



Last month the senior leaders of SMDC/ARSTRAT visited the Stones River National Battlefield monument as part of a Staff Ride. Since about 1906, the Staff Ride has been used by the US Army to visit and study battlefields around the world to “find out what happened, establish why and how events occurred as they did, and decide what these cause and effect relationships mean now.”

The Stones River battle took place December 31, 1862 to January 2, 1863 in an area just north of Nashville. It's an interesting battle to study from the perspective of how an inconclusive tactical victory became a strategic victory claimed by both sides. Unfortunately, it was a victory gained at a very high cost in casualties.

The greater lesson from the staff ride isn't necessarily about the battle itself, but the larger issue about how technology had bypassed the tactics of the day during the Civil War – a similar blind spot that may still exist and the topic for this month's column.

The Civil War tactics used in 1861 and 1862 by both sides were based on the success the U.S. Army had during the Mexican War (1846-1848) and the lessons learned observing the Napoleonic Wars. However, the Civil War saw a new, simple, technology introduced – the rifled musket – that increased the range and accuracy of the infantry. The rifled musket caused the cavalry and artillery units to change their tactics to avoid higher casualties. Cavalryman discovered that saber charges were ineffective against infantry with rifled muskets and artilleryman could no longer use canister rounds because of the increased range of the rifled musket. What did not change were the large offensive formations used to maneuver against the enemy; consequently casualty rates were very high during attacks.

“High casualty rates resulted because tactical developments failed to adapt to new weapons technology,” according to the Combat Studies Institute at Fort Leavenworth .

Fast-forward to World War I, again technology had outpaced tactics as large infantry formations were decimated during the attack by another new technology – the machine gun. For those who have visited the battlefield memorial at Verdun, France, it is a humbling experience to see mounds of bones representing a generation of Soldiers wiped out in a single campaign that stretched from February to December, 1916. There were more than 700,000 casualties at Verdun, of which about 200,000 died.

In his book, “7 Deadly Scenarios,” Andrew Krepinevich notes that in “a military competition the ‘next big thing’ is typically derived from an insight that some new development – or some capability that has been around but was previously overlooked – has the potential to provide a major asymmetric advantage. The military that arrives at this insight first, and exploits it quickly, will realize a great advantage over its rivals.”

It is no surprise that the strategic environment continues to change and become more complex. At the Space and Missile Defense conference last month, senior leaders from across the Department of Defense were relatively unanimous in stating that in this new strategic environment Space is key terrain and it is inextricably linked to Cyber.

Envision for a moment that we are again in 1862 or in 1916. We should look at Cyber as the new “rifled musket” and avoid a repeat of Stones River or Verdun in Cyberspace. The Army needs to examine our tactics and the organizational structure we are using for Cyberspace. Our tactics and organizational structure must be designed to fight in a domain where events occur at light speed. We are already discovering that Rules of Engagement that work in combat don't necessarily work in Cyberspace. We must question everything we do in Cyberspace. We may come to the realization that the Principles of War that have served us so well may no longer serve us well in the Cyber domain.

Staff Rides are excellent tools that help illuminate lessons learned from historical vignettes, but we need to apply those lessons....otherwise it just becomes a ride in the country.

SECURE THE HIGH GROUND!

¹ William Glenn Robertson, “The Staff Ride,” Center for Military History, US Army, 1987, URL=<<http://www-gsc.army.mil/carl/resources/csi/robertson/robertson.asp> >

² Jeffrey J. Gudmens, “Staff Ride Handbook for the Battle of Shiloh, 6-7 April 1862,” Combat Studies Institute Press, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 22