

# Marine Corps University – Wildland Fire Leadership Workshop #3 Trip Report

## Introduction

During the week of October 28 to November 1, 2002 the Marine Corps University (MCU) in Quantico, Virginia hosted 16 wildland firefighters for the third MCU - Wildland Fire Leadership Workshop. The intent of the workshop is to expose wildland fire trainers to proven leadership development techniques so that they can assess the potential to transfer and use these techniques in wildland fire training efforts.

The workshop focused on leadership development techniques from three different schools within the Marine Corps University curriculum. The specific workshop objectives are:

1. Observe the techniques used to facilitate a Staff Ride.
2. Learn basic design and delivery requirements for Tactical Decision Games (TDGS) and Sand Table Exercises (STEX).
3. Participate in the Leadership Reaction Course in order to observe the design and administration requirements of the technique.

## Summary of Events

### **Staff Ride of Gettysburg National Battlefield**

**(October 28-30):** The 16 wildland fire participants were dispersed among 12 conference groups from the USMC Command and Staff School. This is a nine-month academic school for Majors. The Gettysburg Staff Ride occurs during the first half of this academic year and is a seminar type event. Through pre-work preparation, each Major is required to develop and lead discussion for their seminar group regarding assigned events from the battle and the associated key learning points. Thus during the course of the two-day Staff Ride, each Major will have facilitated their seminar group two to three times under the guidance of an MCU instructor who is usually a Colonel. The primary intent of this event is to begin raising the students' awareness level from company level actions to operational and strategic leadership factors that affect decision-making.



**TDGS / STEX Practical Application (October 29 & 31):** Two lead instructors from The Basic School led the wildland fire participants through the design and facilitation requirements for these two techniques. This part of the workshop culminated with the wildland fire participants working in teams of four to design a STEX and then facilitate the exercise in small group exercise format. The Basic School is a six-month academic school for new Lieutenants. All USMC officers go through this school at this location before their first operational assignment. Sand Table Exercises and Tactical Decision Games are used on a daily basis in The Basic School and are facilitated by an MCU instructor who is usually a Captain. The extensive use of Sand Table Exercises and Tactical Decision Games repeatedly puts these future leaders in the hot seat, requiring them to make tactical decisions and issue verbal instructions in front of a group of their peers in stressful, time compressed situations. The following is a quote from the USMC workbook regarding these techniques “From a decision making perspective, 10 different TDGS/STEX are more valuable than a single full-scale, computerized war game in the same period of time.” The primary intent of this technique is to develop a bias for action in new Lieutenants and to instill in them the confidence to communicate their decisions to their subordinates.



**Leadership Reaction Course Practical Application (October 31):** A group of evaluators from the Officers Candidate School put the wildland fire participants through the Leadership Reaction Course. In teams of four, the wildland fire participants attempted 5 of the 20 problem-solving exercises that makeup the Leadership Reaction Course. Officer Candidate School is a ten-week evaluation and screening process conducted by senior Non-commissioned Officers that determines if an individual will become a commissioned officer. The Leadership Reaction Course is a key component of that evaluation and screening process. The primary intent of this technique is to assess individual leadership potential by testing their competence in handling a small team that has been charged with accomplishing a mission under conditions of stress.



## Identified Action Items

During the afternoon of the final day of the workshop, an After Action Review was conducted with all participants. Lieutenant Colonel Eric Carlson, Major Robert Baird, and Staff Sergeant Mark Slatton of the MCU staff were also in attendance. Several action items were identified that various participants would work on as follow-up to ongoing efforts from the two previous workshops (see Appendix B):

- Participants will write up a brief (less than a page) to describe the benefits they see in the techniques and how they intend to integrate the knowledge in their various roles within the wildland fire service.  
(All participants to Anthony Escobar by 11/27/2002)
- Provide the various MCU host staff with a one page written overview paper describing what wildland firefighters are doing at MCU, the intent of our involvement, and some general commonalities between Marines and firefighters.  
(Greg Power)
- Assist with USFS Region 4 STEX initiative.  
(Scott Anderson)
- Assist with Northern Rockies Training Center STEX train-the-trainer session.  
(Godot Apuzzo, Steve Karkanen, Sarah Doehring, Bill Miller)
- Assist with the NWCG evaluation test course for L-280 Followership to Leadership.  
(Tom Bates, Bob Bente, Josh Mathiesen, Bill Miller)
- Explore the possibility of organizing a Staff Ride for the Great Basin IHC Workshop.  
(Tom Bates)
- Introduce the use of STEX at the National Interagency Joint Apprentices Academy.  
(Scott Whitmire)

## Future Workshop Suggestions

During the same After Action Review suggestions for improving future workshops were also identified:

### Orientation of the Participants

- ✓ Provide name tags for each participant.
- ✓ Provide a list of previous participants and agreement that they could serve as mentors for future participants (all members of the group agreed to do this for future groups).

