



Chemical School Staff Ride to Shiloh

By Ms. Christy Lindberg

The U.S. Army Chemical School Commandant, Brigadier General Thomas W. Spoehr, hosted a professional development staff ride to Shiloh National Military Park, Tennessee, 10–12 May 2007. In addition to fostering an interest in military history, the staff ride enhanced professional development, team building, and current applications for the Army.

The staff ride group—45 officers and 5 subject matter experts—was divided into two teams. The Blue Group was led by Colonel Robert Walk, Deputy Assistant Commandant, U.S. Army Reserve; Ms. Christy Lindberg, Historian Assistant, U.S. Army Chemical School History Office; and Mr. Kip Lindberg, Curator of Collections, U.S. Army Chemical Corps Museum. The Gold Group was led by Colonel Leslie Smith, Commander, 3d Chemical Brigade, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri; Mr. David Chuber, Historian, U.S. Army Chemical School History Office; and Mr. Michael Thomas Chychota and Mr. David Goebel, instructors at the Center for Army Tactics Department, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

The first phase in the staff ride consisted of preliminary study. Each officer was assigned a commander from the Battle of Shiloh and instructed to prepare a personality

profile and brief on the commander's actions during the battle. The Battle of Shiloh provided excellent examples for study, including—

- Good and bad leadership.
- Terrain importance.
- Combined arms use.

Civil War battles lend themselves well to staff rides because of their location proximity and timeless lessons on the principles of war. The Union objective leading up to Shiloh was the destruction of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad junction at Corinth, Mississippi. After successes at Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, Major General Ulysses S. Grant was given command of Union forces numbering approximately 48,000 men. General Albert Sydney Johnston was given the task of defending the western theater of operations with a combined Army of 46,000 men. The Battle of Shiloh was one of the first battles during the Civil War that showed the true cost of war in human life. The casualties from the two-day battle totaled more than 3,500—a number larger than all of the American wars combined up to that point.

The second phase of the staff ride consisted of field study. Both teams followed the timeline of the battle and discussed critical points in the fighting. The officers

presented counterpart points of view and made analyses of decisions and actions taken during the battle. Walking the actual battle terrain provided a glimpse into the past and the events at Shiloh on 6 and 7 April 1862. The areas known as *Sunken Road*, *Ruggles Battery Line*, and *Dill Branch* were only names in a book until the group experienced them firsthand. Was this a good location for an attack? How would you have defended this terrain? Did this position affect logistics? These were the types of questions addressed in the field phase.

During the Battle of Shiloh, the Union secured key terrain in an area known as *Pittsburg Landing*. The Confederates attempted to use the combat multiplier of surprise to direct the Union Army into a swamp area, trapping them in miserable conditions and cutting off their supply lines. After numerous attempts to turn the Union line, the Confederates lost the initiative, and the Union was able to regroup and drive the Confederates from the field.

The reward for a long day of walking the battlefield was dinner at a local hotel. The group enjoyed local cuisine and a chance to socialize and talk about the day. The next day, the group met for the most important phase—the integration phase. Each officer contributed an analysis of the battle and offered opinions on key points that could be taken away and applied to a current combat situation.

Accommodations were provided by the National Guard Armory in Corinth, Mississippi, which enabled the Chemical School to limit expenses and strengthen camaraderie. The National Park Service was also instrumental to the success of the staff ride, as were their staffs at the Corinth Civil War Interpretive Center and Shiloh National Military Park. 🗣️

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