



# Advances in Predeployment Culture Training: The U.S. Marine Corps Approach

Barak A. Salmoni, Ph.D

*This article is dedicated to  
the memory of Captain  
Brian S. Letendre, USMC,  
and Lance Corporal  
Cory R. Guerin, USMC.*

*Barak Salmoni is Deputy Director, Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, U.S. Marine Corps Training and Education Command. He received a B.A. in Islamic/Middle Eastern, Judaic, and medieval studies and an M.A. in Middle Eastern/Islamic studies from Brandeis University, and a Ph.D. in Middle Eastern history from Harvard University. His teaching and research concentrate on the contemporary Middle East, with particular focus on Egypt, Turkey, Israel, and Iraq; civil military relations; and the implications of indigenous culture for military operations.*

PHOTO: Marines with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, and 6th Civil Affairs Group, walk in a market near downtown Hit, Iraq, 26 January 2006. (DOD)

**T**HE HISTORY AND SELF-IDENTITY of the United States Marine Corps are based on operations in foreign environments, in close proximity to peoples from foreign cultures and with indigenous security personnel. Still, the systematic study of foreign cultures in an operationally focused fashion is a relatively new phenomenon for Marines.

Since late 2003, Marine units deploying to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) have undergone orientation training on the culture of places to which they will deploy. A three-stage evolution has taken place in the conception and execution of such training.

At first, the moniker was “cultural sensitivity training.” The goal of the training was to learn how to avoid offending indigenous people by focusing on decorum, taboos, “do’s and don’ts,” pleasantries, and the etiquette of face-to-face non-military interactions. Some referred to this as “culturization.” The training also included an introduction to the history of the operational areas. Marines returning from deployments later commented that social aspects of such training only partially reflected realities in what were diverse, changing areas of operations, while the coverage of history was too academic, with insufficient links to contemporary dynamics.

“Culture awareness classes,” a term used into 2004, placed more emphasis on the *contemporary* history, political legacies, and visible religion of the OIF and OEF theaters. The training began to address evolving social dynamics, and it was based on the first-hand observations of deployed troops and the personnel teaching the classes. The training also paid more attention to culturally important tactics, techniques, and procedures, such as the use of translators. In this sense, culture trainers moved beyond a priori assumptions of what might be important to deploying troops, to a method of curriculum development that integrated Soldiers’ and Marines’ recent experiences and articulated needs.

Into 2005, “tactical culture training” or “operational culture learning” replaced culture awareness classes. The focus shifted from not offending people (a *negative* incentive) to grasping local human dynamics in order to accomplish the mission (a *positive* incentive). Thus, culture *knowledge*—knowledge applied toward achieving mission goals—became an element of combat power and a force multiplier. Increasingly realistic culture dynamics were injected into field exercises, in particular the stability and support operations exercises coordinated by Marine Corps Training and Education Command (TECOM).

The responsibility for finding qualified instructors and appropriate learning materials evolved in a similar fashion. In the 2003-2004 phases, battalion, regimental, and division commanders preparing for second deployments into theater recognized the need for culture and language education and attempted to identify the knowledge necessary and those who could teach it. Their conscientious but improvised efforts in a new field of predeployment military learning yielded uneven results across the deploying Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF).

In late 2004, TECOM took over the responsibility for all aspects of predeployment training in the Corps. It too turned to culture training, coordinating and eventually encompassing efforts already in progress while continuing to consult with operating forces.

Along with removing the burden of developing and coordinating culture training from the operating forces, TECOM, via ongoing consultation with OIF and OEF veterans, initiated changes to help determine who was a subject matter expert for warfighter culture training. Instead of generalist historians, religion specialists, and journalists, younger personnel who combined recent operational experience with academic study, site visits, and debriefing of returning units conducted the training. In this respect, cultural trainers have been working to shorten the lessons-learned feedback loop from deployment to deployment.

## From Ad Hoc to Institutional and Operational

The culmination of the culture training process was the emergence in May 2005 of the Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL), established on the initiative of Lieutenant General James Mattis, the commanding general of Marine Corps Combat Development Command, and based on his experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq. The planning and initial stand-up of CAOCL occurred under the guidance of TECOM's commanding general at the time, Major General T.S. Jones.

