

The Army AAR

A KM / Learning Tool

Center for Army Lessons Learned

Research Division

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US ARMY COMBINED ARMS CENTER

Agenda

- Army KM/Learning
- AAR – what is it?
- AAR in Operations
- CALL and AARs
- AAR Problems

“The most important part of every training exercise is the After-Action Review (AAR).”
2008 Army Posture Statement



Army Knowledge Management

Not unlike a big business

- **Army Environment**
 - High OPTEMPO
 - Complex relationships
 - Joint
 - Multinational
 - interagency
 - Constant change, adaption
 - **Constant training**
 - Individual
 - Collective
 - Unit
 - Emphasis on assessment & measures of effectiveness
 - Standards (doctrine, regulations)
 - Bloated bureaucracy

Based on Experience

- **Assessment Products**
 - **After-Action Reviews**
 - Battle Drills
 - Checklists
 - Collaboration websites
 - Doctrine (field manuals)
 - Histories
 - Interviews
 - Observations, Insights, & Lessons (OIL)
 - Standing Operating Procedures (SOP)
 - Training Circulars
 - Trip Reports
 - Tactics, Techniques & Procedures (TTP)



After Action Review: Definition

- A structured review process ...to discover:
 - What happened
 - Why it happened
 - How it can be done better
- A professional discussion that requires the participation of those being trained
 - Soldiers
 - Leaders
 - Units

Source: FM 7-0, *Training the Force* (2002)



AAR is not ...

- “Not a critique or lecture”
- “Does not grade success or failure”
- “Does not gloss over mistakes or unit weaknesses”

Source: TC 25-20, *A Leader's Guide to After-Action Reviews* (1993)



AAR is ...

discovery learning

“Making mistakes is integral to the theory of **discovery learning**, the basic methodology of the AAR process. Underwriting subordinates’ honest mistakes is one key to **building trust and mutual understanding.**”

Source: *FM 6-0, Mission Command* (2003)

information sharing

“Create an **information sharing culture** within the Army in which every Soldier sees himself or herself as a **collector of positive** (sustain) **and negative** (improve or change) **information** with a **responsibility to submit** this information through his or her chain of command.”

Source: *AR 11-33, Army Lessons Learned Program* (2006)



AAR Structure and Methods

- Discussion Approaches
 - Chronological order of events
 - Army Warfighting Functions (WFF)
 - Movement & Maneuver
 - Intelligence
 - Fires
 - Sustainment
 - Command & Control
 - Protection
- Leader Techniques
 - Guide the discussion
 - Ask open-ended and leading questions



AAR Structure – Micro Level

Issue/Observation – Discussion – Recommendation

- Issue: The media-on-the-battlefield training was poorly conceived and planned.
- Discussion: The role-player journalists were not sufficiently trained for the task they were to perform, and they were not resourced properly. They did not know the scenario and asked unrealistic questions.
- Recommendation: You must train role players for media-on-the-battlefield scenarios. Role players should be given a character description so they can act the part. They should understand the media credential system, ground rules, and the scenario in general. They should be capable of engaging in dialogue to determine the essential elements of a news story.

Source: CALL Publication 07-04, *The Media is the Battlefield* (2006)



AAR: Successes and Failures

- Sustain
 - Strengths
 - What worked and went well
- Improve
 - Weaknesses
 - What didn't work or go well
 - Solutions/courses of action to solve the problem
 - More or better training
 - Better procedures
 - Better understanding of Army standards (doctrine, etc.)
 - Learn from the experience of other units



AAR in Actual Operations

From training to full-spectrum operations.
From a review-discussion to a written report

- AARs: clearly an integral part of training, but not in actual operations ... but
 - A habit from training
 - Implied in commander's responsibility to assess performance
- AAR after an operation is a “report”
 - PowerPoint or Word
- AAR (report) after an operation may also be the unit operational “command history”



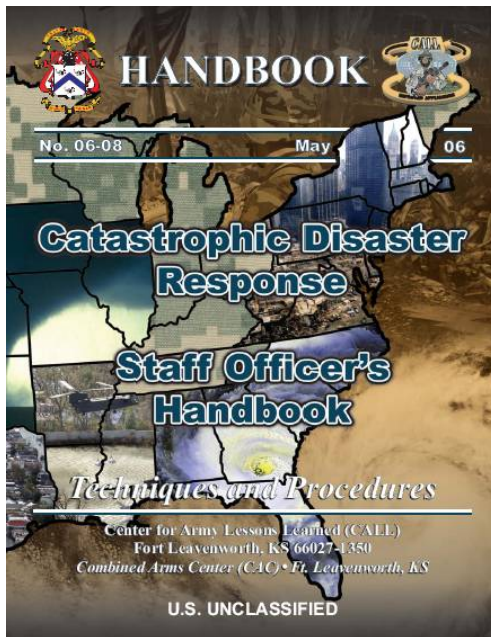
Who uses AARs?