### Staff Ride

- ✓ Provide an aerial photo of the Staff Ride site.
- ✓ Include NPS Gettysburg book with other pre-work reading.
- ✓ Suggest the participants bring a compass for use at the Staff Ride site.
- ✓ Have two firefighters in each conference group.
- ✓ Have participants research a Staff Ride topic like the Marines do.

### TDGS/STEX

- ✓ Overview (one pager) of STEX, including key concepts of facilitator role, objectives, and decision points.
- ✓ More time spent on STEX...especially facilitator skills.

### Integration of Techniques

- ✓ Continue with the informal discussion group opportunities between firefighters and MCU staff (Gunslinger session).
- ✓ Provide more suggestions for the participants regarding how to take the information learned back to the wildland fire service and pass it along.
- ✓ Articulate the value of participating to back to the wildland fire service.

## APPENDIX A

### Workshop #3 Participant Roster

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## APPENDIX B

### Initiatives and Actions from Workshop #1 and Workshop #2

The following are initiatives that were accomplished or are currently in progress as a result of efforts from the groups that have attended the first two MCU – Wildland Fire Leadership Workshops:

- The Commandant of the USMC Training and Education Command, Major General Thomas Jones, provided a keynote address to the annual Incident Commander / Area Commander preseason meeting in March of 2002. He has also been requested to provide a keynote address to the U.S. Forest Service National FMO Workshop in February 2003.
- A wildland fire version of the USMC TDGS/STEX Workbook was developed. The Leadership Committee of the NWCG Training Working Team has made this workbook available at the Leadership Toolbox feature of their website:  
[http://www.fireleadership.gov/toolbox/documents/TDGS\\_STEX\\_Workbook.pdf](http://www.fireleadership.gov/toolbox/documents/TDGS_STEX_Workbook.pdf)
- A train-the-trainer session on TDGS/STEX techniques for the NWCG S-336 course development workgroup was presented. This was a two-day session held at NIFC in March of 2002. The session was led by MCU officers Major Robert Baird and Captain John Douglas, with logistical assistance provided by the Boise BLM Smokejumper Unit.
- A train-the-trainer session on TDGS/STEX techniques for the Great Basin Training Center was presented. This effort involved two back-to-back sessions held in October 2002. Forty participants from the Great Basin, California, Southwest, Pacific Northwest, and Northern Rockies geographic areas attended. The sessions were led by MCU staff members Major Robert Baird and Staff Sergeant Mark Slatton. They were assisted by 6 group “coaches” who were wildland firefighters that had previously participated in Workshops #1 and #2.
- A train-the-trainer session on TDGS/STEX techniques is currently planned for the Northern Rockies Training Center in February of 2003. Once again, lead instructor support will be provided by the MCU staff members and group coaches will be drawn from wildland firefighters that participated in Workshop #3 and the Great Basin Training Center session described above.
- The U.S. Forest Service in Region 4 is embarking on an initiative to enable each district fire organization within the region to utilize STEX techniques for training and after action review purposes.

- The National Interagency Joint Apprentice Academy is planning to build a Sand Table training room at their new facility in 2003.
- A Field Leadership Assessment Course has been included in the design of the L-280 Followership to Leadership course package that will be part of the new Wildland Fire Leadership Curriculum. This was modeled from the Leadership Reaction Course at MCU. The problem-solving exercises have been modified into fire related tasks and to be field portable. The course is scheduled to be available by June 2003 in the NWCG Publication Management System.
- A Professional Reading Program modeled on the USMC A Book on Books was developed. The Leadership Committee of the NWCG Training Working Team has made this reference available at the Leadership Toolbox feature of their website: [http://www.fireleadership.gov/toolbox/documents/pro\\_reading\\_list.pdf](http://www.fireleadership.gov/toolbox/documents/pro_reading_list.pdf)
- The military Staff Ride technique was originally brought to the wildland fire service by Dave Thomas in the early 1990s. This concept has received a new level of interest due to efforts of Leadership Workshop participants. The Leadership Committee of the Training Working Team has worked in conjunction with the Wharton Center for Leadership and Marine Corps University to sponsor three Staff Rides (Mann Gulch, South Canyon, and Little Big Horn/Mann Gulch). Other initiatives using the technique are beginning to happen including the National ICs going to the World Trade Center, The USFS Region 4 Forest FMOs going to a recent entrapment incident, and the Prescott Fire Department going through a recent interface fire.
- A Memorandum of Understanding for training exchange purposes has been established between the MCU, the BLM, and the USFS. The document has signatures from the President of the Marine Corps University, the Director of the Bureau of Land Management, and the Chief of the Forest Service.