After Action Review Best Practice: An International Review

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ABSTRACT

The After Action Review (AAR) is widely acknowledged as a key component of military collective training, which can have a fundamental impact on the quality of training output, which in turn should be reflected in increased performance in operations. The British Army Land Warfare Centre sought to ensure that AARs were being conducted in accordance with accepted best practice, to identify ways of improving the effectiveness of the AAR practice and to inform the process of formalising Observer/Controller training. This paper presents the results of an international review of AAR practice conducted for these purposes. In order to identify areas where improvements could be made, it was necessary to determine what was considered to be 'best practice' and how that related to current practice and the AAR experience for those involved in the process. This involved a review of British Army practice and a comparison with the approaches taken by the US Army and the Canadian Army. The study was conducted in two phases. During the first phase, a detailed set of interviews were conducted with British Army ARR participants, including both staff involved in AAR delivery and AAR recipients, during collective training exercises being conducted at a cross section of British Army Collective Training Establishments in the UK and at the British Army Training Unit, Suffield (BATUS) in Canada. During the second phase a similar set of interviews were conducted with AAR participants from the US Army and Canadian Army during collective training exercises being conducted at the National Training Centre, Fort Irwin. The interview results were compared with the findings of a literature review and an evaluation of established doctrine. The paper details the findings of each phase of the study and the final recommendations that were made.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of the After Action Review (AAR) is to provide feedback to the training audience about their performance against training objectives and to reinforce learning, maximise training value and improve individual and collective performance. Kelly et al (1996) describe the AAR as *"a specialized debriefing process using both subjective and objective inputs in an interactive environment between trainers and trainees"* (p.1). As well as providing feedback on performance and being an interactive event, the atmosphere needs to be conducive in encouraging openness and trust. As Schindler and Eppler (2003) remarked "*Team learning, building trust and team integrity are crucial goals of the process"* (p.223). The AAR is very much evident during collective training events within the British Army. Collective training typically involves a large number of people, for example, a battle group (a number of different units coming together to train e.g. Engineers, Medics, Cavalry Units etc). These types of events are very complex in their design and execution and, as Morrison and Meliza (1999) state, *"it is difficult to establish causal connections between performance, weapons effects and mission outcomes"* (p. 1). They describe the context of such events as being stressful, confusing and surrounded by uncertainty – 'the fog of war'. It could also be said that in any military training exercise the pace and number of events that occur are of such magnitude that it is impossible for any one person to have a complete view of what is happening and what it means. The AAR is the arena in which these gaps in knowledge can be brought together to form a complete view and enhance the understanding and increase the depth of learning of the participants.

The AAR process is an elementary part of collective training within the British Army and is fundamental in enabling learning from training events and, subsequently, for the lessons learned to be taken in to theatre. As the AAR is so important, the purpose of this research was to explore the practices and procedures employed in relation to the AAR. The aim being to identify areas where practices could be further improved and to inform the process of developing Observer/Controller (O/C) training within the British Army. In order that the research wasn't purely introspective, the decision was made to explore how other armies carried out the process and to see if any lessons could be learned from their practices. The US Army and the Canadian Army kindly agreed to participate in this research in order that such comparisons could be made.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSES

We used a qualitative approach; where insight into people's attitudes and behaviours is gained by analysis of unstructured information such as interview transcripts, notes, official documentation etc. The purpose of this was to enable us to identify participants' experiences of the process, and gain an in-depth understanding of which elements work best and which elements could be improved upon. The research was carried out in two phases:

Phase One

The first phase encompassed a literature review to enable identification of best practice, a review of current British Army procedures relating to AARs and data collection visits to British Army training establishments in the UK and Canada.

The appraisal of published literature on the topic of the AAR demonstrated that factors which could impact on the effectiveness of the AAR event, could be categorised as 'The Strategy' (logistical issues such as timing of the AAR), 'The Event' (issues relating to the content and delivery of the AAR) and 'The People' (factors relating to the skills and abilities considered ideal for conducting an AAR). This framework was used to structure the doctrine comparison and also as structure for the subsequent interviews.