HISTORIANS (HST)

DOCTRINE WRITERS (DOC)



LESSONS LEARNERS (LL)



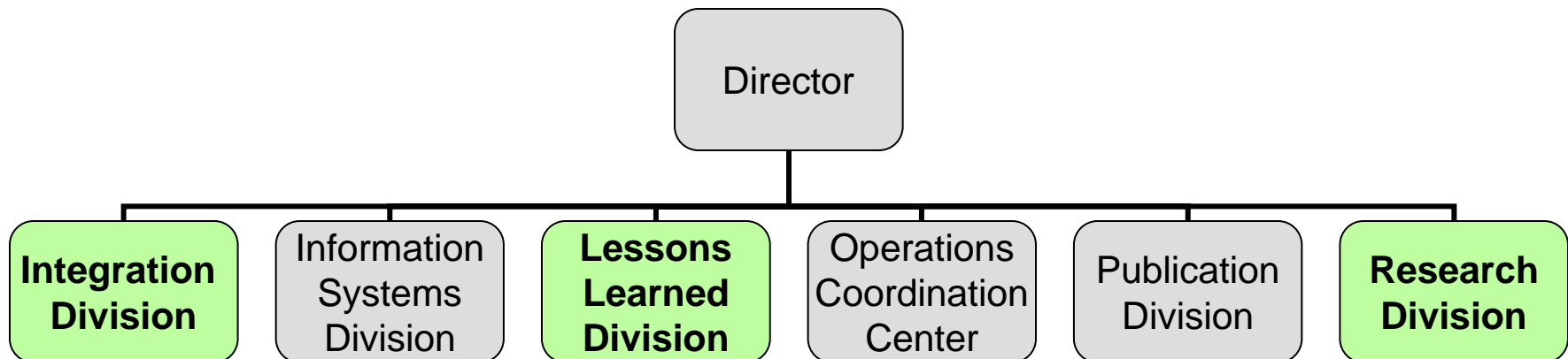
AUG-SEP 2005: Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma
 2005-2008: Lessons Learned, Doctrine, History publications

	2005	2006	2007	2008
LL		*		
DOC				*
HST				?



Center for Army Lessons Learned Mission

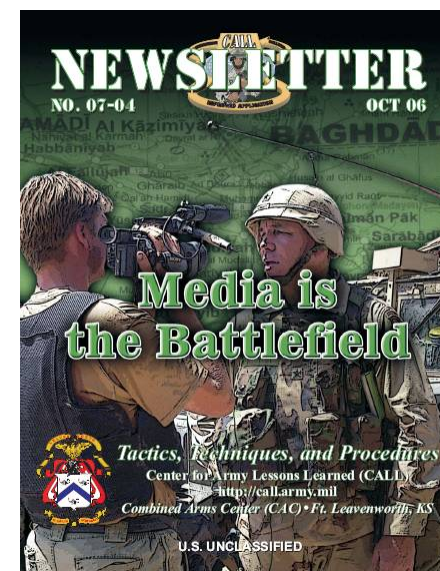
Center for Army Lessons Learned **collects, analyzes, disseminates, integrates,** and **archives** Army and other agencies to support full-spectrum military operations.



CALL and AARs: Lesson Learned

Lessons Learned Division

- Harvest lessons from AARs and look for trends
- Integrate lessons into CALL handbooks, newsletters, etc.
- Issue exemplary AARs as CALL products
- Assist units in preparing AARs
 - OIF 2003: 3rd Infantry, 101st Airborne, 4th Infantry
 - OIF 2005-2006: 3d ACR



CALL and Lessons Learned

Research Division

- Solicit and collect AARs from returning units from OIF and OEF
- Upload all received AARs in the web-accessible CALL Archives
- Advise units on how to prepare written AARs
- Use AARs in responding to requests for info

“Direct assigned units, brigade-sized or larger ... to submit unit level AARs and other lesson learned material to CALL for review, analysis, dissemination, and archiving.”

Source: AR 11-33, *The Army Lessons Learned Program* (2006)



CALL and Lessons Learned

Integration Division

- Identify widespread problems that require special remediation
- Systematically work towards integrating solutions to problems into Army school curricula and unit training



AAR Problems

- Units do not always prepare a **report**
 - No time or no command emphasis
 - Want of writing/analytical skills
 - Some resistance to sharing experience
- Unclear distinction between AAR and the Command History
- Inconsistent format
- Inconsistent effort
- Classification and Handling Restriction
 - Unclassified or Classified?



Bottom Line

- Importance of an information sharing culture
- Focus on solutions to identified problems
- AAR is only of value outside the unit if it is a **report** – a document
- Need for KM organizations (e.g. CALL)
 - to sift through AARs and validate lessons
 - to broadcast critical lessons
 - to insure their integration

