

Appendix G

After Action Reviews and Reports

After Action Reviews

All training exercises have an AAR. It can be conducted from within the unit or by a third party that was involved with the training or the evaluation of the training. The AAR's formality and scope increase with the command level and the size of the training evolution. An AAR identifies both the strengths and weaknesses of an exercise's planning, tactics, combined-arms employment, command and control, communications, survivability, and personnel and logistics support. It highlights lessons learned and identifies alternative solutions. To be more timely and effective, an AAR is conducted several times (at logical breakpoints) during the exercise and at the conclusion of the exercise. This allows units to clearly identify and correct deficiencies as they occur, vice at the end of the training evolution.

Since exercise events often occur simultaneously over great distances, no single person can observe all the events as they occur. An AAR integrates the experiences and observations of everyone involved in the exercise into a cohesive discussion. An AAR's intent is not to critique the exercise itself. It does not judge success or failure of an exercise. It is a professional discussion of training events in order to promote learning among exercise participants. For effective AARs—

- Controllers, umpires, and evaluators must be trained in AAR techniques and prepared to conduct AARs with subgroups. The chief controller debriefs all controllers and assistants prior to the AARs. The chief controller records and collects information on key issues as they surface.

- Commanders and controllers do not critique or lecture. They guide discussions by asking leading questions. They enter the discussion only to sustain the momentum of the AAR, to get the discussion back on the right track, or to bring out new points.

- Discussions emphasize the positive, they are not intended to embarrass exercise participants.

- Participants describe what happened in their own terms.

- Discussions are outlined, prepared, and rehearsed.

- Thought-provoking questions are prepared to stimulate discussion.

Analyses relate tactical events to subsequent results and training standards.

Alternate courses of action are discussed.

Discussions avoid minor events that do not directly relate to the major training standards.

Participants do not excuse inappropriate actions. They examine why actions were taken and what alternatives were available.

Terrain models and training aids are used to illustrate events. Participants relate their comments to the model and move unit, vehicle, and personnel markers to show events.

Video tape playbacks of key events generate interest and discussions.

Every element that participated in the exercise is present at the AAR.

Training deficiencies that surfaced during the AAR are incorporated into the unit training schedule within 2 to 6 weeks of the exercise.

Marines learn best when they learn from each other and from their leaders. An AAR helps Marines determine what went right and what went wrong. Controllers, umpires, and evaluators guide the AAR evaluation, discussion, and learning process. They provide unbiased comments to the units involved in the exercise. The chief controller schedules an AAR in a convenient location, preferably some place quiet and protected from adverse weather. It should occur as soon after the conclusion of the exercise as possible. If the exercise is lengthy, the chief controller schedules interim AARs for predetermined times during the exercise, typically these times follow significant events. Controllers, umpires, and evaluators coordinate with the respective OPFOR and player commanders to determine who attends the AAR. The chief controller provides the agenda for the review. The agenda becomes the outline for the formal, after-action report (which is written concurrently with or immediately after the exercise).

DETAILED OBSERVATIONS

Event Number (from schedule of events)/OPFOR Action:

Description:

Observation (player action):

Comments/Conclusions:

Recommendations:

Figure G-1. Sample Format for Observations.

Preparation

To conduct an AAR, the chief controller must have a complete picture of what happened in the exercise. The chief controller debriefs the

controllers immediately after the end of the exercise to determine what happened. The chief controller also must debrief the OPFORs that, as control elements, are in advantageous positions to observe player units. If controllers know that something occurred that they could not observe,

they should ask a player unit member, who was involved, exactly what happened. The controller does not ask the player why or how it happened, but guides the player through the event. The why and how are presented by the player during the AAR.

During the course of the exercise, players record detailed observations of exercise events (see fig. G-1). These recorded observations are referred to as working papers. By collecting and recording data from the working papers and reviewing the comments provided by controllers, umpires, evaluators, and OPFORs, a chief controller can extract the information needed to conduct an AAR.