The initial analysis carried out was to compare the 'best practice' concepts identified above with current British Army doctrine - the Army Field Manual: Volume One Combined Arms Operations, Part 7:Training for Operations (2004) and the AAR Best Practice

Principles laid down in HQ LAND document LAND/G3 Trg. (1999). We then began our data collection visits to training establishments. During these visits observations and interviews were carried out in order to gain an understanding of exactly what was involved in the processes. We observed Mission Briefs, Observer/Controllers (O/Cs) in action during exercises and both formal and informal AARs at Battle Group and sub-unit level. In addition, 31 semi-structured interviews were held. To obtain a balanced perspective, interviews were held with participants from both the training establishments and those being trained. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection.

The interviews from Phase One were transcribed and a Grounded Theory approach, developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), was used for the analysis. The purpose of using such a technique is to allow the data to emerge naturally rather than impose a template upon it. This is important because it goes some way to assuring that the matters of interest to the participants are highlighted and pertinent data is not missed. The raw data was coded and used to identify and develop groups of concepts using a constant comparison technique as recommended by Partington (2002). We then developed higher level categories by grouping the concepts and finally, links between previously identified categories are identified. On completion of the analyses, the results were triangulated and changes to the categorisation of concepts were identified and discussed to reach an agreement.

Phase Two

The second phase involved data collection at the US Army National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin in the USA where the US Army and the Canadian Army carry out collective training exercises. Once again, a series of observations and interviews were carried out in the same way as those for Phase One. In this second phase, 23 semi-structured interviews were held making a total sample number of 54 for the complete study. The coding framework developed during Phase One was used as a template for analysing the data gathered during Phase Two.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion from both research phases are presented together to enable comparison of results across all three armies involved in the study. The framework developed during the analysis stage is used to provide coherence.

The Strategy

In this section, issues relating to the logistics of the AAR process are addressed. The review of published literature highlighted that timely feedback is essential to improve performance; the training event and the subsequent learning will be more recent and therefore more likely to be retained than after a long time delay (Schindler & Eppler, 2003 and Jones, Gilbert and Lister, 2000). Keene's (1994) rule of thumb is that *"An AAR should be provided as soon as possible without interrupting the flow of the exercise, but trainees should never proceed to a new exercise or mission until an AAR has been conducted for the previous"* (p.3). Timely continuous feedback throughout the training exercise also allows the training audience to see the results of change in their performance (Allen and Smith, 1994). In addition, Jones, Gilbert and Lister (2000) suggest that a unit can maximize its performance improvement if time is specifically allocated for the purpose of reconciling learning. This means that lessons learned are understood more thoroughly, retained for longer and more easily transferred to future situations by the trainee.

The review of British Army doctrine reflected the recommendations highlighted in the literature review; that the AAR is to be held as soon as possible after the training event, but before the next event starts so that lessons learned can be applied in the next training event or mission. However, there was nothing in British Army doctrine to suggest that time should be allocated specifically for learning to be addressed. In practice, British Army AARs are held each day to allow for continuous feedback through the training event - as recommended by the literature and stated within doctrine. However, the point raised a number of times in the British Army interviews was the lack of time allocated to consolidate the learning from the AAR before the beginning of the planning phase for the next mission.

Whilst the British Army hold formal AARs every day, the US and Canadian Armies hold them on designated 'training days' at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the training rotation (which generally last for 14 days) so that the flow of the exercise is not interrupted. This could be deemed to go against the 'best practice' recommendation of continual feedback. However this is counteracted by holding informal AARs (called hot washes or hasty AARs) on the days where no formal AARs are planned. These informal AARs tend to take place at Platoon level after every mission, Company level after major operations and Battalion and Brigade level all the time. The rationale for doing it this way is

that continuous feedback is given via the informal AARs that occur on a daily basis and the credibility of the formal AAR event itself is not compromised because any lower-level issues are dealt with in the informal AARs.

The Event

In this section, issues pertaining to the content of the AAR and how it is delivered are addressed.

