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Studying Military History

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As senior Non-Commissioned Officers we are managers of our soldiers time and welfare. Depending on your unit of assignment the management process may require an immense amount of your limited time. With all the necessary requirements that bid for our attention, we have an obligation to our soldiers to take the time out of our busy schedules to study the history of past operations, and the lessons learned to help us affirm or refine the Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTP's) for current and/or future operations that we may be involved in. The Army has many resources for looking at past performances, After Action Reviews (AAR's) and the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) just to name two of them. A review of Operation Just Cause validated many of our TTP's, but it also exposed an area that required a new line of TTP's that needed to be written.

"After Action Reviews in the formal sense were originally developed by the U.S.Army…" (After Action Review, 2009, para. 1). The AAR is designed to analyze what was supposed to happen and what were the standards, what went right to sustain, and what could be done to improve. The facilitator that is guiding the AAR process allows the participants in the training event to bring up all the points for discussion and ensures they stay on track. He should guide the discussions with open-ended sentences, and ensure that know one takes the critique personally. At the end of the review process the facilitator should recap the lessons learned and what the unit could do to avoid the same mistakes in the future. The leadership should take the information gained from the AAR process and ensure that the TTP's that are in place are working or refine them as needed. The facilitator also has the responsibility to ensure that the

data is documented and filed for review at a later date. It is then the leadership's responsibility to retrieve the documented information and implement the lessons learned when similar training events or operations are being planned.

The Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) was officially stood up on August 1, 1985 and is still located at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas (U.S. Army Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2009, para. 2). The CALL mission statement: "The Center for Army Lessons Learned collects and analyzes data from a variety of current and historical sources, including Army operations and training events, and produces lessons for military commanders, staff, and students. CALL disseminates these lessons and other related research materials through a variety of print and electronic media" (U. S. Army Combined Arms Center, 2009, Mission). The Research Division (RD) is responsible for collecting and processing the lessons learned, TTP's, and other operational information into the Archives and the Requests For Information (RFI) system. It is the Integration Division (ID) that analyzes the information, identifies key issues, monitors solution development, and coordinates the integration of the solutions into future training, doctrine, and leader development. The Lessons Learned Division (LLD) drives the CALL train. It sends observers and collection and analysis teams into the theatre of operations to quickly gather, analyze, and archive the information so that the leaders on the ground will have resources available to them sooner.(U. S. Army Combined Arms Center, 2009, About). With the amount of history that our nation has in conflicts all over the world, a resource such as this streamlines the leaders ability to review historical data and implement it into current and future operations. With the LLD sending teams into the theatre of operations, we can now be

assured that we will have access to the most up to date TTP's, and implement them to save lives.

If we analyze the training events and preparations leading up to Operation Just Cause, we can see that the units were well trained and rehearsed for the initial mission. Lanes Training is designed to train Company size elements, and smaller, to standard on one or more collective tasks. The units that were selected for potential operations in Panama were training on the actual ground that they would be fighting on or trained on terrain that was designed to mimic what they would encounter. Examples of these training exercises, included the arrival and departure flights of military organizations coming and going from the United States. These exercises desensitized the Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) to the increasingly frequent troop movements, many of which occurred at night (U.S. Army Center for Military History, 2006, pg. 11). A detachment from 2-62d Air Defense Artillery would go through night drills setting up an M61 20-mm. Vulcan gun on a baseball field near the PDF barracks at Fort Espinar. Sometimes the gun was left in place overnight, and soon the PDF observers became accustomed to these evening exercises (U.S. Army Center for Military History, 2006, pg. 12). This is only two of many training exercises that were conducted by service members in all branches of service leading up to the operation. The successes the soldiers would reap from this training are well documented. On 20 December 1989 Operation Just cause began and twenty-four hours later all twenty-seven objectives related to the PDF were secure (United States Invasion of Panama, 2009, Operations). It is said that the more you sweat in training, the less you bleed in combat. This was the case in Panama as the soldiers fought how they were trained, the lanes' training was so accurate that many of the actual objectives had a training feel to them.

Because the Americans moved to their positions with such speed, and precision, and without firing their weapons, the PDF thought they were training exercises. Another situation had PDF guards being disarmed and detained before they new what was going on (U.S. Army Center for Military History, 2006, pg.47). The many training exercises that took place prior to the invasion allowed the leaders to analyze the TTP's and either affirm them or refine them to ensure their soldiers would have success on the battlefield.

Five days after the initial assault into Panama the forces on the ground went from combatants to peacekeepers. This was uncharted territory for the infantry soldiers that now had to direct traffic, settle domestic disputes, distribute relief supplies, provide public services, and house refugees. At the time we had units that were dedicated to just that type of mission but they were not brought into the planning until after the fact. Panamanians frequently noted the restraint and responsible behavior of the U.S. forces. This is significant because the U.S. forces spent most of their time in Panama performing duties that they received little or no training at all on (U.S. Army Center for Military History, 2006, pg.46). A quick look back at the stability operations in Panama, and we can see that everything the soldiers did then is now commonplace for our soldiers. This operation helped formilate a new set of TTP's that are now in place, and being used currently in the War on Terror.

A weapon that has taken many lives on the battlefield in the War on Terror is the Improvised Explosive Device (IED). One of the first examples of large-scale use of IEDs was the Belarussian Rail War against the Germans from 1943-1944 in World War II. A French study showed that in Iraq, from March 2003 - November 2007 there were 3,070 deaths to coalition

soldiers, and 1,257 were caused by IED (41%). That is more than in normal fighting which had only 1,027 fatalities (34%)(Improvised Explosive Device, 2009, History). Due to the tactics being used by the enemy we have had to continue to update our TTP's. We now have Training IEDs and procedures in place to detect them before we encounter them. Reviewing past and present operations, has enabled us to keep up with enemy tactics to stay one step ahead of them, which in turn saves lives.

Now that the World Wide Web has given anybody with a computer access to historical information it could be argued that the enemy is studying the same tactics we are. Logic would say they are countering the tactics we are employing, and it could be more difficult to defeat the enemy. The United States has done well in winning the information war. This is a critical element in the success of our soldiers on the ground. We have been able to analyze battlefield information and disseminate counter tactics to keep our soldiers up to date in current enemy tactics.

With the advances in technology and weaponry the chances of you encountering an operation or engagement that has the exact same characteristics as one from the past is slim. The details of most operations may differ, but if you look at the basics you can find a lot of similarities. It is these details that get worked out in the training.

We know that history will not repeat itself, but you cannot learn from your mistakes if you do not know what they are. Studying the decisions and the lessons learned in past operations can help give you insight to the challenges you may face in your operation. You can then apply or adapt the TTP's to your current situation.

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