally, the description portion of the instructor notes use a system to help the instructor find the major events and essential material, while still having many of the details available for the instructors' own knowledge or to answer questions. Each major section heading (roman numerals and capital letters) is done in boldface. In the rest of the material, gray highlights mark the information that is most important for the students. The material in the description not highlighted is additional detail to help the instructor (but can also be presented to the participants if the instructor chooses).

2. Visual Aids (visuals). These are the Powerpoint presentations for each stand. They are usually maps, diagrams, and other information to help in the conduct of the field phase. The staff ride instructor may want to consider providing a copy of the visuals to participants in the preliminary study phase.

IV. Scaling (or tailoring) the Stalingrad VSR.

A. The battle of Stalingrad was a massive event that included larger campaigns such as Case BLUE and Operation URANUS, and involved hundreds of thousands of soldiers in a 5 month struggle. The complete Stalingrad VSR reflects this enormity.

B. If instructors were to present all of the material in the instructor notes and visuals—even focusing only on the gray highlighted materials—the VSR would take more than eight hours and would have to be executed in two days to avoid participant burn-out.

C. However, the Stalingrad VSR is scalable. It should be tailored to fit the audience and thus reduced in scope and time (a six hour ride, three in the morning and three in the afternoon, is a good goal). Below are some general suggestions for scaling the field phase of your staff ride (note that at the beginning of each volume of the instructor notes is more specific guidelines for trimming down portions of the ride to fit the unit needs).

1. If you are a higher level unit looking to examine more operational (and even strategic) implications and insights of Stalingrad, you will want to keep most of the first two and last two stands' material in the ride (BARBAROSSA, Case BLUE, Operation URANUS, and Final Acts). This will entail cutting significant portions of the other stands, which focus on tactics. You may want to focus on only three to five of the key terrain areas of the city for detailed descriptions and virtual movements, instead of the dozen or so that are in the notes.

2. If you are a mid to lower level unit looking for some insights at all levels, you can maybe cut BARBAROSSA altogether and minimize Case BLUE, Operation URANUS, and Final Acts (you will want to even cut some of the gray highlighted parts). Also scale back on Stand 3, Isolation of the City; Stand 4, Fight for the Suburbs, and Stand 13, Operation HUBERTUS and Ludnikov's Island. You can then focus on maybe six to eight key terrain areas of the city for detailed descriptions and virtual movements.

3. If you are only interested in the tactical aspects of the battle, eliminate stands 1, 2, 3, 4, 14, and 15. Instead, using a few of the visual aids provided, give a 15-20 minute overview of the entire campaign. Then pick one, two, or three stands (depending on time) and do those stands as written, like case studies of certain actions.