Mattis and Jones were guided by the emphasis the Marine Corps Commandant, General Michael Hagee, put on invigorated training and education for global contingencies in an irregular warfare environment. Hagee's vision called for more and better training and education on foreign cultures,

languages, and the regional and cultural contexts of counterinsurgency and irregular warfare.<sup>1</sup>

CAOCL immediately assumed the role of coordinating, sourcing, and planning operational culture predeployment training throughout the Marine Corps. By August 2005, CAOCL staff had visited the MEF area of responsibility (AOR) in al-Anbar province, Iraq, to evaluate previous culture training in order to develop new material for the upcoming training cycle. The staff emerged with standardized procedures for culture training assessment and sustainment teams that would go to other areas of operation. By partnering on these visits with instructors from Marine Corps Professional Military Education (PME) schools and students in regional learning programs, CAOCL affirmed two central principles: first, to conduct effective culture training, culture trainers need to know and understand cultures in a military context by experiencing them first-hand; second, to effect change across the service, there must be a feedback loop from predeployment culture training to the schoolhouses.

Although CAOCL brought onto its staff Marines and civilians who had been involved in culture training since 2003, it suffered and continues to suffer from the need to quickly and continually expand its educational and training ambit in a time of war, as opposed to gradually and methodically building up in a time of peace. Nevertheless, the hectic operational tempo has helped CAOCL to better understand its mission and to evolve responsively and responsibly. Thus, even with a skeleton staff, by January 2006 its trainers had begun to service training requests in Hawaii and Okinawa, supporting I, II, and III MEF. This was in addition to providing predeployment classes and learning tools for culture and language to detachments deploying to OEF and areas of responsibility in the Caucasus and Africa.

CAOCL is chartered as the Marine Corps' operational culture and operational language center of excellence, with chief responsibility for the training and education continuum. The latter currently consists of three main waypoints:

- *Predeployment training at the small-unit to major-subordinate-command level.* This remains CAOCL's overarching, highest priority. Through small one-to-three-man teams, the Center teaches Marines in classrooms, observes and evaluates

field exercises, and provides scenario-development assistance to command post exercises, often through solicited “injects” to the efforts of already existing TECOM elements.

- *Integration of culture training into PME.* Commanders at all levels have articulated a concern that predeployment training, be it for culture or language, is in reality just-in-time, last-ditch training. TECOM leaders have thus made it a priority to ensure that PME at all appropriate levels integrates curricula on operational culture concepts and tools, aligned with the rank of PME students and the roles they are to take up after graduation. TECOM seeks to create a chain linking all phases in operational culture PME on both the officer and enlisted levels, and CAOCL has been charged with ensuring these linkages. To best do this, in summer 2006 CAOCL established a Professorship of Advanced Operational Culture at Marine Corps University, filled by a cultural anthropologist with significant fieldwork abroad.

- *Establishment of institutional culture and language programs.* A cardinal principle of the post-cold war world of irregular warfare is uncertainty about the nature and location of military engagements. An effective military will feature operating forces seeded with personnel possessing a baseline capability to operate with culture and language knowledge in many environments and types of operations, from disaster relief through police actions and counterinsurgency up to high-intensity, force-on-force combat. To meet this challenge, the Marine Corps has begun to develop career-long regional culture and language learning opportunities to be offered via the Internet and at language learning resource centers at the major Marine bases across the globe. These opportunities will be directed at noncommissioned and commissioned officers in the career force and are intended to draw on the conceptual learning underway in the PME schools.

CAOCL is also tasked to liaise with the other services’ emerging centers for culture education. It bears noting that the Army, in particular, has made fast strides of late in this direction, with the Navy and Air Force in hot pursuit. Continuing collaboration and liaison will be important as each service seeks to ensure that its own needs are met. CAOCL has also pursued links and mutual learning

opportunities with similar military centers among allies in Europe and the Middle East.

## A Threefold Shift

The establishment of CAOCL marks a significant threefold shift. First, Marine Corps senior and field-grade leaders now understand that operational culture and language are central to mission success, especially in the brave new world of irregular warfare and distributed operations. Second, learning from I MEF’s and II MEF’s past efforts, the Marine Corps has chartered CAOCL to take the burden off the operating forces in the culture-language realm while they (the forces) prepare for deployment. Battalion commanders, for example, will not have to make their best Rolodex-aided guess on whom to call for culture and language training. CAOCL staff will either provide the training or evaluate and recommend other providers. The key is that CAOCL will consult with the requesting unit to ensure defined needs are met.

