

The Battle for Attu Virtual Staff Ride (VSR)

EXPORTABLE INSTRUCTIONS

1. Introduction.

a. Since 2004, the Combat Studies Institute, now part of the Army University Press (AUP), has fulfilled the Army's need to conduct leader training and education through the use of the virtual staff ride (VSR). A VSR uses computer developed terrain in a near 3D environment to bring historical terrain to the classroom. This exportable package allows Army organizations to conduct their own staff rides without external instructors and VSR computer operators.

b. The purpose of a staff ride is much more than teaching history. The purpose is to have participants draw insights and lessons from the battle or campaign, which are of value to the modern military professional. Thus, history is the vehicle through which the military professional can learn how to develop better solutions to current and future challenges.

c. The exportable VSR, like all staff rides, follows *The Staff Ride*, the Army's "how to" manual on staff rides. The manual discusses the fundamentals of a staff ride and the techniques and procedures for how to conduct one. This guide is available through the Army University Press website at: <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Books/CSI-Press-Publications/Staff-Ride-Handbooks/#staff-rides>

2. The Battle for Attu VSR.

a. This VSR examines the US assault on the island of Attu within the context of the larger campaign in the Aleutian Islands in WWII. As part of their plan for seizing Midway Island and drawing the US Navy carriers into a decisive battle, the Japanese conducted an operation to seize two American islands, Kiska and Attu, in the Aleutian chain near Alaska. Both US Navy and Army planners were determined to take these islands back. The resulting campaign was arduous, but ultimately successful.

b. The primary learning objective is to discuss the insights and lessons learned in the planning and execution of a complex amphibious operation making a forced entry into prepared enemy defenses. The Attu VSR offers insights into many aspects of warfare to include:

- Operations in a Unique Arctic Environment
- Joint Operations
- Leadership and Mission Command
- Planning for a Complex Amphibious Operation

3. **Staff Ride Methodology.** A staff ride follows a three-phased approach of preliminary study, field study, and integration. The *Staff Ride* discusses each phase in depth, but in short, the description of each phase is:

a. The preliminary study phase provides participants a thorough understanding of the historical event prior to the field phase. In other words, to maximize the learning experience, the participants should already know 'what happened.' Preliminary study can include reading

materials, classroom sessions, movies, and any other material that can be presented before one conducts the field phase. For this staff ride, the preliminary study phase is primarily provided in the read ahead materials and other options referenced in this package. The preliminary study phase is critical to the success of the field study phase and therefore equally critical to the success of the staff ride as a whole.

b. The field study phase most readily distinguishes the staff ride from other similar forms of historical study (e.g., battlefield tours, campaign/battle analysis). It adds the one critical element of study that cannot be replicated in the classroom, in map study, or in readings—a view of the actual or virtual terrain. Because the field study builds upon the preliminary study, each phase compliments the other to produce a coherent, integrated learning experience. The visual images and spatial relationships seen during the field study may reinforce or challenge analytical conclusions reached during the preliminary study or generate new insights built upon the added dimension of seeing the actual or virtual terrain.

c. The integration phase provides an opportunity for participants to reflect upon the staff ride experience. This phase integrates the preliminary study with the field phase to draw out the timeless insights and lessons that can be found in the staff ride. Several positive effects stem from the integration phase. First, it provides the participants the opportunity to develop a richer overall view of the campaign. Second, it provides a mechanism through which participants may organize and articulate their impressions of both the event and the insights derived from its study that are applicable to them today.

4. Attu VSR Contents. This VSR consists of the following products:

a. Preliminary Study Instructions. This packet contains the reading(s) that the participants use to prepare for the field phase of the staff ride as well as other guidance for the preliminary study.

b. Instructor Notes. Contains the notes required for the instructor and the navigation instructions for the virtual terrain operator. We recommend that both the instructor and the VBS operator have a copy of the instructor notes.

c. Visual Aids. PowerPoint slides (mostly maps) that are used to convey key information to the participants.

d. Virtual Terrain. The virtual terrain is a separate component of the virtual staff ride exportable products. The AUP Staff Ride Team uses the Army's gaming platform, Virtual Battlespace 3 (VBS3), as its program to build virtual terrain. Refer to the separate virtual terrain instructions on how to download VBS3 and how to load terrain files and models into the VBS3 database.

e. Video Clips.

4. How to use the VSR Products.

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. We also use the term virtual view in the instructor notes to synchronize movement in the virtual terrain with the conduct of the field phase of the virtual staff ride.

b. Read Ahead Material:

(1) At a minimum, preliminary study should consist of mandatory reading for all participants. Constraints on the unit training schedule sometimes preclude a more in depth preliminary study.

