How to Study a Battle

Military History and Combat Leader Development

PME for Company Officers
LtCol B.B. McBreen
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

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 Crevald 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