**...the Marine Corps has chartered CAOCL to take the burden off the operating forces in the culture-language realm...**

Third, if we look at the body of literature about culture in warfighting, we see an evolution. In early 2004, writing focused on the same initial message, worthy of repetition: culture is important.<sup>2</sup> But from late 2004 on, writers attempted to define culture in a military context. The overall harvest has produced some intellectually abstract work ill-suited to warriors, along with approaches edging towards stereotypical conclusions.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, authors closer to the warfighting community began to produce work with conceptual and informational utility for culturally educating Marines and Soldiers preparing to deploy. Some of this was published.<sup>4</sup> Other materials were authored by service people looking after the needs of their units.<sup>5</sup>

As the proponent for service-level doctrine on operational culture in the training, educational, and operational domains, CAOCL aspires to carve

out a niche focused on the operator. This focus is reflected in the emerging definition of operational culture CAOCL has provided for officer PME. The definition ignores factors that usually constitute generic definitions of “culture” and adds atypical factors from “operational culture.” In this way, CAOCL seeks to ensure that training focuses on what can be broadly described as “the lived human dynamics that influence a particular military operation.” There are three clusters of ideas to be defined: operational culture, operational culture learning, and culture operator.

- *Operational culture.* Governed by a particular operation’s goals, material assets, and functional areas of personnel, “operational culture” consists of—

- Operationally relevant behavior and expressed attitudes of groups within indigenous forces against or with whom Marines operate, civilians among whom Marines operate, and indigenous groups whom Marines wish to influence.

- Factors determining operationally relevant behavior and attitudes, to include biological, social, environmental, and individual.

- Historical mechanisms shaping the factors behind determinants of operationally relevant behavior and expressed attitudes.

- Knowledge in order to successfully plan and execute across the operational spectrum.

- *Operational Culture Learning.* In predeployment training scaled to rank and billet and focused on mission locality and objectives, “operational culture learning” includes—

- Study of a specific area of operation’s (AO’s) human environment and its shaping forces.

- Training in billet-focused language domains.

- Use of distance learning, face-to-face classes, and field exercises.

In PME phases geared to the responsibilities Marines will have to undertake at the completion of each level, the learning includes—

- Study of the concepts of operationally relevant culture.

- Development of skills necessary to succeed in diverse environments.

- Examination of human, print, and electronic resources for learning about operational culture.

- Exploration of the role of culture as suggested by past operations and simulations, along

with discussion of the relevant skills needed for the deployment AO.

- Introduction to the application of skills to the current operating environment.

In the career continuum, appropriate to military occupational specialty (MOS), phase of career, and leadership responsibilities, learning includes—

- Service-, command-, and self-directed study of emergent operating environments.

- Maintenance of knowledge with respect to likely future areas of operation.

- Monitoring of service- and DOD-provided resources for culture learning.

- Fostering unit study of foreign cultures for operational benefit.

- Recording culture observations about deployment areas.

- *Culture Operator.* A “culture operator” works at the tactical, operational, and strategic level within his AO. He—

- Continually rereads the changing human terrain.

- Diagnoses the dynamic interaction among the conditions and parameters of human existence.

- Grasps the basic culture-influencing forces of the human environment.

- Considers the impact of Marine operations as a new condition and parameter of human existence.

- Influences local behaviors and attitudes.<sup>6</sup>

In such fashion, the Marine Corps is creating a training and educational program useful to deploying Marines at all levels. CAOCL’s staff has found the above three categories useful as it continues to improve its approaches to structuring, executing, and evaluating operational culture learning.

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The remainder of this article seeks to illuminate Marine Corps predeployment culture and language training lessons learned, and suggest steps to the implementation of these lessons. Marine Corps lessons may be of benefit to sister services, each of which is now establishing centers for culture education and training.<sup>7</sup>

**A seat at the table.** Predeployment training and work-ups are planned, usually through a comprehensive process involving solicited opinions; interactions between units, higher commands, and



training entities; and meetings of interested parties. This process enables the creation of a coherent overall training package.

