

APPENDIX G

AFTER ACTION REVIEWS

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Both during and after training, evaluation feedback is used to identify successes and shortcomings. While some simple shortcomings are immediately retrained, others are scheduled for future training. Leaders must pass on this feedback so that everyone receives training value from significant events occurring during training. For all performance-oriented training, the after action review (AAR) is the key in providing this feedback. The AAR is not restricted to field exercises.

This appendix provides leaders information on the after action review and its significance in providing feedback to soldiers, leaders, and units. It is a guide to leaders on how to plan, prepare, and conduct an AAR. It describes how AARs are used during or after training to link training and evaluation.

WHAT IS AN AAR?

An AAR is a review of training that allows soldiers, leaders, and units to discover for themselves what happened during the training and why. It is also used to solicit ideas on how the training could have been performed better. It is a professional discussion that includes the training participants and focuses on the training objectives and their linkage to the METL and wartime mission.

AARs are not critiques because they do not determine success or failure; rather, AARs are professional discussions of training events. Leaders and evaluators avoid lecturing participants on what went wrong. They use AARs to tell a story about what was planned, what happened during the training, why it happened, and what could have been done differently to improve performance.

Leaders guide discussions to bring out important learning points, preferably by the soldiers and subordinate leaders themselves. Soldiers learn much more when they identify for themselves what went right and wrong than when lessons are dictated. AARs always—

- Reinforce and increase the learning that took place as a result of the training exercise.

- Increase soldier and leader interest and motivation (thereby enhancing learning).
- Identify and analyze both strengths and weaknesses.
- Involve all participants.
- Guide toward achieving learning objectives.
- Link lessons learned to subsequent training.

TYPES OF AFTER ACTION REVIEWS

There are basically two types of AARs—formal and informal. Formal AARs require more detailed planning, preparation, and resources. They are normally scheduled and conducted as a part of external and internal evaluations. Informal AARs require less planning and preparation than formal AARs and are often on-the-spot reviews of soldier and collective training performance at crew, squad, or platoon level.

FORMAL

Formal AARs are normally conducted at company level and above. However, when a training event is focused at squad or platoon level, and resources are available, a formal AAR may be conducted to gain maximum training benefit. Externally evaluated lane training, small-unit ARTEPs, and tank and BFV gunnery tables are prime examples. Informal crew, squad, and platoon AARs are held prior to company and higher-echelon AARs.

The AAR facilitator (evaluator or controller) provides an exercise overview and leads a discussion of events and activities that focuses on the training objectives. The discussion with leaders and soldiers should orient on the use of terrain, integration of key BOS, and leader actions. The

discussion should also examine the weapons systems and doctrine used by the enemy during the exercise. At the close, the AAR leader summarizes comments from the observers, covering strengths and weaknesses discussed during the AAR and what the unit needs to do to fix the weaknesses.

INFORMAL

Informal AARs are usually conducted for soldier and crew-, squad-, and platoon-level training or when resources are not available to conduct a formal review. They are often held for lower echelons prior to a formal company- or higher-level AAR. Informal AARs may also be conducted at company level. Informal AARs are extremely important since they involve all soldiers and leaders in the participating unit. The formal company AARs for the training event depend on these thorough, informal reviews.

Informal AARs are conducted similar to formal AARs and may be done for large or small units. They may be scheduled, or leaders may do on-the-spot reviews during the training. Discussion comments could be recorded to use in follow-on AARs or to apply immediately the lessons learned as the exercise is repeated.

AAR PLANNING, PREPARATION, AND CONDUCT

Formal and informal AARs follow the same general sequence: Leaders must plan and prepare before they can conduct an effective AAR. The amount of planning and preparation depends on the type of AAR to be conducted and the resources available. The general sequence to use in planning, preparing, and conducting an AAR is shown in Figure G-1.

PLANNING

Leaders conducting an AAR must ensure it accomplishes its objective to promote learning. Through planning, leaders provide the foundation for a successful AAR and create a positive climate for training and evaluating subordinate soldiers, leaders, and units.

AAR planning and execution sequence

<p>PLAN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish objectives for the AAR. ● Select qualified observers. ● Review the training and evaluation plan. ● Identify the participants. ● Plan stop points during exercises for AARs. ● Make potential site selections. ● Select training aids. ● Draft an AAR plan. ● Review the unit's training objectives and plans. <p>PREPARATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review the training objectives, orders, and doctrine. ● Observe the training. ● Organize the selected AAR site. ● Collect information from other observers. ● Develop a discussion outline. ● Organize and rehearse. <p>CONDUCT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Restate the unit's mission and event's training objectives. ● Generate discussions. ● Orient on training objectives. ● Seek maximum participation. ● Continually summarize to emphasize key learning points.

Figure G-1.

An example AAR plan is at Figure G-2. As a minimum, the plan should include—

- Who will observe the training and conduct the AAR.
- What the observers should evaluate (T&EO).
- Who is to attend the AAR.
- When and where the AAR will be conducted.
- What training aids will be used during the AAR.

