

Staff ride conveys lessons of the past for current application

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MG Randolph P. Strong hosted a staff ride of the Revolutionary War Battle of Monmouth for CECOM leadership on 23 April at Monmouth Battlefield State Park in Manalapan.

Staff rides enable military leaders to retrace the course of a battle on the ground, deepening their understanding of the recurring fundamentals of military operations.

According to *The Staff Ride*, by William Glenn Robertson, U.S. Army Center of Military History, “Staff rides represent a unique and persuasive method of conveying the lessons of the past to the present-day Army leadership for current application. Properly conducted, these exercises bring to life, on the very terrain where historic encounters took place, examples, applicable today as in the past, of leadership, tactics and strategy, communications, use of terrain, and, above all, the psychology of men....”

Staff rides also provide leader professional development and education, and foster cohesion in organizations. MG Strong stressed that in a worldwide organization such as CECOM, where business is often conducted via video teleconference, it is still important to make time for face to face communications. This is especially important as CECOM conducts split-based operations due to the pending closure of Fort Monmouth and movement of the Command to Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland.

The 28 June 1778 Battle of Monmouth, for which Fort Monmouth was later named, was a pivotal engagement of the Revolutionary War because it marked the combat debut of the improved Continental Army tempered by a long winter of training at Valley Forge. The American troops proved they were able to engage the British Army on even terms (see more detailed information on the battle at <http://www.wpi.edu/academics/Depts/MilSci/Resources/monmouth.html>).

The lessons learned from the 1778 Battle of Monmouth still apply to today’s Warfighters and those who support them. The importance of the Commander’s intent and clear, concise communications were the key lessons highlighted for CECOM.

In perhaps the ultimate example of what can happen when the Commander’s intent is unclear, confusion over General George Washington’s intent at the Battle of Monmouth ultimately led to Major General Charles Lee’s confused retreat and subsequent court martial. Commanders at all levels cannot underestimate the importance of adequately relaying their intent to their subordinates.

As one of the Army’s major teaching devices, staff rides are particularly dependent on careful knowledge of military history. COL (Ret.) Jim Johnson, PhD, led CECOM’s staff ride. Johnson is the military historian of the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area, responsible for the

institute's American Revolutionary interpretive theme. Author of *Militia, Rangers, and Redcoats*, Johnson received his PhD from Duke University and teaches courses at Marist College.



Staff ride leader COL (Ret) Jim Johnson invites CECOM Equal Employment Opportunity Office Director Shirley Hill touch his period garb as Chief of Public Affairs Henry Kearney looks on. Photo by Melissa Ziobro.

Johnson served in the U.S. Army for 30 years before retiring in 1999. In his career, he taught history for 15 years at the United States Military Academy at West Point. While he taught during MG Strong's years at the school, Johnson never had Strong in class.

Staff ride activities commenced at 1600 on Thursday 22 April at Gibbs Hall. Johnson gave a two hour seminar about the battle and the relevance of its lessons learned to CECOM's current mission and challenges as provided to him by MG Strong. A dinner following this session allowed CECOM leadership to bond in an informal setting.

The group reconvened at 0745 the next morning to board a charter bus destined for the Monmouth Battlefield State Park visitor's center. There, park historian Dr. Garry (stet) Stone provided a 45 minute overview of the battle. The group exited the building to view the battleground from atop Combs Hill before embarking on an approximately three mile walking tour of the site.



Monmouth Battlefield State Park historian Dr. Garry (stet) Wheeler Stone provides an overview of the battle at the Visitors Center. Photo by Melissa Ziobro.

Lunch and the after action review were held at Old Tennent Presbyterian Church, adjacent to the battlefield. The main church building, which was used temporarily as a field hospital after the Battle of Monmouth, is listed on the National Register of Historical Places. The pews are still scarred "by the surgeon's saw and blood of patriot soldiers," many of whom lie buried in the church yard. An unknown number of these Soldiers rest in a common grave. The somber setting helped to remind the team that its one vision, one mission is the Warfighter.

This staff ride was more than just a history lesson. It was a team-building exercise and learning experience designed to highlight the enduring principles of war that apply to CECOM today. The

importance of the Commander's intent and clear and clear and concise communications is timeless.