The culture component must be included in this preplanning process. Doing so is difficult because the concept of robust, systematic culture training is new to military thinking, and the individuals responsible for providing it across all the services are also new and relatively unknown. However, when planning for predeployment culture training occurs late, as an add-on, it jeopardizes the training. Preplanning is necessary to provide the right training to the right audiences at the right intervals in the predeployment cycle. It is the first step to achieving integrated, holistic, and mission-relevant culture training.

Inclusion of culture training in the planning process should occur at the highest possible operating force level—in this case, the G-3 of the MEF. Although lower-level units do not like being told what to do by higher, particularly when it comes to training, command direction is necessary to ensure a properly sequenced, integrated approach to training. It will also prevent subordinate units from overtaxing their operations sections in planning and coordinating culture training. When the highest levels of command drive the overall planning process, including culture and language training, they can transfer that burden to CAOCL.

**Timing it right.** Training for different kinds of skills must be timed right: it has to be relevant to when Marines use those skills. This is particularly true in the realm of operational culture and language. If training on these two related topics comes too early or too late, many Marines will think it is irrelevant to the upcoming deployment, no matter what they are told to think by commanders who get up to lecture them. In addition, if it is done too early, Marines might lose some essential concrete skills—use of a translator, formulaic interaction, spatial dynamics, key phrases in the local language, culturally coded interaction with females, informational interviewing techniques, or de-escalation of tension techniques.

Conversely, cultural and language training too close to the deployment date runs the risk of finding Marines unavailable because of last-minute requirements. It is also too late then to include concepts for application in field exercises—they might appear to be added “bricks in the pack.” Most important, at this point, the unit already has a fully crystallized deployment mindset: some commanders inculcate a perspective in which the indigenous culture is a core consideration, while others might permit a solely kinetic inclination.

In-unit, leader-mentored study of service-level-approved materials must precede the main block of face-to-face culture training. The face-to-face classes should precede, by 10 days to 2 weeks, the major field exercises that come a few weeks before deployment to a Marine Air-Ground Task Force Training Center at 29 Palms, California.

Language training should phase in a month earlier, and in a fashion that does not separate Marines from units during the important predeployment phase. Using audio/video and printed pre-study tools at this point can help commanders and trainers identify the appropriate personnel for further face-to-face language training. Language training can continue afterwards, through use of learned phrases at Mojave Viper exercises and through web- and CD-based sustainment materials. Additionally, due to the relatively quick decay of survival-level language learning, language training cannot end earlier than two weeks prior to deployment.

**Eluding the fire hose.** A well-known method of training in the military is the “fire hose” method: spewing out immense amounts of information to huge, disparate groups in a short amount of time. It results from extremely tight training timelines and intense operational tempos. Such a pedagogical method is detrimental to learning “soft skills” with concrete ramifications.

A different scenario suggests the needed course of action. From January 2004 through July 2005, 1st Marine Division Schools ran Combined Action Program (CAP) training, inspired by positive Marine experiences in Vietnam. By the summer

***Inclusion of culture training in the planning process should occur at the highest possible operating force level...***

of 2004, when it was in full stride, small groups (either platoons or two platoons accompanied by the company commander) would undergo a multi-day package. Sometimes in-unit reading and discussion preceded the training.

The CAP culture class took up a nine-hour day—long enough to teach concepts, answer questions and discuss solutions, practice certain skills, and play hip-pocket tactical-decision games. Allowing enough time for several breaks and lunch permitted recovery as well as unstructured learning. CAP platoons took further learning materials away from the program, and they practiced skills at field exercises. It should be noted that over the past two years, CAP platoon commanders and Marines have continued to grow their culture and language skills during and between deployments, often acting as the larger company or battalion's point man on these matters.<sup>8</sup>

Although breaking MEFs into platoon-size elements for culture training is the most pedagogically sound method, it is likely unrealistic. CAOCL currently breaks a battalion-sized unit into three groups, to which it sends small training teams. Sergeants and below receive three-and-a-half hours of face-to-face training. Staff sergeants through first lieutenants receive four-and-a-half hours, and captains and higher receive a five-and-a-half-hour class. Commanders are encouraged to determine whether they require senior NCOs and warrant officers from the company and battalion staff to join the third group. The substance of each class must be aligned according to the planning and operating functions of the Marines in grouping the class. Trainers work to catalyze students' active engagement by responding to questions and employing hip-pocket tactical-decision games.