Content

The literature review identified that the AAR needs structure in order to be effective and should encompass the following:

- What was supposed to happen? Review of mission objectives and restate performance standards to focus the AAR conversation.
- What actually happened? Performance datum used should be accurate, specific and focus on explicitly stated training objectives; irrelevant evidence can detract from the learning experience. Research shows that good performance should be a focus as much as poor performance because it can have a positive effect on the training audience in terms of confidence, motivation and a sense of accomplishment.
- Why did it happen and what can be learned from this experience? Any discussions that take place during the AAR need to be focussed on establishing what happened, why and how it could be improved upon in the future. The *know-how* of what has occurred can be shown by use of quantitative data (facts and figures such as direct fire data, position data and command post data etc). This can provide answers to the 'what' and 'where' aspects of performance but does not address the *know-why* of what occurred. Experience and insight into cause-effect relationships etc is less tangible and therefore better addressed by placing the evidence into context by use of subjective data.

(From Schindler & Eppler, 2003, p. 223, Allen and Smith, 1994, Morrison and Meliza, 1999, Keene, 1994, Jones, Gilbert and Lister, 2000 and Kaplan and Fallesen, 1986).

Whatever the content and outcomes of the AAR, a clear and concise summary should be given by the facilitator which refers to what went right, what went wrong, why these successes and failures occurred and what alternative courses of action may be taken in the future to capitalise on successes and avoid repetition of mistakes in the future.

The doctrine review showed that the British Army format of the AAR as prescribed in the Army Field Manual (2004) reflected the guidelines found in the literature. The manual also stated that factual detail and visual illustration should be used when presenting evidence and both positive and negative items should be raised. It also prescribed that the training audience should be guided to give its own assessment of performance and the extent to which they achieved the aim of the training. The format of the AAR was the same for the US and Canadian armies - all worked to the fundamentals of what was supposed to happen, what did happen, why did it happen, what went well/not well, what are will be done about it, which elements should be sustained and which improved as well as key major points to address. All three armies recognized that there needed to be a balance between positive and negative issues raised in order to maintain morale and the credibility of the AAR. Too many negatives can affect the level of participation in the AAR. As one participant succinctly stated ***"If they just ding you all the while, it can kill it".***

Across all three armies, it was generally recommended that the number of key issues was kept to a minimum in order to ensure that the main training issues identified were dealt with. If too many issues were raised, and some of them were not key points, it can detract both from the credibility of the AAR and also the learning that takes place. As the technology used in collective training exercises now generates a significant amount of varying types of performance data, the amount of data used within the AAR should be carefully considered. Data overload can be overwhelming and be too much for a training audience to assimilate. The importance of the use of accurate data is a topic that was raised in the literature review and the results from the interviews suggest that data accuracy, in practice, could sometimes be questioned. There was a feeling that less emphasis should be placed on statistics if there is some doubt as to their validity. It was felt that anomalies in the Tactical Effects Simulation (TES) equipment (a laser-based system for live training providing objective performance measures) used affected statistics to such a degree that great care should be taken in their interpretation and use. This was not an issue raised by any of the participants in either the US Army study or the Canadian Army study. However, it should be noted that the TES equipment was used differently to that of the British Army. Phase Two data showed there was much less reliance on statistics, possibly due to the nature of the exercises observed.

The literature highlighted that a balance of objective and subjective data should be used to facilitate understanding of what happened and also why it happened. This balance between types of data used was another matter that was raised by participants from the British Army. There appeared to be a variance between training establishments in terms of the use of objective data. It appears that, at one establishment, the focus was on objective data yet at another, statistics were likely to be used to validate a point if they were relevant but more emphasis was placed on lessons learned and moving forward. Over-use of objective data in the AAR can detract from learning. One participant in the British Army study commented: ***"I did not find them much use at all – all this nonsense about range gates, whether you attack from the front or the side".*** Presentation of statistics that do not appear to support the training objectives can also detract from the impact of the AAR: ***"It can be dangerous to put them in regardless because you have to understand the complexity behind the events that occur".***

The US Army and the Canadian Army both relied more heavily on subjective data during the training events that were observed. The statistics that were used were to highlight technical information, such as response times for reports, for safety statistics and to show progress. Quantitative data was seen as a useful guide to progress and as a useful tool for guiding discussions during the AAR but was kept to a minimum and directly linked to training objectives.

One of the most salient points found in the data came in the form of scheduling time for learning. The US and Canadian armies have implemented what they term as "The Fix" which is a formally stated part of the AAR. At the end of each AAR, each person attending is asked to identifying an issue that needs to be worked on, who will be responsible for it and whether it is possible to fix it within the time available. This ensured that the key learning points from each AAR were actually resolved. The follow-up of fixes is usually one of the first things on the agenda for the ensuing AAR - what were we going to fix last time? And did we fix it? The follow-up is not only a check on progress but is also a useful way of encouraging interaction within the AAR - it gives a common ground for starting discussions.

