

Leaders learn lessons from unit staff ride

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94th AAMDC Public Affairs

The Dec. 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor caught the nation and the military off guard and thrust the United States into war, much like the events of Sept. 11, 2001.

The officers of the 94th Army Air and Missile Defense Command recently conducted their first staff ride of Pearl Harbor to learn the history of that attack and derive some lessons learned for the leadership.

Staff rides are typically conducted by the unit officers and noncommissioned officers for professional development. They help the leadership see what was done right and wrong in combat situations in an effort to dissect the issues that the leaders faced. This is beneficial in making better decisions in the future.

"This staff ride uses history as our teacher to learn what we did right and wrong in the past in order to make better decisions in the future," said Col. Kelvin Bright, Chief of Staff for the 94th AAMDC. "This is important for our leaders today because those lessons still tie-in to what is currently going on in the world."

"Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it" is the

famous quote by George Santayana.

Military leaders acknowledge this and look to history as a means to correct past mistakes while still continuing to do those things that were done right. Staff rides are powerful tools because the leaders actually get a chance to walk the same ground where the battle occurred which puts them in the same mindset as those who fought there. These staff rides are a way of learning the history of not only what happened but also what didn't happen which provide leaders a unique way to learn lessons that they can apply to the decisions they may make in the future.

"The decisions leaders make are based on experience," said Bright. "Staff rides like this one provide a focused environment to enhance the decision making ability of our leaders."

During the Pearl Harbor staff ride, each of the staff sections took a particular piece of the battle and provided vignettes about what happened at each site. Most of the information came from the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. Each station ended with thought provoking questions designed to generate open responses and feelings from the



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The remains of the *USS Utah*, also known as the *Forgotten Memorial*, where 58 sailors lost their lives Dec. 7, 1941, sits in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

assembled leaders.

While the Pearl Harbor attack occurred over 64 years ago, there are ties to the current global war on terror. One obvious connection is the intelligence failures that occurred prior to the attack. In both cases, there was information available, but it was either not utilized or it was ignored. Our leaders can never completely foresee what is going to happen in the future but studying the past can help them make better educated predictions.

"No one had a complete picture that would have suggested an attack was imminent," said Col. Thomas "Buck" Luther, assistant chief of staff for intelligence. "The take away from this staff ride is that it is important to

pass intelligence both laterally and vertically to get it to the people who need it."

Most of the history of Pearl Harbor has been preserved. Bullet holes on the metal beams inside a hangar on Wheeler Army Airfield are still present. The Pacific Air Forces Headquarters still bears the bullet ridden scars of an aerial attack by Japanese Zeros both inside and outside of the building. And of course, the memorials of the *USS Arizona* and *USS Utah* are still visible in their watery graves.

All of these are a reminder to military leaders everywhere. Learn the lessons from the past so we will not repeat them in the future.

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