This only partly does away with fire hosing. Whatever the rank cut-offs, class size should not exceed two companies. To be fully effective, self- or commander-driven PME reading should precede classroom study. CAOCL then provides programs scaled to different ranks and functions. In the same spirit, the classroom only begins the learning process; it is followed by distance learning. CAOCL currently offers CD and web-based distance learning material consisting of audiovisual modules on human-terrain mapping, negotiations and meetings, the state of the Iraq insurgency, work-

ing with the Iraqi Security Forces, culture aspects of convoy operations, cultivating relationships with Iraqi officials, use of a translator, culture aspects of interacting with Iraqis in and around domiciles, and third-country/Arab journalist measures. This is in addition to basic and basic-plus language support. Commanders who choose to prioritize this distance learning find that their units' performance in field exercises improves and that their Marines consider culture and language as integral to the overall tactical and operational fight.

**Qualified instructors.** Another issue having to do with culture training involves who is qualified to teach the operational culture of a particular AO. If the instructor is uniformed, he or she must be a Soldier or Marine who has recently deployed operationally to the AO in a job requiring ongoing interaction with the indigenous population—the division combat operations center watch officer from OIF-I will not do. MOS is not important here; interaction with Iraqis on a regular basis is.

The Marine instructor must be temperamentally inclined to teach culture as an operational force multiplier, and be able to combine experience-based knowledge with further learning and research. He or she must pursue, and be afforded the time and opportunity for, cross-pollination with Marines who have just returned from deployments. Fundamentally, the Marine instructor must be a good communicator.

One military community conspicuously unsuited to executing predeployment culture training is the chaplaincy corps. For several reasons, studying a religion to minister to a flock does not prepare one to teach about other cultures. First, the chaplain's primary mission is to provide religious, moral, and psychological support to warfighters. Anything diluting this would be an imprudent distraction. Second, chaplains may be inclined to perceive culture as being *determined* by an AO's religion. They may also focus on the *textual* as opposed to the *lived* dynamics of the religion in that area. In OIF and OEF, this is equally true of Christian and Muslim chaplains, because very few of the latter come from the Middle East or Central Asia. Third, all humans are biased, but chaplains, given their calling to minister for one particular religion, are more so. Additionally, because of their rank—O3 through O6—they have extra moral weight, so that

if they allow religious bias into teaching, it would more likely be taken as truth.

If the teacher is a civilian, matters are more delicate, and criteria more subjective. The Marine Corps must seek out and benefit from the civilian Defense Department, academic, and general community; it cannot deny deploying Marines the benefits of such expertise. Civilians without prior service must have lived in the AO in question or in a similar adjoining country. It is preferred that they possess advanced academic training, so they can speak at a level of expertise beyond the anecdotal or journalistic.<sup>9</sup> This assumes they will also possess language skills for the AO, if only as a matter of credibility. They must also be familiar with the military, with the Marine Corps, and with the nature of the unit they are talking to, and they should have enough of a grasp of the mission to be instructionally useful to the Marines.

In fact, civilian authorities, especially academicians, must be positively inclined to the Corps and the mission. Fundamentally, they must know how to talk to Marines at various levels, and be open to learning from Marines about the Corps, its culture, and their experiences. It is also important that they be able to teach: good *analysts* are not always good *teachers*; *briefing* is not *teaching*; and a good *performance* is not always the same as good *teaching*.

One final point: due to the global nature of Marine Corps deployments and the constantly evolving Marine demographic, deploying units or their neighbors will frequently have in their ranks Marines native to the upcoming deployment AO. Units and outside trainers must locate these Marines and use them to provide educational and operational value-added to personnel going forward.

**Making communicators.** Operating forces need language capabilities corresponding to actual functions, just as they need

orientation to the dialect used in the actual AO. Marines and Marine units also require pedagogical methodologies that resonate with them.