Delivery of the AAR

Gow and Kember (1993) suggest that the method employed during the event and the explicit specification of learning tasks can create an environment that *"[... encourages meaningful learning"* (p.31) as opposed to surface-level learning where data and opinions are transmitted and understood therefore transfer of training to the workplace is more likely to occur. They advocate a process whereby a facilitator helps the participants to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, making audience interaction vital. Active participation can increase motivation as the training audience are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning by recognising and owning the problems and, collectively, developing solutions to them. (Jones, Gilbert and Lister, 2000).

According to Schindler and Eppler (2003), the facilitator is *"responsible for the lasting effect of the experiences discussed"* (p.225). It is the role of the facilitator to validate evidence presented in context and to cross-reference learning points to other related lessons learned. It is also their responsibility to create an environment which encourages the participants to interact and learn and to be a guide to point out relevant sensitive issues. This means creating a non-threatening environment where participants feel free to disagree with points raised, are encouraged to interact by use of appropriate questioning styles such as open questions and have events described by using specific statements rather than abstractions. Keene (1994) suggests it is also the role of the facilitator to point them in the right direction and to provide specific evidence for the reasons for the assessment that has been made. Ways of improving performance are most effective when they come from the training audience themselves but they may not always be able to do so. Keene (1994) feels that the facilitator should be prepared to help in this situation by either drawing on his own knowledge and experience or, in the case of less experienced facilitators, from experiencing methods that have worked well for other training units that have been through the process.

With regard to British Army doctrine, a Guide to Conducting AARs is available in the Army Field Manual (2004) and this stated that, to be effective, sound AAR techniques must be universal, consistent and to focus on key issues; not becoming embroiled in extraneous debate and that all users should be competent in their conduct. The training audience should feel comfortable, not threatened and it is the responsibility of the facilitator to engender positive attitudes - to guide not control, to maintain balance and objectivity and avoid destructive criticism. This is in accordance with the literature and some basic coaching hints are given in the Army Field Manual (2004).

Within the British and US Armies, delivery of the AAR is carried out by an O/C. The Canadian Army did things slightly differently; the O/C was responsible for conducting the AAR on Training Day One. The Unit

Commander conducted the AAR alongside the O/C on Training Day Two (the O/C still had the role of independent feedback to the Commander) and on Training Day Three, the AAR was conducted by the Unit Commander alone. The rationale for this is that it encourages the training audience to take true ownership of the process. However, at Fort Irwin, the Canadian Army tried things the US Army way with the O/C presenting every AAR. One participant commented ***"That was the beauty of process - talking and having things teased out of them by someone completely independent, there is no emotional engagement. This is away from Canadian Doctrine and worked well"***.

Whoever is responsible for the AAR, all three forces concur that it is important to set the right 'tone' or create the right atmosphere for learning to occur. The results highlighted the importance of creating an open atmosphere promoting the sharing of best practice where participants should not feel that criticism could negatively impact careers; the leader of the AAR should be able to ***"Let their guard down and listen to questions and criticisms from sub-ordinates".*** The view, across all three forces was that the AAR is very 'personality' driven and the presenter needs to have the right qualities to be successful. The results showed that an O/C who is prepared to show humility and talk about their own mistakes is more likely to create this type of atmosphere than an O/C that knows it all. As one participant said ***"I don't have all the answers because I have stripes on my shoulder"***. This open relationship fostered trust and created a professional relationship and participants said they felt more at ease when discussing things with their O/Cs during training so the reason for what happens during the exercise is understood. The data from Phase Two showed that the O/C was viewed as a mentor rather than a critic. The US Army O/Cs offered guidance in the form of 'A Way'; that is making a suggestion to resolve an issue based on personal experience. The participants were keen to point out the guidance offered was just a suggestion - 'A Way' rather than 'The Way' of going about business. The participants felt that the O/C should be able to offer solutions and should have the experience to be able to do that as well as the ability to 'think on-the-fly'. It was deemed as useful to have a balance of techniques to address things and discussing 'sustains' and 'improves' that have worked in the past was one technique to engage the audience and encourage interaction.

