

# Staff rides trigger unique learning for business, government leaders

By Thomas Zimmerman

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*Members of RPM International look out over the Gettysburg Battlefield during a recent Strategic Leader Staff Ride. Photo by Charity Murtorff.*

Dec. 28, 2011 -- While the Battle of Gettysburg took place nearly 150 years ago, the leadership lessons from the battle still echo with relevance today, a fact not lost on military, business and academic leaders who have participated in Army War College Strategic Leader Staff Rides.

The staff rides are a whole-of-Army War College effort, conducted by the Center for Strategic Leadership, that brings USAWC experts from all of the centers and institutes together with leaders of business and academia to discuss and learn about the art and practice of strategic leadership and critical thought. Since 2003, the USAWC has hosted 103 staff rides with almost 1,800 participants. More than 56 percent of participants hold positions of vice president or higher in their organizations.

“A lot of organizations grapple with issues of leadership, organizational management and how to lead during a time of transformation,” said **Col. Robert Rice**, Director, DA Support Branch. “These are all issues and challenges that the military has been dealing with and working through for decades. I think we are able to provide some lesson through the staff ride program that these organizations can use.”

The staff rides are designed to show real-world examples of strategic leadership and view lessons that are still applicable today through a historical context. The staff ride takes place over two and one-half days and includes a orientation dinner with U.S.AWC students and faculty, a full day “staff ride” of the Gettysburg battlefield lead by a USAWC historians, followed by a half-day of seminar discussion focused on strategic leadership and related topics facilitated by the USAWC faculty.

“First, unlike a lecture or presentation, the staff ride is interactive, akin to our seminar discussions,” said **Dr. Jim Helis**, chairman of the Department of National Security and Strategy. “Participants are drawn into discussing lessons derived from the battle. Leadership, decision making, the human dimension of war, fog and friction on the battlefield are topics as relevant today as in 1863.”

“Leadership is timeless,” said **Col. Barry Di Ruzza**, the staff rides coordinator. “What we look at, motivating people to do something they wouldn’t normally do, is a challenge that isn’t unique to the military. We use the Battle of Gettysburg as a way to show how it can be done.”

The experience also provides discussion on critical strategic leadership lessons including the importance of self awareness, knowing your subordinates and personalities in leadership, succession planning and the art and practice of strategy development.

“People have told us how they are personally and professional impacted by taking part in this program,” said Di Ruzza. He said that many organizations have made the staff ride program part of the professional development programs, coming back each year with a new generation of developing leaders.

“This is the single best ‘executive development’ experience in my 23 year career,” said one recent participant from Deloitte.

“I have attended many seminars and programs and would rate this program above all, bar none,” said a participant from Copper Development Association. “The knowledge of the staff, insights provided, and discussion that they provoked was immediately applicable and useful.”

The program allows Army leaders to learn what issues and challenges are on the minds of civilian leaders said Rice.

“Through these staff rides we build relationship with leaders of very prominent business and academic leaders,” he said. “We learn from each other during this experience.”

General officers from the Pentagon and Non-commissioned officers at CSL who have recently returned from theater also take part in the staff rides, providing perspective to the issues discussed from a senior leader and tactical perspectives.

“The benefit of having the leaders and Soldiers there is really two-fold,” said Rice. “The civilian leaders can talk to leaders at these two different levels and see how the lesson’s they’ve learned can apply to their business. On the other side, our senior leaders gain some insight into the challenges facing our business and academic leaders. It’s a win-win for everyone.”

For more information on the Strategic Leader Staff Ride visit <http://www.csl.army.mil/SLEP.aspx>

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