After gathering all available information, the chief controller reviews the exercise to determine the sequence of events and the cause and effect relationship of significant activities. The chief controller then coordinates the AAR and outlines an agenda. Figure G-2 shows a sample AAR agenda for a platoon- or company-size maneuver unit operating in an offensive role.

Conduct

Each AAR contains three major steps:

- A restatement of training standards.

- A discussion of all events and how they relate in order to bring out teaching points.

- A summary of the AAR and a recommendation for subsequent training to correct weaknesses and sustain strengths.

Note

Normally, the AAR covers only the training standards identified by the commander prior to the exercise.

The chief controller briefly restates specific training standards. The chief controller then guides a discussion of events and their relationships by—

- Asking leading questions that emphasize the training standards.

- Asking players to describe, in their own words and from their own points of view, what happened.

- Bringing out important lessons learned.

- Relating tactical events to subsequent results.

Exploring alternative courses to specific actions that might have been more effective.
Avoiding detailed examination of events not directly related to major training standards.

Note

EVENT	RESPONSIBLE PERSON
State training standard	Chief controller
State defensive plan	OPFOR leader
Offensive plan	Unit leader
Events before detection/contact	Unit leader
First detection/contact	Unit umpire
Report of detection/contact	Unit umpire
Reactions to detection/contact	Unit leader/OPFOR leader
Fragmentary order	Unit leader/OPFOR leader
Events during employment	All
Results	All
Summary	Chief controller

Figure G-2. Sample AAR Agenda.

Key elements of the AAR are the unit commander’s visualization of the battle, the commander’s concept, the actual events, and the reasons why they happened.

Diagrams or overlays help players visualize what happened during the exercise. The assembly area and the objective are shown first. As the AAR proceeds, routes of advancement and engagement locations are shown in the same sequence that they occurred in the exercise.

The chief controller concludes the AAR with a quick summary. After the summary, the chief controller privately discusses individual and unit performance with unit leaders. Both strengths and weaknesses are discussed honestly and positively in order to improve unit performance. Commanders use these summaries to develop unit training standards for subsequent exercises.

Echelons

Regardless of the echelon or level of command conducting the exercise, the maximum number of player personnel possible should attend the AAR. This includes personnel down to and including first-line NCO leaders and Marines that participated in exercises at battalion and above. Separate AARs are conducted at each echelon of command. For example, in a division-size exercise there would be a separate AAR conducted at each command level; that is, one at division, one at each

regiment, one at each battalion, etc. This approach allows the participants to focus on their unit's actions, contributions, and performances.

The higher the echelon of command, the more complex the systems within that organization. In addition to conducting separate AARs at every echelon within the command, it may be necessary to conduct them within functional areas as well. Basically, intersystem training exercises seek to integrate the concurrent training of several battlefield functional systems (i.e., maneuver, fire support, intelligence, engineer, maintenance support) during one overall training evolution. By contrast, an intrasystem (i.e., single function) training exercise seeks to focus on training in only one system at a time, for instance, exercising the battalion's ability to conduct fire support planning and coordination during a fire support coordination exercise. The intrasystem exercise, since it involves only one battlefield function, wouldn't require as many AARs as an intersystem training exercise. Regardless of the complexity of the battlefield functional systems, the appropriate number of AARs are conducted to maximize on the lessons learned during the entire exercise. For a division-size evolution, each echelon's AAR discusses items and events relating to a unit's exercise objectives and how they affected the assigned mission.

Combat support units also conduct multi-echelon AARs. Combat support units normally provide elements, such as fire support sections, that associate and collocate with maneuver units during the exercise. These supporting personnel should attend both the maneuver unit AAR and the parent unit AAR, if possible. If these personnel cannot attend both AARs due to scheduling conflicts, they should arrange for a knowledgeable representative to attend in their place. Commanders of direct support units (artillery, engineer) should attend the supported maneuver element's AAR and schedule the direct support unit AAR at a later time. This allows the commander to interject key observations brought out in the higher echelon of command's AAR into his own unit.

