

How to Study a Battle

Military History and Combat Leader Development



PME for Company Officers

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New Challenges for Officers

- Lower echelons of combined arms teams
Lower echelons of decisionmaking



- Increasing
 - Technology / C2 / SA / Media
 - Combat Power, Precision, and Range / Joint Operations
 - Weapons / System complexity / Close urban terrain
 - Irregular conflicts / COIN / Indigenous Forces / Cultures
- **Smaller Combined Arms Forces + Complex conflicts**
= Increasing Expectations of Competence
 - Of both you and your people

Increasing Expectations of Competence

- Solution: **Increase abilities of commanders**
 - *Increase experience, training, and education:*
“Fanatical pursuit of tactical excellence”

– *Increase pace of self-development:*
“Old heads on young shoulders”
Squeeze 20 years of experience into 10 years

- The Marine Corps cannot adequately prepare you.
What do we do to compensate?

Fight alongside your ancestors

- The human dimension never changes
- Battle references: shorthand of the profession
 - The Key Leaders and the Key Decisions
- Read widely, outside USMC, pull carefully
- **Know 20 battles**

Naktong Bulge: 1950

2 / 5

Operation COBRA: 1944

CCA 3rd AD



Ancestors



- Capt Charles MacDonald
 - Capt Hans von Luck
 - Capt Richard Winters
 - Maj John Howard
 - Capt William E. DePuy
 - Capt Samuel Jaskilka
 - Capt Ron Christmas
 - Capt _____
- I / 3 / 23 Inf 2ID
 - K / PzAA 37 7PzD
 - E / 2 / 506 PIR 101AB
 - D / 2 / OBLI 6PD
 - C / 1 / 357 Inf 90ID
 - E / 2 / 5 Mar 1MarDiv
 - H / 2 / 5 Mar 1MarDiv
 - OEF / OIF USMC

How to Select a Battle

Teach in order to Understand

- Select a battle that *interests* you.
- Select something *small*. Stay focused.
- Select something *relevant*.
- **Sources:** The military leader *is* a historian
 - Read as if you are going to explain it later – you are.
 - Say more than you show. Hand out more than you say.
 - Know the *one* standard text. Review the others.

How to Present a Battle

- “Why do I care?”
 - Justify your issues to the audience
 - Like a movie, create interest in the first two minutes
 - Use the stories of real people to gain interest
- **Specificity is the Key: Focus!**
 - *One* take-away lesson. *One* memorable thesis.
 - Follow a *single* Unit. Follow a *single* Leader.
 - Follow a *single* Decision, Issue or Event.

Battle Study: The Seven Products

1. **An Overview**
 - Strategic to operational to tactical
2. **A Map on the Wall**
 - Combat leaders know that the dirt is reality
3. **A Task Organization**
4. **An Enemy Organization**
5. **A Timeline**
6. **A Lessons Learned**
 - Summarize relevant issues
7. **A Bibliography**



[Op HUSKY Handout]

Go Deeper than the Fight...

- Compare their army to ours
 - What does this battle mean to us *today*?
- Learn about armies IOT look at ourselves
 - Look for deeper issues: Military Anthropology
 - How are institutions Built? Evolve? Fail?
 - Officer Selection? Education? Professionalism?
- See Atkinson, Perret or DePuy on the U.S Army, Doughty on the French, Van Creveld on the Germans
 - Not battles, but institutions

COIN Battle Study Challenges

- Diplomatic, Economic, Information vectors
- No battles. No states. No governments.
- No enemy order of battle
- Years and years of conflict
- Revolutionary theory vs tactical decisions

“Insurgents start with nothing but a cause...the counter-insurgents start with everything but a cause and gradually decline...”

COIN Battle Study Questions

- “How well did the army know their enemy?”
- “How well did the army adjust to the fight?”
- “How well did key leaders direct the fight?”
- “What tactical actions supported or contradicted the strategic goals?”
- “How well did military leaders support diplomatic, economic, and information leaders, organizations, and objectives?”
- “What can Marines learn from this conflict?”
“Who else can learn from this conflict?”

Dozens of Battle Study Examples:

www.2ndbn5thmar.com/history/battlestudies.htm

- Task Force Smith 1950
 - 2ndbn5thmar.com/history/TFSmith1950.pdf
- Op HUSKY 1943
 - 2ndbn5thmar.com/history/505thPIR1943.pdf
- The Battle of Goose Green
 - 2ndbn5thmar.com/history/2Para1982.pdf
- Kampfgruppen in BARBAROSSA
 - 2ndbn5thmar.com/history/6thPzDiv1941.pdf