Thus far, commanders have called upon various language learning resources, with mixed results. The Defense Language Institute (DLI) is rightfully promoted as the one-stop shop for language. Government-sponsored or commercial contracting organizations have presented quick fixes ranging from pointy-talky cards to machines that translate as you go (phraselators). At times, MEF- or division-level training officers have worked with local community colleges to develop survival-level language courses. All of these resources have been helpful and have provided lessons for improvement. But they come with drawbacks:

- They all cost money.
- Different foci and impetuses have influenced quality. For example, contracting organizations are primarily interested in profit, not necessarily in what might work best for Marines on the ground. Government-sponsored think tanks, another source of possible solutions, tend to favor a technology-heavy approach to something that, by its very nature, cannot be solved solely by technology.
- DLI's primary mission has been to train cryptographic linguists and foreign area officers in 40-



Iraqi children escort U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Gregory A. Frank while on patrol in Al Ish, Iraq, 10 May 2006. Frank is with Weapons Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1 Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward).

to 63-week courses. There has been less historical emphasis on the short-term preparation of operational units in the basic terms, phrases, and learning skills needed for specific AOs and functions. DLI has made strides in this direction, but the operating forces and services must still aid, guide, and craft the materials DLI produces, as well as supplement the classes they provide, so that DLI can continue its traditional role of preparing language professionals.

- Survival or familiarization language programs have had mixed success in filling the needs articulated by training officers, units, and returning Marines. “Market research” in the form of pre-program planning with receiving units, in-country site visits, no-holds-barred debriefing of returning units, and inclusion of returning Marines in subsequent planning sessions has often been one task too many for ad hoc programs whose personnel are scrambling to deliver training on very short timelines. Survival-level courses provided at community colleges close to Marine Corps bases have been a good alternative to unit-fabricated training. Proximity to the units has facilitated a feedback-to-teaching loop that has facilitated effective instruction. The survival-level courses at Coastal Carolina Community College, for example, have greatly improved thanks to Marine input.

To ensure Marines get the best possible predeployment language training, units and returning Marines must participate in the program planning stage to define skill sets for operating levels from fire teams to field-grade officers. This planning must also address what kind of pedagogical products will actually work in the Marine classroom and what kinds of operational language tools will work in the field. Unit representatives, higher-level developers of the overall predeployment training timeline, and service-level coordinators of language training must all meet to determine the timing and sequencing of language exposure as well as the mix of classroom and distance learning.

In executing language training, it is necessary though not sufficient that teachers be native or near-native speakers of the language. They must also understand Marine learning styles and the Marine mission in an area. Fundamentally, they must be teachers by profession and training, not by accident of native speaking skills. Like those who teach culture, ideally they should also have had operational experience with Marine or Army units

in the field. Furthermore, to the extent possible, language-capable Marines, even if their skill levels are rudimentary, must be included in the training as instructors’ assistants.

**Audiences.** Because Afghanistan and Iraq are so culturally foreign, everyone wants predeployment cultural orientation. The senior commander’s intent has often been that every Sailor and Marine receive it. This approach indicates the seriousness with which the Marine Corps now approaches the issue, but it is not certain that training “every Sailor and Marine” is the most prudent course of action.

Any Sailor or Marine who has to go outside the wire to interact with indigenous people should, when it is plausible, participate in distance learning and face-to-face training. The intensity and detail of the training should be the greatest for infantry units, civil affairs groups, military police units, military/police adviser teams, and air-naval gunfire liaison elements. Intensity and detail also need to be substantial for commanders and staffs at the regimental through MEF levels (although the issues and skills covered will differ).

Certain support units have a high likelihood of performing infantry-like roles or interacting with indigenous people. These include motor transport, combat engineers, engineer service battalions, medical personnel, and those components of the MEF logistics group who liaise with third-country contractors, laborers, and government officials. Intelligence assets external to infantry units, logistics units, and the wing also need specific culture training (although it should be provided by the intelligence community). For all of these units, culture awareness and culture skills are necessary in the planning and operating continuum.

***Thus, an integral part of culture training prior to planning must involve determining which personnel should get what kind of exposure to operational culture, and what the mix of distance learning and face-to-face training should be...***



There are, however, a large number of Marines and Sailors who will never go outside the wire (or off the vessel): those who have no operational planning role, and those in the more technical fields where interaction with indigenous people will be limited. Aircraft mechanics, bulk fuel specialists, nuclear-biological-chemical specialists, aircraft ergonomics and aviator human stress specialists—these Marines will not interact meaningfully with indigenous people; such being the case, using limited culture training assets and time to deliver classes may ill-serve a laudable intent.

Thus, an integral part of culture training prior to planning must involve determining which personnel should get what kind of exposure to operational culture, and what the mix of distance learning and face-to-face training should be for each audience. In this way, the commander's intent will indeed be served through economies of force benefiting both the training cadre and the personnel receiving the training. This method will have the added benefit of ensuring from the outset that the predeployment certification requirements of all echelons are met.