The use of examples from personal experience was also considered important by the Canadian Army participants; not only to create the right atmosphere but in terms of facilitating interaction. This was clear during observations, one particular O/C clearly showed his level of experience by using examples from his own time in Tikrit. By doing this, the audience was encouraged to ask questions about how he did things; knowing they were going to theatre in the near future, they were keen to make use of his knowledge. During an interview post-AAR, the O/C stated ***"When they come up with the answers, they make 'the fix' on their own. That Unit will do it and execute it much faster than others, if we just tell them"***.

The Observer/Controller

In this section, views on the qualities, experience and the training of O/Cs are detailed. The O/C is a key member of the training establishment staff and, as such, can have an impact on the quality of the AAR and, consequently, the learning of the training unit. Their impact can be identified in terms of their abilities as an AAR facilitator and also more individual attributes such as previous experience and rank. As the AAR is a facilitative process it requires a more sophisticated approach than the ability to present facts and critiques of performance. Similarly, going round the room and asking each trainee how they feel they need to improve will not be effective. For this reason Jones, Gilbert and Lister (2000) state that there is a requirement for training of officers responsible for conducting the AAR process. They also proposed that experienced training officers deliver AARs. If this is not the case, then AAR presenters should be trained in facilitation skills; for example, the ability to present evidence and encourage the audience to effectively debrief themselves. This is an important aspect of the process as adult learning literature suggests that this type of approach "provides deeper learning and better retention" (Dismukes, McDonnell and Jobe, 1998, p.36).

The data from the British Army showed the majority of participants felt that the AAR was more credible to the audience and had better learning effect if the presenter had operational experience. If the person presenting has done the job and understands the frictions of reality, then they are likely to be able to encourage frank and open discussion with the audience. It was also commented that people with this level of experience are better able to see the whole picture, to know what is right and what is wrong and to be able to deal with a degree of grey, whereas less experienced personnel do not have the operational picture to rely on but have to stick to known detail and fact – this tends to encourage a black and white perspective on an event that may not be that clear cut and can be the cause of tension during the AAR.

The views of participants from the US and Canadian Armies very much echoed those presented by the British Army. The analysis showed that each war-fighting function has an O/C that is experienced in that area. For example, O/C Medics speak the same language as the Training Unit Medics as they understand the requirements that are specific to that particular role. This is important because the Training Unit's performance assessment is based on the experience of the O/C; they need to show that they have Command experience and recent combat experience in order to be credible. One participant succinctly stated **"He needs to know what it's like to be in my shoes, someone similar to my type of experience - I'll listen to him"**. It was also stated that the process can lack credibility without the right people in place.

The British Army Field Manual (2004) issues guidance on conducting an AAR and also states that, in accordance with the first principle of training, the conduct of the AAR is a function of command and should be conducted by the commander one up from the one being trained. If it is commanders that normally conduct the AARs being trained, the manual states that "the Senior O/C must be at least equal of the commander in experience and preferably in rank".

The issue of rank was brought up many times and deemed to be an important factor. The majority view amongst participants in the British Army study was that the review should be led by someone of equivalent rank with command experience at the level they were reviewing. This was a particular issue at the sub-unit level, where it was considered that a junior Captain may simply not have the experience to comment authoritatively on the actions of an experienced Major. The majority felt that ideally post-command Majors needed to be employed as O/Cs. This view was echoed by participants from both the US and the Canadian Armies. It was felt that relative rank is very significant with equivalent rank, between the O/C and the Commander of the Unit under training, in the AAR being deemed as optimal. Participants from all three forces thought that the O/C presenting the AAR could be one rank lower than the Commander of the Training Unit but only if that person was tactful and a good communicator. If they did not have the requisite communication skills then they were unlikely to gain respect from the training audience. As one participant stated when asked about this issue: ***"He can go tell someone who is interested".***

In theory, the idea of having someone of the same rank works well but things were a little different in practice. All three forces experienced logistical problems with making sure that all O/Cs are of the desired rank and level of experience - it was easy to run out of Majors at Battalion level. All three forces used Augmentees to supplement permanent training establishment staff and it was not always possible to select by rank and experience.

