

# About Staff Rides

Staff rides were developed by the Prussian Army in the early nineteenth century and have been used by the militaries in many countries since then. In the 1970's the U.S. Army and the U.S. Marine Corps turned to staff rides with great enthusiasm and now they are considered essential instructional techniques in advanced military schools and in field units.

The intent of a staff ride is to put participants in the shoes of the decision makers on a historical incident in order to learn for the future. A staff ride should not be a tactical-fault finding exercise. Participants should be challenged to push past the basic question of "What happened?" and examine the deeper questions of leadership and decision-making: "What would I have done in this person's place?" "How detailed should the guidance from a superior to a subordinate be?" "Can a senior leader make use of a competent but overzealous subordinate?" "What explains repeated organizational success or failure?" The study of leadership aspects in a staff ride transcend time and place.

## **Staff Ride/Case Study/Site Visit... There is a difference...**

### **Staff Ride:**

A field study that is conducted on the ground where an incident or event happened. A staff ride consists of three distinct phases:

- a systematic Preliminary Study of a selected fire or other emergency operation,
- an extensive Field Study to the actual site(s) associated with the incident,
- and an opportunity for Integration of the lessons derived from the study and visit.

Staff Rides require maximum participant involvement before arrival and at the site to guarantee thoughtful analysis and discussion.

A staff ride should avoid being a recital of a single investigation report. Such reports rarely address the human factors that affect individual decision-making. For this reason, providing participants with a variety of information sources is important.

### **Case Study:**

- An analysis of persons, events, and decisions that are studied holistically.
- Does not need to be conducted at the site of the incident, but could include a visit to the incident location.
- Case Studies are used to demonstrate a thesis or principle.
- Case Studies are led and require facilitation.

### **Site Visit:**

- A visit to the actual location associated with an incident or event to provide opportunity to gain meaningful perspective and insight.

### **Virtual Site Visit:**

- A virtual staff ride (VSR) follows the same methodology as a "live" or "field" staff ride, but because travel restrictions preclude a trip to the incident location, the terrain is replicated in a virtual environment.
- Material from Virtual Site Visits may be used to help conduct Case Studies and Staff Rides.