Select Observer-Controllers

Those selected for observer-controllers should not be involved in the training. They should not have other duties which detract from their observation and evaluation of the training. If this cannot be done, the chain of command should evaluate subordinate elements and conduct the AARs. Squad leaders should evaluate their soldiers' performance and limit the AAR discussion to their actions. Platoon leaders would do the same for their squads; the company, for their platoons, and so on. Selected observers must be—

- Able to perform the tasks to be trained.
- Experienced in the duties they are to evaluate.
- Knowledgeable in the current doctrine.

If external observers are used, they should be of at least equal rank to the leader of the unit being evaluated. However, if choosing between experience and rank becomes necessary, experience is better. A sergeant who has experience as a TOW section leader can evaluate the section better than a platoon sergeant who has no TOW experience.

Leaders must also plan to train their observers. Each observer conducts the AAR for the element he observes and provides input to the AAR for the next higher echelon. In addition, observers themselves must be observed as they observe soldier or collective training. *After observers conduct their AARs, leaders should conduct an AAR for them to improve their techniques and procedures.* If possible, observers should accompany and assist an experienced AAR leader and sit in on other AARs whenever possible.

Observer-controllers must be familiar with the unit's METL or soldier and collective tasks they will be observing. Moreover, they must know the training objectives and be proficient in the tasks themselves. By knowing up front what the training involves, observers can concentrate on the specific tasks considered to be mission essential and provide critical feedback concerning the unit's performance.

Identify Participants

The commander specifies who must attend each AAR. The AAR leader may recommend additional participants, based on specific observations. They select as many participants, to

include the OPFOR leaders, as can reasonably be handled at the AAR site. At each echelon, the AAR will have its own primary set of participants. At crew, squad, and platoon level, everyone should attend and participate. At the company level, this may not be practical. Insufficient space at the AAR site or the ongoing training mission may preclude some unit soldiers from attending. In this case, leaders and key players may be the only participants.

The OPFOR can provide valuable feedback on the training based on observations from their perspectives. While the unit's leaders and evaluators see the training from one point of view, the OPFOR can provide healthy insights on—

- OPFOR doctrine and plans.
- The unit's actions.
- OPFOR reactions to what the unit did.

Plan Stopping Points

An observer cannot see everything each soldier does during an exercise; likewise, for other than a brief exercise, the observer cannot review the entire exercise at one AAR. In planning training, leaders must allow time to conduct AARs as an integrated part of the training. Additional time for an AAR at the end of each essential task or major event is necessary. Stopping points should be planned; for example, after a unit arrives at a new position or after it consolidates on an objective.

AARs should be conducted as soon as possible after the event and before another operation begins. For planning purposes, leaders should allow approximately one hour for platoon-level AARs and one and one-half to two hours for company-

and higher-level AARs. The additional time required to conduct the AARs may result in fewer missions or drills. The increased effectiveness of training, however, will more than make up for this loss of training time. With AARs, soldiers receive better feedback on their performance and remember lessons learned longer.

Plan Training Aids

Training aids add to the AAR's effectiveness, but they must be carefully selected and requested well in advance. They must support the training discussion and not distract.

Training aids should be large enough, and positioned, so that everyone can see. Models of units, vehicles, and personnel make discussions clearer. If models are used, leaders should move them on the terrain board or map as they discuss the unit's actions.

Unit graphic control symbols should be included on the terrain model or on a centrally positioned sketch map. Slides, TV tapes, and other media may also be appropriate. All aids used should be professional and complement the dialogue.

Leaders can enhance selection of training aids by using the TASC catalog. To make a preliminary choice, they should ask the following questions:

- What points will I need to make during the AAR?
- Will the aid illustrate one or more of the points?
- Can the actual terrain or equipment be used?
- Does the aid have any restrictions or requirements, such as additional generators?

Exercise AAR plan

Observer	Element	Priority Tasks	Who Attends	When Held	Location	Special Reqmts
SFC Worthy	1st Squad	Task 16- Occupy, Prepare, and Defend A Battle Position	Full Squad	1 hour After Contact Broken	Behind OP	None

Figure G-2.

- Will the participants be able to see and hear it?
- Is the aid really necessary to the discussion?

Asking the questions above will help eliminate unnecessary aids and assist leaders in selecting those which will best contribute to the AAR. The final step in the planning of training aids is to request them from the TASC or their appropriate sources.

PREPARATION

Select and Organize Sites for AARs

Planning several potential AAR sites throughout an exercise area can reduce the preparation time. It allows equipment to be pre-positioned and the layout to be diagrammed. Pre-positioning allows for shorter movement time to the selected site; the diagram permits the setup to begin before the AAR leader arrives.

In most cases, the AAR will be conducted at the training site, but this may not always be possible. As leaders plan their training and training sites, they should watch for areas that could be used for the AAR. These sites should be close to the training site with space for the participants to gather in easy sight and hearing range of the AAR leader. The site should be as free as possible from outside distractions during the AAR. An AAR held in the middle of an active maintenance area may distract more than benefit unless that is the activity being reviewed. Leaders should also plan sites that can support any special requirements of the training aids to be used.