First Echelon AAR. A first echelon AAR occurs in each company-size element that participated in or supported the training evolution. These are the first AARs to be held after the exercise. Observations brought out during these AARs are incorporated into higher echelon AARs as required. As soon after completion of the exercise as possible, the company umpire holds an AAR for the company commander, subordinate leaders, and participants.

Second Echelon AAR. Second-echelon AARs are conducted only after the first echelon AARs are held and the necessary observations are recorded. Second echelon AARs are held at battalion-/squadron-level organizations. Battalion umpires conduct and guide the AARs. Battalion commanders, staffs, company commanders, officers, and NCOs down to platoon sergeants, or the equivalent, should attend. At this echelon, AARs are professional discussions led by commanders and battalion umpires to examine what

events happened, why they happened, and what alternatives might have been used in different tactical situations.

Third Echelon AARs. Third echelon AARs are held at the regimental/group organizational level, and they are conducted after the second echelon AARs are completed. This allows enough time to compile necessary observations and examine lessons learned at the battalion level for incorporation into the higher echelon's AAR. Regimental umpires conduct and guide the third echelon AARs for commanders, staffs, and appropriate NCOs. Battalion commanders, their staffs, and company commanders attend. AARs at this echelon are also professional discussions of what happened and why. Third echelon AARs can include—

- Operations under limited visibility.
- Tactical operations in an NBC environment.
- Impact of new systems and doctrine on operations.
- Intelligence preparation of the battlefield.
- Tactical operations against different enemy actions.
- Effects of enemy electronic warfare activity on friendly operations.
- Integration and use of all support assets.

Fourth Echelon AARs. The fourth level AAR is the highest level AAR held, and it ties the whole evolution together. Fourth-echelon AARs bring together comments from all previous AARs and the exercise in general. The exercise director and control staff conduct these AARs. Attendees include division commanders and their staffs and commanders and staffs of the force service support group, maneuver regiments, battalions, and aviation units. Fourth-echelon AARs focus on the previously identified exercise's objectives and the degree to which they were accomplished.

They consist of frank and professional discussions of the effects of decisions made in response to changes in the battlefield environment. They discuss battle staff training, survivability operations, and the support integration necessary to fight and win with a MAGTF. They also discuss how new systems impact on operations.

After Action Reports

Formal, after action reports should be submitted as soon after completion of the training exercise as practical. Normally, this is no longer than 1 to 2 weeks. Exercise directors are responsible for producing this report.

Formal after action reports identify combat, combat support, and combat service support problems encountered during the exercise. They document an operation's identified strengths and weaknesses. They also include test results on new tactics, techniques, and equipment. Commanders and their staffs should use them as input for long- and

short-range planning for training. The format and content of an after action report can vary from one command to another. Exercise LOIs issued prior to the evolution's start should provide format guidance and due dates. Figure G-3 is a sample after action report.

A typical maneuver company's AAR discussion might address—

- Engagements.
- Use of terrain.
- Suppression of enemy weapons.
- Coordination of fire and maneuver.
- Employment of antitank weapons.
- Employment of other organic and supporting weapon systems.

A first echelon AAR should be held at company level for combat service support units as well. For example, the maintenance company umpire conducts an AAR for the commander, leaders, and participants. The AAR is scheduled so that all members of the maneuver unit or other AARs can participate. It is not scheduled until evaluator observations are compiled. In a typical combat service support company, in this case a maintenance company, the AAR discussion might include—

- The capability to repair equipment as far forward as possible.
- Provision of spare parts.
- Optimum use of available spare parts.
- Communications.
- Availability of proper tools.
- Response time to requests for repair.
- Coordination procedures with supported units.
- Tactical operations (rear area security) and survival operations.

For example:

During the training evolution, antitank weapons engaged OPFOR units from defensive positions at the maximum range of 3,000 meters. The OPFOR dispersed instead of entering a kill zone where Dragons could have been employed. The AAR discusses the pros and cons of this event and the tactical procedures. It explores what should have happened and what the results might have been.