British Army doctrine states that O/Cs and support staff should be fully trained pre-exercise including training of the rules of the exercise, data capture issues and the issues relating to objectivity and subjectivity. An AAR data collection plan should be briefed prior to the exercise. Detailed guidance for O/Cs regarding the phases to be observed and commented on is available in the Army Field Manual. The Army Best Practice Principles (1999) clearly state that the AAR should be delivered by the appropriate and appropriately trained staff.

The US and Canadian armies both have very formalised processes for training their O/Cs. US Army O/C Training is carried out at the Observer/Controller Academy at the NTC and teaches a standard way of going about business to ensure consistency across the piece. The course is attended by new O/Cs and Augmentees as well as by regular O/Cs for refresher training and runs for eight days. The course covers everything an individual needs to know about working as an O/C at the NTC - from logistics to safety and exercise rules of engagement. It also covers how to facilitate an AAR, which is detailed here.

The AAR element of O/C training begins with information on the purpose of the AAR and its importance to training outcomes. The different types of AAR (formal and informal) are defined and the expected standards communicated. Whether formal or informal, all AARs follow the same format and are focussed on improving training proficiency via the exchange of ideas and observations. In AAR training, the format is broken down into three sections: planning an AAR, preparing an AAR and conducting an AAR. Course attendees are taught to review training objectives, order and doctrine, to ensure that "Tasks, Conditions and Standards" for the exercise are clearly stated and also the "AAR Rules". In addition to this, attendees are trained in observation techniques in order to identify key events and to organize these into meaningful data, allowing the identification of key issues for review within the AAR. During the AAR training, there are also a number of interactive sessions which show the right and wrong ways to conduct an AAR. The trainees are also given a scenario from which they must plan, prepare for and conduct an AAR with their cohort.

In addition to O/C training, there is a formal mentoring scheme in place to help new O/Cs and Augmentees whilst they settle in. During their first training rotation the new recruits do their AARs along with a Senior O/C as part of their ongoing coaching and mentoring. This happens to the extent that the Commander Operations Group (COG) responsible for training at the NTC goes out and gives feedback to his O/C team on their AAR-giving performance. A point of note was made by one particular participant who stated that the AAR is part of the US Army way of life from first joining up - they are done all the time so the soldiers learn from the experience of attending AARs what makes a good one and what makes a bad one. This contrasts with the experience of British Army participants in Phase One of the research when it was stated ***"We don't do them often enough, we only do them at big events".***

The participants in this research were keen to explain the importance of the mentoring programme. It was explained that the feeling is very much one of entering a team where you know you are expected to perform to standard but that you are not alone. The mentor can pass on tips regarding the best places to be to observe, how to use the radios and to make sure that enough food and water is carried because of the nature of the terrain. One participant stated that the main benefit was ***"it's about being able to talk to guys who have been out there and done it - that's how we learn".***

The Canadian Army also implemented formal O/C training as a result of identifying that, across Canada, the AAR process was in place but that each establishment had their own way of doing things and they were all different. The AAR Center of Excellence at Camp Wainwright was created and a Qualification Standard was developed. The importance of this qualification is recognised across the Canadian Army and has become accepted as the required standard, consistent across training establishments throughout Canada. The Canadian version of the course runs for five days and covers the same areas as that run by the US Army e.g. the physical aspects of running an exercise along with specific training in the AAR process, including interactive role-playing sessions.

The Canadian Army deem the AAR process to be highly important and recognise that it cannot be just anybody that runs it. They take the view that the training is beneficial whilst at training establishments but that the person attending the course will also have the necessary skills and abilities to take back to his own Unit with him to pass on. Augmentees also have to attend the course before they do the job.

The Canadian Army also have a formal mentoring scheme in place to assist newcomers. In addition to this, the Canadian's view is that ***"Your tour isn't over until you have passed on your knowledge"*** and troops in Afghanistan can be posted straight from theatre into training establishments to pass on their recent knowledge and experience to those who will be going to theatre in the near future.

