



Students with the International Military Student Office at the U.S. Army NCO Leadership Center of Excellence attend a trip to downtown Baltimore, Md. as part of the field studies program. The students graduated with Class 69 of the Sergeants Major Course. (Photo courtesy of Sgt. Maj. Florian Emonet)

Meeting America

By Sgt. Maj. Florian Emonet

Swiss Armed Forces

As a sergeant major in the Swiss Armed Forces, being selected for the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Course as an International Military Student (IMS) is a respected honor. To fully benefit from the experience, and broaden the understanding of American culture, an IMS must take part in the field studies program (FSP) of the International Military Students Office (IMSO).

During the FSP, students visit different U.S. cities and institutions in order to understand America's

history. The FSP allows them to meet the real America and its patriotic architects. As described by former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich (2016), "True patriotism isn't simply about waving the American flag... It's about coming together for the common good" (para. 2). The purpose of this article is to reflect on four specific encounters made at each step of the FSP and how each of these experiences taught me something valuable about America — and myself.

*"Here lie the remains of Travis, Crockett,
and Bowie and other Alamo heroes."*

—Memorial Tomb Marker in the Cathedral of San Fernando

A Community Servant from El Paso

My first memorable encounter during the FSP was with the city council representative of El Paso's Fourth District: Sam Morgan. After retiring from the Army as a major, he earned a doctorate in business administration and then dedicated his life to serving his community. Instead of relaxing in his retirement, he continues to dedicate his time to the community of El Paso, both in the educational system and as a politician ("Sam Morgan," 2017). He exemplifies the notion that service to one's community is deeply rooted in the American way of life and is an expression of patriotism.

A Historic Family at Prude Ranch

At Fort Davis, Texas, the family of Michael Simpson perpetuates a 120-year-old tradition: immersing their guests in a rustic way of life synonymous with the Old West. Located in the heart of a breath-taking natural landscape, the Simpsons keep alive the simple cowboy lifestyle.

More than just hosting clients, they provide a deep

cultural experience and teach America's rich heritage to children during their summer camps ("History of Prude Ranch," 2017).

Fallen Heroes in San Antonio

In San Antonio, on a wall in the Cathedral of San Fernando, next to a marble shrine, these simple words are written: *Here lie the remains of Travis, Crockett, and Bowie and other Alamo heroes.*

As a child, these men were legends and became the protagonists of my childhood games. But the day I stood before the wall, I realized they were much more than that. They were real living men of American history. They personify a period in time and compel us to remember the sacrifices made at the Alamo.

The Storyteller of Gettysburg

Mr. John Baniszewski, our tour guide at Gettysburg, was not only passionate about the historical grounds he led us through, but proud of the rich tradition that he



Soldiers with the U.S. Army Drill Team perform a drill exhibition, April 24, 2018, during Army Day at the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas in front of hundreds of onlookers. These Soldiers are assigned to 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment "The Old Guard" at Fort Myer, Va. (U.S. Army photo by Joshua Ford, U.S. Army North)



Soldiers of the Presidential Salute Battery, 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard), fire a 21-gun salute to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, June 30, 2013 in Gettysburg, Pa. More than 10,000 participants turned out for the anniversary reenactment of the Civil War's bloodiest battle. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Klinton Smith)

has chosen to uphold. His storytelling keeps the memory of the brutal battle of Gettysburg and its fallen Soldiers alive. Vibrant in his depiction of the war's savagery, he taught us the true meaning of Abraham Lincoln's message, as relevant today as it was in 1863:

“We can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but can never forget what they did here. (Bancroft Copy section, para. 4)”

Knowing the origin of symbols and historical figures keeps the past alive and galvanizes the love of the nation. This is why, all over the world, battlefields are preserved and storytellers undertake the noble tradition of recounting the brave deeds and terrible losses of each.

Conclusion

America is more than just a collection of institutions or a population spread out upon a territory. Americans made, and continue to make,

America. The FSP allows the IMS to meet these nation builders and understand their patriotism. A servant leader of El Paso exemplified the dedication to serve a community. A hard-working family at Fort Davis demonstrated how to share and teach their love of a previous time period. The fallen heroes of the Alamo helped teach the value of believing in something more than yourself. And a storyteller at Gettysburg made us feel the weight of the sacrifice that American Soldiers made as they fought for a better future.

The FSP was an inspirational journey that helped me understand the culture of my American counterparts. I realized that Americans, like my own countrymen, come from varied walks of life. But no matter their upbringing or time period, patriots are always unified by the vision of a better future for their country. Embracing this desire above ourselves, no matter where we're from, will make us all better leaders. ■



Swiss Armed Forces Sgt. Maj. Florian Emonet, gives a presentation at the U.S. Army NCO Leadership Center of Excellence, Fort Bliss, Texas. Emonet was an international student at the Sergeants Major Course and graduated with Class 69. (Photo courtesy of Sgt. Maj. Florian Emonet)

References

History of Prude Ranch. (2017). Retrieved from <https://pruderanch.com/history/>

Lincoln, A. (1863). The Gettysburg Address. *Abraham Lincoln Online*. Retrieved from <http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>

Sam Morgan. (2017). *Ballotpedia*. Retrieved from [https://ballotpedia.org/Sam_Morgan_\(Texas\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Sam_Morgan_(Texas))

Reich, R. (2016). What's the true meaning of patriotism. *Newsweek*. Retrieved from <https://www.newsweek.com/robert-reich-whats-true-meaning-patriotism-477803>

Sgt. Maj. Florian Emonet is currently working for the Swiss Armed Forces College as class leader to the fundamental instruction course of the professional NCO school. In 2019, he graduated with class 69 of the U.S. Army's Sergeants Major Course at the U.S. Army NCO Leadership Center of Excellence in Fort Bliss, Texas. He holds a federal degree in Adult Education and his previous duty assignments include serving as the senior enlisted leader of the 7th Mountain Infantry Battalion and the senior operations NCO (G3) to the Multinational Task Force South of the Kosovo Force (KFOR) in 2009. He has also held several teaching assignments including the Swiss Armed Forces College as class leader to the NATO/Partnership for Peace NCO Leadership Course.



<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>
<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>
<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