It also will discuss how the contact team can get enough information from the unit requesting support so that supervisors send the right personnel equipped with the right tools forward to make repairs.

A maneuver battalion AAR discussion can include—

- Organization for combat.
- Concept of operation and scheme of maneuver.
- Fire support coordination.
- Combat engineer support.
- Employment of antitank weapons systems.
- Communication support.
- Target acquisition systems.
- Staff coordination.
- Intelligence planning and support.
- Administrative and logistical support.
- Integration/orchestration of all support elements.
- Probable results for alternate courses of action.

The AAR might discuss why the battalion did not use combat engineer support properly as a combat multiplier and how ineffective planning resulted in inadequate preparation of the battlefield. The engineer officer who supported the battalion should be present to discuss the proper use of combat engineers.

A maintenance battalion AAR can cover—

- Systematic procedures for requesting spare parts.
- Procedures for dispatching contact teams to support maneuver units.
- Training shortcomings in specific maintenance areas.
- Communication procedures.
- Maintenance system operations with units above and below battalion level.
- Effect of terrain, weather, and intensity of combat on the demand for various types of spare parts.
- Recovery and evacuation.
- Controlled substitution.
- Maintenance collection points.
- Operational safety.
- Operational readiness plan.
- Mission-oriented maintenance only.
- Calibration.
- Repair facility site.

For example:

The AAR might discuss the procedures for dispatching contact teams to perform forward area maintenance and how a lack of organic transportation degraded responsiveness. The AAR might address alternate means of transportation available to the battalion and the procedures used to obtain them. If the unit SOP seems to be in error, the discussion should focus on correcting and validating it in the next similar exercise.

If the exercise were conducted in summer under ideal conditions, the AAR could discuss how the same operation would be conducted in winter on frozen ground and with limited visibility. Operational planning would have to consider—

- Increased control measures.
- Degraded air support.
- Limitations on target acquisition.
- Effects of cold weather on troops and equipment.
- Impact on logistical systems.

Third echelon AARs conducted for the force service support group should be attended by the commander, the support staff, subordinate battalion commanders and their staffs, and company commanders. Representatives from maneuver and combat service support units should also attend. These AARs cover all aspects of combat service support during the exercise and their impact on the tactical operation. Topics of discussion can include—

- Medical support and casualty evacuation.
- Personnel and administrative support.
- Supply system operations.
- Maintenance procedures.
- Transportation.
- Ammunition hauling and stockpiling.

The AAR discusses the time units actually spent supporting exercise requirements as opposed to the time they spent on scenario events. The AAR compares the training benefits received from responding to actual situations caused by the exercise to the benefits from simulated situations. The lessons learned from this comparison allow planners to schedule events for combat service support units during future exercises. They also provide indicators of what will actually be required in combat and allow commanders to fine tune support systems and procedures.

SUBJECT: After Action Report, FTX _____

A. Executive Summary. (Informs senior leaders about exercises at regiment and above. Contains significant lessons learned, discussion of unit readiness, and recommendations for future training.)

B. Letter of Transmittal

C. Exercise Objective. (Restated from the exercise LOI.)

D. General Discussion. (Detailed discussion of significant events, lessons learned, and exercise support requirements; findings and conclusions associated with each lesson learned and exercise support deficiencies; and specific recommendations for future training and conduct of exercises.)

ANNEXES: (As required.)

Annex A - Personnel
Annex B - Intelligence
Annex C - Aviation
Annex D - Electronic Warfare
Annex E - Funding Procedures
Annex F - After Action Reports
Annex G - Logistics
Annex H - Public Affairs
Annex I - Civil/Military Operations
Annex J - Range Instructions
Annex K - Communications
Annex L - Operations Security
Annex M - Protocol
Annex N - Maneuver Damage and Environmental Considerations
Annex O - Control Cell Organization
Annex P - Provost Marshal
Annex Q - Engineer
Annex R - Distribution

Figure G-3. Sample After Action Report.

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