With regard to the British Army and O/C training, the Army Field Manual (2004) states that O/Cs should undergo training in data-capture procedures and the rules of the exercise. The results of the interviews highlighted the need for the formalised O/C training that was under development by the British Army. One participant expressed concern when he said ***"Do we train our people how to do it? I don't think we do. They go, they take over the job, they get a bit of a brief then they do it their own way".*** If this is the case, it would provide a reasonable explanation for the variance found in training the AAR process. Other participants reported that no specific guidance was given on the requirements for an AAR and, on occasions, that all they were given was a 45-minute talk on the need for an AAR and how it fitted in with the training programme. It was also noted that there is sometimes no real opportunity to train people to do the AARs; a hand over session can be the extent of the training, along with a reliance on common sense.

On occasions it seemed that mentors were available to help; participants related having an experienced O/C sitting with them to help guide them for the first few exercises. There was an incidence of an experienced Warrant Officer being tasked to sit with a new O/C who did not have much experience. However this is done on an informal basis rather than as part of a training mechanism and did not occur consistently, probably for reasons relating to staffing levels. This was illustrated by the following comment: ***"Initially I was going to be shadowing someone through a whole exercise but, just with numbers of people, it didn't work out so I was essentially thrown in at the deep end".*** It was also noted by several British participants who have worked with the US Army that a formal mentoring process can be effective – ***"The Americans introduced a formal mentoring system to a much better degree than we do. For example, I went on the Commanding Staff course and I received a formal brief from my mentor who sat alongside me for the training".***

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research was to explore the practices and procedures employed by the US Army and the Canadian Army in relation to the AAR; with the aim of identifying any areas that could be gainfully used by the British Army to further improve practices within the UK. The research showed that there were many similarities in terms of the way that the US and Canadian Armies view the AAR process compared to the British Army. Views on the timing of the AAR were similar across all three forces. The major difference between the Forces in this respect was that the latter build in training days on which AARs are held whereas the British Army hold AARs every day. The benefit of having an AAR on a scheduled training day is two-fold. Firstly, the battle rhythm isn't interrupted by the need to hold a formal AAR, which is more realistic. Secondly, the fact it is a dedicated training day means that there is no rush to think about and plan the next mission so time and attention can be turned to consolidating learning from the AAR.

In terms of format and overall content of the AAR, there were, initially, few notable differences between the three forces. However, it became apparent that the format of US and Canadian Army differed from that of the British Army greatly in one respect. At the end of a US or Canadian Army AAR, each individual is asked to identify 'A Fix' and to take responsibility for carrying out and reporting back on progress at the beginning of the next AAR. This appeared to be a very simple and effective way of ensuring that learning from training translated into action. It is also effective as a mechanism for monitoring progress throughout the training event.

With regard to O/Cs, once again all three forces worked to similar principles – recent command experience and combat experience being acknowledged as essential for the O/C to be credible with the training troops. It was universally acknowledged that rank can be an issue and that equivalent rank is ideal when expecting O/Cs to liaise with their training unit counterparts. Once again, there was one notable difference between the way the British Army operate and US and Canadian Armies operate. That difference is in the area of O/C training. Both the US and Canadian forces have developed specialized training courses for the role of O/C. These courses last for around a week and lead to Army-recognized qualification standards. This has led to consistent standards being used across the training establishments in the USA and Canada. The course includes the logistics of running an exercise, range safety and exercise rules of engagement etc. It also includes formal, in-depth training on the AAR process and facilitation skills. Interactive sessions and role-play are also included so that the trainees. have some practical experience before going out into the training area to conduct their own AARs. In addition to this, both Countries have implemented formal mentoring schemes which were well-thought of and seen as an essential part of ongoing training.

Overall, the researchers witnessed teams of dedicated individuals working extremely hard in demanding circumstances, to deliver carefully considered feedback and to engage the training audiences in useful self-evaluation. Future work where recommendations have been made could provide opportunities to further enhance the British Army AAR process.

- Consider the benefits of scheduling formal AARs on dedicated training days into the exercise rotation. This would allow time to consolidate from learning without compromising the battle rhythm of the exercise. Best practice of providing feedback immediately after training would be maintained by holding informal AARs after each event.
- Implement 'The Fix' format to both formal and informal AARs to ensure that action results from the discussions.
- Develop and implement a formal O/C training course to provide standardization across the British Army. This would also be of great benefit to Augmentees going into the O/C role.
- To develop a formal mentoring programme, at training establishments, for O/Cs and Augmentees new to the role.

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