**THE OEF WANAT VIRTUAL STAFF RIDE**

**1**. **INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

This staff ride examines a coalition task force conducting counterinsurgency operations in the Waygal valley of Afghanistan, 2007-2008. The ride’s primary focus is an insurgent attack on a small outpost occupied by the 2nd Platoon of C Company, 2-503 Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade. This force of 43 American and 24 Afghan National Army soldiers was attacked by 150-200 insurgents in the early morning of 13 July 2008.

The primary learning objective is to discuss the enduring insights of combat in a complex environment, especially at the junior leader and company/platoon level. However, the staff ride can also be tailored to concentrate on issues important to battalion leadership. The ride itself offers insights into the following aspects of warfare:

* Leadership with an emphasis on Mission Command and decision making
* The Operations Process
* Intelligence Operations
* Warfighting Functions
* Terrain Analysis

**2. HOW TO USE THE VIRTUAL STAFF RIDE**

**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. Virtual View: A point on the “ground” in the virtual terrain used to stop and discuss the battle. The “virtual view” is also a title found in both the “instructor notes” and the “screen movements” to synchronize those two documents (see below).

**B. Virtual Staff Ride Format. Instructor Notes:**

During a traditional staff ride, an instructor uses the instructor notes, or walk book, through each stand. This guide contains a description of the terrain, the significant events, and analysis questions, which are broken up by stand. A staff ride walkbook follows an *Orientation*, *Description*, *Analysis* format:

1. Orientation: identifies all the relevant terrain to the participant.
2. Description: contains the events that pertain to that stand (normally in chronological order).
3. Analysis: contains the questions asked to guide the participants toward the insights that can be gained from the staff ride.

The *virtual orientation* is further broken into two parts:

1. Orientation to the Situation (using PowerPoint Slides at the beginning of the stand) which presents the background events/information needed to focus the participants on the stand.
2. Orientation to the Terrain(using the virtual terrain) which presents all the relevant terrain and should be tied to the maps that are provided. The *terrain orientation* occurs when the virtual terrain is first presented, and can also be executed anywhere the instructor feels he/she needs to keep the participant oriented.

Another element to the walkbook is the use of visual aids for each stand. These are normally maps or important pictures/diagrams that are brought to the battlefield on large boards and are used to guide or enhance the discussion. The virtual staff ride uses PowerPoint presentations and these will be referred to in the instructor notes as “Visual Aids”. These PowerPoint presentations may be heavily animated to present the events in a chronological order and to assist both the instructor and participant in understanding movement/placement of units, vehicles, and personnel.

**C. Classroom Setup:**

With the need to show the participants the virtual terrain and the visuals simultaneously, the required classroom setup is to have two screen views. Try to have two computer/projector combinations, with the Virtual Terrain projected in the center, and the Visuals projected off to the right or left. While it is possible to switch back and forth between views, it is encouraged to use the dual screen method, for a clear understanding of the events. Also, it is not advisable to have a class size larger than 30 participants. The smaller class size allows for increased participation and better view of the Virtual Terrain for all the participants.

**D. Time Requirements:**

The Wanat VSR is meant to be completed in four hours, though with adjustments it can be completed in as little as three hours, but at the cost of reduced content and discussion. If you choose to shorten the VSR to save time, it is recommended to omit or reduce the following:

1. Shorten the amount of time the videos play after they have illustrated their points for emphasis.
2. Reduce the amount of time for analysis in Stand 1. This stand can easily consume too much time simply for the amount of background information it contains.
3. Reduce the amount of time for the description of Stand 6.

**3. THE WANAT VIRTUAL STAFF RIDE CONTENTS.** Ensure you download the following files from the Staff Ride Team page on the Army University Press website:

1. **Instructor Notes.** Contains the notes required for the instructor and the “flight” instructions for the virtual terrain operator. We recommend both instructor and VBS operator should have a copy of the walk book.
2. **The Visuals.** PowerPoint slides used to convey key information to the participants. Some visuals are animated and cued by the instructor; others are stand-alone and have no animation.
3. **The Virtual Terrain.** There are three databases maintained in VBS3 for the Wanat VSR: Wanat Battalion South, Wanat Battalion North, and the Wanat Company database. Wanat South and North are used for the first two Stands and the Company database for the remaining stands. Each can be uploaded into any VBS3 system to facilitate the staff ride.
4. **Video Clips.** There are two video clips used in the Wanat VSR. They are titled:
   1. Bella Helicopter
   2. Wanat OP