AAR sites should be quiet, protected places where soldiers can feel relatively comfortable. They should be clean, orderly, and well lit. Coffee, soup, and juice can help create the proper atmosphere, especially after time in the field during night or adverse weather conditions. Ideally, the site should overlook the exercise area. As a minimum, training aids, sand tables, and maps should be available to reinforce the discussion. -

Organize the AAR Discussion

Prior to conducting an AAR, leaders need a plan for organizing and rehearsing. To do this, they should develop a discussion outline before the training and further develop it as the training progresses. The AAR leader should put

notes and observations from the training in chronological sequence; then he should select the most critical ones and sequence them as they relate to the exercise training objectives. The AAR may be organized as follows:

- Introduction.
- Presentation of commander's and OPFOR's plan.
- Summary of recent events.
- Discussion of key issues.
- Analysis of key BOS (what happened when the battle was joined).
- Discussion of training to sustain or improve.
- Conclusion.

CONDUCT OF THE AAR

The following is an example of the conduct of an AAR. Squads have just finished an FTX which the platoon leader observed and evaluated. He has completed his AAR preparation and squad leaders have assembled the soldiers.

Before starting the AAR, the platoon leader must ensure all participants are present and ready. The soldier who is absent or late may have information critical to reconstructing what happened. The platoon leader must insist that all key players attend, to include OPFOR leaders. The AAR must not start until the leadership accounts for all players.

The AAR leader provides the focus for the AAR by briefly restating the specific exercise or training objectives. Next, he has a squad leader summarize the OPORD. This encourages unit participation. Another technique is to have each squad leader restate a portion of the OPORD. From this point on, the AAR leader guides the discussion, keeping the focus on the objectives and in a logical sequence.

The most difficult task for an AAR leader is to *avoid turning the discussion into a critique or lecture*. He can avoid this pitfall by entering the discussion only when necessary. Initially, he should only ask questions—why certain actions were taken, how personnel reacted to situations, and when actions were initiated. He must limit his input to sustaining the AAR, guiding the discussion back to the right track, or bringing out new points.

Techniques which will help the AAR leader guide the discussion follow:

- Ask leading and thought-provoking questions that focus on the training objectives. Ask squad leaders what METT-T factors influenced their decisions.
- Have the unit members describe what happened in their own words and from their own point of view. They should be free to discuss not only what took place, but also why it took place.
- Relate tactical events to subsequent results.
- Explore alternative courses of action that might have been more effective. (How could you have done it better?)
- Avoid detailed examination of events not directly related to major training objectives unless the squad leader wants to go into greater detail.

Discuss Leader Mistakes

Many times the discussion must focus on leader mistakes. This discussion should be frank, but without embarrassing leaders involved. The positive must be emphasized so that lessons can be learned without destroying confidence or respect. The AAR leader should ask the leader why he chose a particular course of action or what factors of METT-T influenced him; others can learn from a mistake and gain an appreciation for the difficulties involved in leading. Perhaps some key information was missing because a subordinate leader or soldier didn't think it was important. Unit members must be reminded that in combat they too can become leaders, so they must learn to make decisions.

Use Appropriate Training Aids

Training aids can significantly contribute to the AAR discussion if they have been carefully selected. They must not distract from the AAR.

For example, a detailed and done-to-scale terrain table showing the terrain where the FTX was conducted would be inappropriate if the AAR site had a view of the actual terrain. Some keys to the successful use of training aids follow:

- Use the actual terrain whenever possible.

- When using terrain models and maps, orient the participants to the key terrain. Use the correct symbols and graphics on maps and overlays.
- When using video and voice recordings, ensure all participants can see and hear.
- Use charts to emphasize kill ratios or other data that need to be discussed.

Following are ways training aids can be used in the discussion of the FTX:

- Use actual terrain as a terrain table and require the participants to point out where specific actions occurred.
- Use voice recordings of radio nets to reveal unclear FRAGOs issued as well as COMSEC violations.
- Use a chart of artillery missions fired to reveal inadequate smoke usage when disengaging.

Summarize the AAR

Once all the key points have been discussed and linked to future training, the AAR leader should leave the immediate area and allow the unit leader and soldiers the opportunity to discuss the events in private. The unit leader will decide when to end the AAR.

The AAR process involves several leader functions requiring skill, training, and good judgment. Leaders observe performance, then evaluate the quality of what they see. They decide which of their observations to include in the AAR and what questions to ask. They ask open-ended questions to ensure the discussion causes soldiers to compare their own performance with established Army standards. AARs tend to treat poor performance in great detail and focus on what happened and why. Trainers try not to unduly damage self-esteem or cohesion. To do so would be contrary to the AAR's goal of improving performance.

By the end of the AAR, soldiers must clearly understand what was good, bad, and average about their performances. The art of the after action review process is to get soldiers to accurately grade their own performances. Self-rendered grading will be more meaningful than a judgment issued by the trainer or AAR leader. However, soldiers must *know* where they stand. Thus, in some cases, the leader may need to clearly dictate (tell the participants) his findings.