

# USAWC experts share leadership lessons

*Thomas Zimmerman, Army War College Public Affairs Office*

## USAWC experts share leadership lessons with business leaders



*Retired Army Col. Jim Helis, director of the National Security and Strategy program, shares a lesson about the 20th Maine Division and the role of leaders during a Gettysburg Staff Ride Aug. 20. Photo by Megan Clugh.*

Aug. 20, 2009 –The lessons of the Gettysburg, Pa., battle of 1863 are valued by military and civilian leaders more than 140 years after the last shot was fired.

Multiple times a year, the Army War College hosts business leaders for a Strategic Leader Staff Ride. During the three-day event, leadership experts from the Army War College engage in professional discussions with government, academic and business leaders using the Gettysburg Campaign as a historical setting that's widely understood to have been a turning point in the war.

"The focus of the Army War College is senior leadership development," said Prof. Doug Campbell, Center for Strategic Leadership director. "These staff rides help us better understand what leadership issues are facing the business sector, and helps them see what issues the Army is facing. We're sharing issues associated with senior leader development."

Campbell recalled a staff ride with a company's senior European manager who questioned the value of a day with the Army. By the end of the staff ride, he'd changed his tone. There are many executive programs like Harvard's, he'd concluded, but only one like the Army War College's.

Army War College faculty link expertise in the leadership domain with lessons of Gettysburg to demonstrate that the strategy, sacrifice and leadership lessons are as applicable in 2009 as they were in 1863.

"Trust, innovations and adaptive thinking are crucial no matter if you're fighting a battle in Iraq or

running a major company," said Maj. Gen. Mark Hertling, special assistant to the TRADOC Commander. "Apply these lessons to your organizations."

Staff rides are a tradition dating to the 1880s. Then and now, officers eyed the terrain as they reviewed the battlefield commanders' tactics, leadership techniques, and command decisions. Then and now, the lessons offer meaning.

The Army War College staff ride includes three elements customized for the staff ride: goal-setting, battlefield visit, and AAR -- the after-action report. The first day, the business leaders provide an overview of their company and lay out the goals for the learning event.

"The chance to learn from the experts at the War College about leadership is a great opportunity," said Frank Sullivan, Chairman and CEO of RPM International, who participated in a recent staff ride. "The experience and knowledge that is gained is great for rising leaders of any organization."

"As leaders we have to analyze what causes a conflict or problem," said Chuck Leichtweis, Testor Corporation president. "One decision can alter everything."



*Staff-ride leader Jim Helis points out an important position before walking the grounds of Picketts Charge, an infantry assault ordered by Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee against Maj. Gen. George G. Meade's Union positions on Cemetery Ridge. Photo by Megan Clugh.*

After the introductions, participants receive an overview of the history leading up to the Gettysburg Battle and the leadership decisions and conditions that led both armies to the battlefield. The main event is a day-long leadership tour of the Gettysburg battlefields with a focus on the decisions made by the leaders at all levels. The guide helps facilitate a discussion between participants investigating the leadership climate, leadership issues, questions of strategy, lessons learned, communications, dealing with change, and other issues that can be applied to any profession.

"The discussion is the most important part of the day," said Dr. Jim Helis, director of National Security and Strategy at the Army War College, who led the RPM staff ride. "The battle was one where decisions that won or lost the battle were made at all levels, which can be directly applied to the business world."

The tour includes stops at the major battle sites and they also walk the infamous "Pickett's Charge," an infantry assault ordered by Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee against Maj. Gen. George G. Meade's Union positions on Cemetery Ridge on July 3, 1863, the last day of the Battle of Gettysburg.

Approximately 12,500 men in nine infantry brigades advanced over open fields for three quarters of a mile under heavy Union artillery and rifle fire. Although some Confederates were able to breach the low stone wall that shielded many of the Union defenders, they could not maintain their hold and were repulsed with more than 50 percent casualties, a decisive defeat that ended the three-day battle and Lee's campaign into Pennsylvania.

Its futility was predicted by the charge's commander, Lt. Gen. James Longstreet, and it was arguably an avoidable mistake from which the Southern war effort never fully recovered psychologically.

"The decision to make this charge has either been characterized as a last-ditch effort by Lee or a brave attempt to win the battle," said Helis. "It truly says something about the reverence and esteem the southern Soldiers had for Lee, marching into almost certain death."

The charge isn't just highlighted for historical purposes; it is selected to illustrate the value and importance of leadership that carries on to this day.

"When you walk this soil there are so many great lessons you can learn. The fate of a nation was decided here in three days," said Hertling.

"This experience truly illustrates how the Army really knows what they're talking about when it comes to developing strong leaders," said Sullivan. "The Army does a great job in identifying potential leaders, developing them and empowering them. This is the fourth group I've brought here just for that reason. We have so much we can learn."

On the last day, corporate participants and USAWC experts host a series of facilitated discussions held on topics of leadership and managing change, the changing environment in both the military and business worlds and leading a global organization.

"The Army today is at the forefront of leader development," said Sullivan. "This opportunity is truly an extraordinary and unique experience to take some of their techniques and apply them to our future leaders in the business world."

