



Knowledge Management for the Base Camp Community of Practice

By Major Travis (TJ) Lindberg and Mr. Albert M. Vargesco

“A good company idea in tactics is likely to remain confined to one company indefinitely, even though it would be of benefit to the whole military establishment...”¹

—S.L.A. Marshall, 1947

“...whereas the flow of knowledge within a business process is (1) easier to determine and (2) easier to optimize, it is the flow of knowledge between business processes, the interfaces between different organizational units and topics that might provide the highest potential for innovation and competitive advantages.”²

—Ronald Maier, 2004

There are a handful of well-known and widely used standards and references to manage the design, construction, operation, maintenance, and retirement³ of base camps⁴ (such as Red Book, Sandbook, Assistive Technology [AT] Planner, Theater Construction Management System [TCMS], and Geographical Base Engineer Support Tool [GeoBEST]). However, there is no single Department of Defense (DoD) standard or authoritative body that addresses the life cycle tasks or funding issues related to base camps, and if you visit 20 forward operating bases in Iraq, you will find 20 different designs. For efficiency and standardization, it makes sense to share knowledge of construction, operations, and maintenance of base camps. This article describes the initiative started at the United States Military Academy (USMA), West Point, New York, and how it progressed to the creation of a knowledge management (KM) collaboration website that is now maintained by the United States Army Engineer School.

Building Knowledge

The Department of Systems Engineering at USMA became interested in studying military base camps as a real-world example of a system students would

be immersed in early in their military careers. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. military increased the pace and reach of its operations. Military units now routinely deploy worldwide to fight wars, participate in peace enforcement and peacekeeping missions, train foreign armies, and respond to humanitarian crises. To support these operations, the military develops temporary base camps, which are complex systems with many integrated components that follow a life cycle pattern and thus provide an excellent educational opportunity for students of systems engineering.

Base Camp Workshops

Between 2001 and 2005, the USMA Department of Systems Engineering and the Department of Civil and Mechanical Engineering—in conjunction with the United States Army Corps of Engineers® (USACE) Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC)—conducted a series of annual workshops to bring together practitioners from the Base Camp Community of Practice (CoP). The 2001 workshop identified that the CoP was indeed wide and varied and that the issues facing it were extensive.

The next workshop was held in March 2004, and the theme was “Base Camps of Today and Tomorrow.” The workshop forum solicited input from the diverse Base Camp CoP regarding these fundamental domains of base camp study: initial planning, site selection, environmental issues, structures, power supply, and force protection. The forum was useful for information sharing; however, the lessons were short-lived because there was no continuous means to keep the Base Camp CoP together.

At the third workshop, held at West Point in May 2005, researchers and practitioners with recent field experience in developing and running base camps focused on sharing best practices among the Base Camp CoP. Three key issues were identified:

- DoD needs to simplify the funding processes for base camp development.
- DoD and the Services need to establish organizations as proponents for the Base Camp CoP.
- A system is needed that allows Base Camp CoP members to share knowledge related to the life cycle management of base camps and Joint forward operating bases (JFOBs).

To address the third issue, USMA initiated a study to determine the requirements for a KM system that could be used by the larger Base Camp CoP to help military units better understand base camp life cycle management-related tasks. The intent was to complete the study before the fourth workshop in May 2006 in order to present the findings and begin the implementation of the KM system at that time.

At about the same time, the Engineer School volunteered to host the 2006 workshop in St. Louis, Missouri, as part of the 2006 ENFORCE Conference. And the School offered to serve as the Army's proponent for base camp-related issues, thereby effectively addressing the second (and probably most significant) issue affecting the Base Camp CoP. Three important results came from the 2006 workshop:

- The Battle Command Knowledge System (BCKS), an existing Army system, was chosen to host a Base Camp CoP or "forum."
- The name of the collaboration site, "ArmyBaseCamp/JFOB.net," was chosen.
- The Engineer School was identified to provide the leaders and administrators to populate the database and maintain the website.

Collaboration Site

Be-coming a member of the ArmyBaseCamp/JFOB.net professional forum is simple, although it requires an Army Knowledge Online (AKO) account. Logon to the BCKS website at <<https://bcks.army.mil>> and use your AKO account to enter. Click on the Professional Forums tab on the bar across the screen, and select Participate on the left to create a BCKS account. Select the ProtectionNet forum at the left of the screen, and there you will find a forum for ArmyBaseCamp/JFOB.net.

The site currently has 13 topics that contain a lot of information on base camps. Briefings, interviews, documents, books, best practices, or policies can be placed under any one of the 13 topics. What makes this more than just a database is that real collaboration is possible. Collaboration can begin by any member starting a discussion or making a comment. Contributions can be made at any time, and uploading documents is easy. Basic administration of the website is performed by BCKS contractors, and site maintenance is performed by the Engineer School Directorate of Environmental Integration.

Promoting and advertising the system is necessary to make it well known throughout the Army, and conducting assessments is necessary to ensure that it's worthwhile and provides value. So logon to BCKS, become a member of the ArmyBaseCamp/JFOB.net professional forum, and start contributing.



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Endnotes

¹S. L. A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War*, Washington: Infantry Journal; New York: William Morrow, 1947.

²Ronald Maier, PhD, *Knowledge Management Systems: Information and Communication Technologies for Knowledge Management*, 2d Edition, Springer-Verlag, 2004.

³The tasks of design, construction, operation, maintenance, and retirement are referred to collectively in this article as the base camp life cycle.

⁴The term "base camp," although widely used, is not a doctrinal term. Some of the corresponding (and also frequently used) doctrinal terms for a base camp are forward operating base, forward operating site, intermediate staging base, and contingency operating base.

