

War Colleges students experience Gettysburg in an entirely new way

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On Sept. 21, War College students walked the grounds of the Gettysburg National Battlefield, discussing the roles of key leaders, locations, and turning points in the battle with their seminar mates and faculty historians, who use the battlefield as

Each year, Army War College students go to Gettysburg and get an entirely new—strategic—perspective on the three-day battle in an interactive educational experience.

Students walked the grounds of the Gettysburg National Battlefield, discussing the roles of key leaders, locations, and turning points in the battle with their seminar mates and faculty historians, who use the battlefield as a strategic leadership case study.

Of course, students hear the facts and details, like the 9 million shots fired during the battle and over 600 pieces of artillery used.

However, the primary focus of the staff ride is on strategic aspects of the

emphasize the importance of trusting one's leaders and creating a good command climate, geo-political assessments, and aligning operational plans to strategic objectives.

“Gettysburg provides us a leadership laboratory to tap into issues of strategic leadership, from communication to culture to decision making to critical and creative thinking,” said War College Professor Doug Douds, who guided strategic discussion with one small group of students. “It also taps into campaigning, joint functions, command and control, intelligence, fires, maneuvers. Although Gettysburg is locked in time in our American Civil War, the lessons we can glean from it are timeless.”

“Staff rides are a wonderful way to tap into five-senses learning,” Douds added. “We can put people on the ground. Not only can they tap into their cognitive skills but now they can physically experience the field -see the terrain and walk the ground.

“In a sense, we tap into five-senses learning so we can put mental hooks into a location, space and time that helps facilitate the retrieval those concepts and ideas we discussed later. Additionally, we can reach a degree of inspirational learning by putting them in places where great things happened.”

Amy Lt. Col. Jeffrey Noll noted the difference between a Gettysburg tour he took in college and the AWC staff ride to the battlefield. This ride focused on tying facts, details and tactics to the larger-strategic goals said Noll.