## Current Status of Training

Predeployment operational culture and language training now unfolds in the following fashion: as soon as higher headquarters and TECOM begin to plan for predeployment training, those providing the culture components through distance learning, classroom interaction, and tactical exercises provide input, ensuring that the culture piece is timed right and sequenced appropriately.

Then, as units are pegged on the deployment schedule and assigned dates for classroom teaching and field exercises, CAOCL representatives brief battalion-level operations officers to plan the distance learning phase that will precede and follow the face-to-face interactions. During this time, CAOCL conducts in-theater site visits to develop timely, relevant learning categories and materials based on critical reviews of past practices.

Face-to-face interactions in the predeployment phase follow up on and synchronize with distance learning. Rather than one-day, multi-hour fire-hose sessions, CAOCL mobile training teams engage in more, but shorter and less intrusive, teaching visits to units, making course corrections as leader evaluations of classes and unit performance require.

Classes are followed by experiential culture learning at field exercises monitored and reported on by culture trainers. Instructional after-action reports, focusing on the performance of Marines and other exercise forces, are distributed to unit leaders and exercise controllers.

Immediately prior to deployment, leaders from platoon commanders on up receive the results of a CAOCL visit to the AO. The purpose of the visit is to cover evolving trends and access information that redeploying units might not transmit in the relief-in-place (RIP) process. Thus, through leaders' seminars or reports, the training cadre ensures that culture coordination occurs as part of the RIP. Finally, CAOCL personnel visit the theater to observe and interview Marines at mid-deployment to glean critical input about the efficacy of previous training. With this information, they then begin the education and training cycle for the next units.

## Into the Future

As Marines and Soldiers experience multiple tours in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other AOs, their insights about how to best conduct culture training matures. Based on participant observation and debrief of returning personnel, CAOCL thus works to evolve in response to articulated needs. The Marine Corps will therefore embrace new training initiatives in the coming months. First, Language Learning Resource Centers at Marine bases will provide ongoing language training in Iraqi Arabic, Dari, and Pashto, in addition to supplemental languages for the Pacific Command region. This means that predeployment language learning will be continuous, beginning much earlier than before. Distance learning will therefore provide a basis of capability upon which more targeted face-to-face instruction will build.

Second, inspired by successes the U.S. Army TRADOC Culture Center has had with "train-the-trainer" methods, CAOCL will transition in this direction. CAOCL is now developing week-long curriculum packages to be executed at regiments. These will target senior NCOs and company-grade officers who have had previous tours involving substantial interaction with indigenous people. By combining Marines' experiential knowledge with added instruction and training resources provided through TECOM, CAOCL will ensure units at the

battalion and company level have organic training expertise available on demand, thus sustaining the credibility, responsiveness, and building-block nature of operational culture training. In effect, CAOCL instructors will assume the role of deep-fight resources, although they will continue to provide mobile training teams for more targeted, advanced-level seminars and exercise evaluation.

## Conclusion

By establishing CAOCL, the Marine Corps articulated a vision of the human dynamics of indigenous peoples—culture—as a central planning and operating consideration for the present

and future. This vision obliges CAOCL to provide culture learning worthy of the Marines whom the Center serves. Through planning, program development, and consultation with sister services and foreign allies, TECOM has begun to implement a long-range vision encompassing Marine culture education at all levels and throughout the career continuum. Likewise, there is talk of a joint-level coordinating body or executive agent. However, before we contemplate any such initiatives, it would be prudent to continue to improve and sustain the predeployment training and education of Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines going forward into the close fight. **MR**

## NOTES

1. See General M.W. Hagee, Commandant of the Marine Corps, "33rd Commandant of the Marine Corps Updated Guidance (The 21st-Century Marine Corps—Creating Stability in an Unstable World)," ALMAR 018/05, 18 April 2005 <<http://www.usmc.mil/almars/almar2000.nsf/52f4f5d11f10b4c4852569b8006a3e35/35a74723d7bcc61085256fe70061040a?OpenDocument>>.

