

THE OPERATION AL FAJR (PHANTOM FURY) VIRTUAL STAFF RIDE 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 any external assistance.

b. 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 Operation Al Fajr (Phantom Fury) Virtual Staff Ride

a. This staff ride examines the clearance of the city of Fallujah in November 2004, Operation Al Fajr (Phantom Fury) during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). The field study's primary focus is on the planning, organization, interoperability and execution of the clearance of Fallujah by the Combined Joint Marine-Army-Iraqi force.

b. The primary learning objective is to discuss the insights and lessons learned in the planning, training and execution of an attack to seize a complex urban environment. The staff ride focused at the company to division level, and offers insights into the following aspect of warfare:

- Leadership and Mission Command
- Understanding and analyzing an Urban Operational Environment
- Interoperability
- Planning, training and operations within a Combined Joint Task Force

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. Preliminary Study. During this phase participants learn about the historical events to prepare themselves for the virtual visit to the historical terrain. A good preliminary study phase is critical to the success of the follow-on field study phase. The goal is for participants to have a strong knowledge of the historical events and to develop their own opinions as to how and why events occurred to promote lively discussion and divergent viewpoints during the field phase.

b. Field Study. The core of the staff ride is the virtual visit to the terrain where the historical events occurred. An integral part of the discussion is how the terrain effected

the actions and the decisions in the battle/campaign. The purpose of the field study phase is to gain an understanding of selected historical events, to analyze the significance of those events, and to derive relevant lessons for professional development.

c. Integration. This phase is the opportunity for participants to combine their experiences in preliminary study and the field study to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the battle/campaign. It further allows the participants to gain insights relevant to their current duty positions and to the present day.

4. The Operation Al Fajr (Phantom Fury) Virtual Staff Ride Contents. This VSR consists of the following products:

a. Read Ahead Material. This packet contains the reading(s) that the participants use to prepare for the field phase of the staff ride.

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

c. Visual Aids. PowerPoint slides 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. There is one video clip of Marine combat footage incorporated in to the staff ride.

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 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 walk book incorporates the use of visual aids for each stand. These visual aids are normally enlarged maps or important pictures/diagrams that are brought to the battlefield to guide or enhance the discussion. The virtual staff ride uses PowerPoint presentations and are commonly referred to as “visuals.” These visuals may be heavily animated to present the events in a chronological order and to assist both the instructor and participants in understanding movement/placement of units, equipment, and personnel. The walk book has cues to the facilitator throughout the text to indicate when to change a slide or advance an animation.

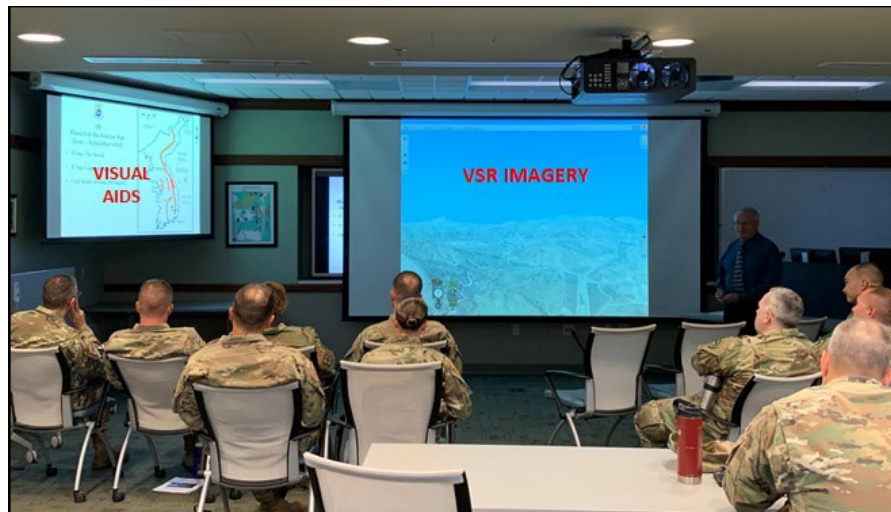
(3) Video clip(s) are incorporated into the VSR to further enhance discussion and understanding. The walk book includes cues on when to play videos.

(4) Lastly, the VBS operator instructions contain directions for navigating through the virtual terrain and screenshots taken from the virtual terrain. In much the same way as the visuals, there are cues and instructions throughout the walk book that tell the facilitator where and when to move through the terrain; the operator instructions are 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 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 for all. However, larger venues with stadium seating and larger screens may allow for a larger audience.



6. Time Requirements. The Operation Al Fajr (Phantom Fury) VSR takes five 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 the 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/>