(2) The optimum preliminary study phase combines individual study, lecture, and group discussion, perhaps as part of an LPD session. The read ahead instructions provide specific guidance on how to use the preliminary study materials. As previously mentioned, the key to a successful and lively field study phase is preparation.

c. Instructor Notes:

(1) During a staff ride, the facilitator uses the instructor notes, or “walk book,” as a guide for the field phase of the staff ride. The field phase is divided into “stands,” places on the virtual terrain where staff ride participants stand to discuss the historical events. Each stand is organized into an *Orientation, Description, Analysis* format:

(a) Orientation: Identifies all the relevant terrain to the participant, pinpoints it on the visual aid, and places the stand in the chronology of the battle/campaign. In a VSR, the facilitator continually pauses to keep the participants oriented in time and space.

(b) Description: Contains the events, actions and decisions that pertain to that stand, normally in chronological order.

(c) Analysis: Contains the questions asked to prompt the participants to discuss how and why events occurred and to evaluate their importance in the historical context. It is also used to evaluate actions and results and their relevancy to the present day.

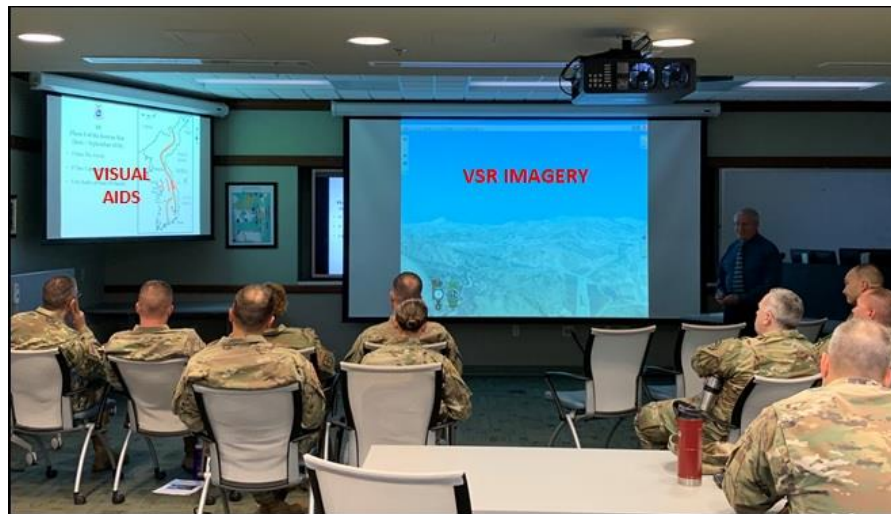
(2) The instructor notes coordinate the use of the visual aids for each stand. These visual aids are normally enlarged maps or important pictures/ diagrams in a PowerPoint presentation and are commonly referred to as “visuals.” These visuals may be animated to present the events in a chronological order and to assist both the instructor and participants in understanding movement/placement of units. The notes have cues to the facilitator throughout the text to indicate when to change a slide or advance an animation.

(3) Lastly, the notes contain instructions for navigating through the virtual terrain. In much the same way as the visuals, there are cues and instructions throughout the instructor notes that tell the facilitator where, when, and sometimes how to move through the terrain.

5. Classroom Setup.

a. The optimal classroom set up consists of two computers and two screens to enable the participants to view the visual aids and the virtual terrain side-by-side. Because a virtual staff ride is similar to a ground staff ride, the terrain should be the focus of the audience's attention and the virtual terrain should be in the center of the venue. While it is possible to switch back and forth between visuals and virtual terrain on a single screen, we encourage the dual screen method for a clear understanding of the events and to minimize having to re-orient participants back to the terrain.

b. Staff rides are most effective when conducted in a small group setting, generally no larger than 30 participants. The smaller class size allows for all attendees to participate and provides for a better view of the virtual terrain. However, larger venues with stadium seating and larger screens may allow for a larger audience.



6. Time Requirements. The Utah Beach VSR takes 2-3 hours to complete properly.

7. Personnel.

a. Staff Ride Facilitators/Instructors. At least one facilitator/instructor is necessary for the VSR. Organizations may opt to have more than one facilitator to divide the stands and lighten the teaching load. The facilitator must be an expert on the battle/campaign and know the material in depth to conduct the three phases of the staff ride. Rehearsals between the instructor and computer operator are essential.

b. VSR computer operator. The operator is responsible for navigating through the virtual views. This person must be familiar with the operation of VBS3 and must practice the movements with the instructor so that the two can work together without disrupting the flow of the field study. Without practice, it is easy to get lost and for the movements to become too fast, too slow, or too choppy.

8. If you need help, please ask us at the Army University Press Staff Ride Team. We are here to assist you! The most reliable means to contact us is through our webmail address: usarmy.leavenworth.tradoc.mbx.armyu-aup-srt@army.mil We can also be reached through the

“Email Us” link on our website at: <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Educational-Services/Staff-Ride-Team-Offerings/>