2. See MAJ Chris Varhola, "American Challenges in Post-Conflict Iraq," *Foreign Policy Research Institute E-Notes*, 27 May 2004 <[www.fpri.org/enotes/20040527.americawar.varhola.iraqchallenges.html](http://www.fpri.org/enotes/20040527.americawar.varhola.iraqchallenges.html)>; George W. Smith Jr., "Avoiding a Napoleonic Ulcer: Bridging the Gap of Cultural Intelligence (Or, Have We Focused on the Wrong Transformation?)," *Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Strategy Essay Competition: Essays 2004* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2004), 21-38; Montgomery McFate, "The Military Utility of Understanding Adversary Culture," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 38, 2005; Barak Salmoni "Beyond Hearts and Minds: Culture Matters," Proceedings of the Naval Institute Press, November 2004; Alex Davis and Dan Fu, "Culture Matters: Better Decision Making Through Increased Awareness," *Interservice/Industry Training, Simulation, and Education Conference (IITSEC) 2004*: <[www.stotterhenke.com/papers/IITSEC-04-culture.pdf](http://www.stotterhenke.com/papers/IITSEC-04-culture.pdf)>.

3. See Davis and Fu; Celestine Ntuen, "Culture-Centric Models for Military Simulation and Training," The 7th Annual Symposium on Human Interaction with Complex Systems 2005, 18 November 2005. Regarding potential stereotype formation, see Helen Altman Klein, Anna Pongonis, and Gary Klein, "Cultural Barriers to Multinational C2 Decision Making," Research Paper prepared through the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) Contract No: DAAH01-00-C-R094: <[www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ccrp/2000ccrts\\_klein\\_culture.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ccrp/2000ccrts_klein_culture.pdf)>.

4. COL Maxie McFarland, "Military Cultural Education," *Military Review* (March-April 2005); LTC Philip C. Skuta, "Cross Cultural Savvy," U.S. Army War College Strategic Leadership Program, December 2005; MAJ P. M. Zeman, "Goat-Grab Diplomacy in Iraq," *Naval Institute Proceedings* (November 2005).

5. A growing number of company-grade Soldiers and Marines have fulfilled this role within units. For examples, see John Koopman, "Marines Seal Bonds of Trust: Special Unit Wants to Win Hearts and Minds," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 July 2004, <[www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2004/07/04/MNG4T7GMRL1.DTL&hw=John+Koopman+Iraq&sn=053&sc=542](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2004/07/04/MNG4T7GMRL1.DTL&hw=John+Koopman+Iraq&sn=053&sc=542)>; and Greg Jaffe, "Trial by Fire: On the Ground in Iraq, Captain Ayers Writes His Own Playbook," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 December 2004.

6. See Barak Salmoni and Paula Holmes-Eber, *Operational Culture: Considerations for Integration in Expeditionary and Irregular Operations (CAOCL/TECOM: Forthcoming)*.

7. The Army has established a Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Culture Center, and has begun initiatives through its Combined Arms Center (CAC). Working through its Senior Language Authority, the Navy has also established a nucleus for systematic operational culture and language training, while the Air Force has established a Center for Culture and Language Studies. The JFK Special Warfare School features a robust culture and language training program, and has continued to improve it.

8. For information about the CAP Program in Iraq, see 1LT Jason Goodale and CPT Jon Webre, "The Combined Action Platoon in Iraq," *Marine Corps Gazette* 89, 4 (April 2005); LTC Phil Skuta, "Introduction to 2/7 CAP Platoon Actions in Iraq," *Marine Corps Gazette* 89, 4 (April 2005); and John Koopman. For information about precursors to the Vietnam CAP, see Al Hemingway, *Our War Was Different: Marine Combined Action Platoons in Vietnam* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1994).

9. That is not to say journalists have no role. As guides to and informants about foreign cultures, they can be unrivaled resources. For an example from a region of growing concern to the Marine Corps, see Jeffrey Tayler, *Angry Wind: Through Muslim Black Africa by Truck, Bus, Boat, and Camel* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005).

**MARINE CORPS  
GAZETTE**

October 2006

Countering IEDs in convoy ops, p. 15.  
View from the cheap seats, p. 19.  
A matter of trust, p. 34.  
Update tradition, p. 42.

Since 1916  
The Professional Journal  
of U.S. Marines  
*Marine Corps Gazette*  
Visit our web site at  
[www.mca-marines.org/gazette.](http://www.mca-marines.org/gazette)