

Faculty deployments strengthen curriculum, validate classroom concepts

Lt. Col. Mark McCann

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Col. Eric Ashworth, right, meets with an Iraqi battalion commander at the Iraqi Maneuver Center, Besmaya, Iraq, 2009. Courtesy photo.

Jan. 26, 2012 – U.S. Army War College faculty who deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan and served at the strategic level of command return with lessons that validate classroom concepts, keep courses relevant, and strengthen the

academic mission of educating future strategic leaders.

“Deploying allows them to fulfill their professional obligations by contributing to ongoing operations in a meaningful way,” said USAWC Dean Dr. Bill Johnsen, about the faculty. “It refreshes the faculty and the curriculum, and makes them better faculty when they return.

“Most faculty go to high level jobs, dealing routinely with senior leaders, so they are exposed to senior leader issues and observe how senior leaders work, which is what we teach here,” Johnsen continued. “They can take theories and concepts from the classroom, see how they are applied in the ‘real world’ and bring those lessons back to the students.”

One faculty member who returned this past September was Deputy Dean Col. Rob Nye.

During his 14-month deployment in Iraq, he was chief of the action group for the Deputy Commanding General (Advising and Training), U.S. Forces-Iraq. This organization trained, advised, and developed military, police, and other security organizations in Iraq’s fledgling democratic government.

Nye’s 10- person, joint service group worked directly with the deputy commander, preparing him for meetings with senior U.S. and Iraqi military and government leaders, providing insight on complex issues ranging from downsizing large organizations in the wake of the U.S. drawdown to working with

the Iraqi government on a \$3.5 billion contract to equip Iraq's air forces with F-16 fighter aircraft.

"I got to observe how senior leaders maneuver through the political / military process that we see on a daily basis," said Nye. "Most of the problems we dealt with are problems we present to the students with the same complexity and same difficulty."

"Being able to operate in the 'unknown' with limited guidance, while being able to trust one's instincts was critical," said Nye. "It also was critical to understand 'strategic patience,' or knowing when to insert an issue or idea into the commander's 'mindspace' or decision cycle."

Dr. George Woods, III, a professor of strategic leadership, went to Afghanistan in January 2008 to teach a class on leadership at the Afghan War College while still on active duty as a faculty member here.

That experience compelled him to volunteer for a longer assignment in Afghanistan.

Later that same year, he returned there and was assigned to the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan where, initially, he helped create the new U.S. Forces-Afghanistan headquarters and then served as an advisor to the Afghan minister of defense.

"Students here have served many rotations overseas, so I felt an obligation to do my share to provide them with something in class relevant to their experiences," said Woods.

Col. George Woods, center, attends the first meeting between Gen. Stanley McChrystal, right, and Abdul Rahim Wardak, Afghan Minister of Defense, left, during the NATO Minister's Conference in Brussels in June 2009. McChrystal was in Brussels to meet NATO Defense Ministers enroute to Afghanistan to assume command of ISAF. courtesy photo.



When he first arrived, Woods said that the command asked him what he wanted to accomplish during the deployment.

“I told them I wanted to be exposed to strategic leadership and decision making, and I wanted to have a better understanding of Afghan culture and how Afghans and the U.S. interrelate,” he said. “My time there helped me learn the importance of relationships at a strategic level, how relationships are established and maintained, and how relationships are an important factor in how decisions are made.”

When he returned, Woods collaborated with many of his colleagues who also deployed to Afghanistan. Working through the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI) here, they developed two elective courses on Afghanistan for Army War College students, focused on policy, operations, and culture.

“As the main effort shifted from Iraq to Afghanistan, we wanted to put together courses designed specifically to help students who would be going to serve there,” he said.

Prof. James Boling, who teaches in the Department of Military Strategy, Planning, and Operations here, deployed to the International Security and Assistance Force headquarters in Afghanistan in 2009. There he was the senior military advisor to an Afghan National Planning Cell, working mainly out of the Afghan Ministry of Defense.

Boling’s multinational team worked a dual mission to advise, mentor, and help Afghan National Security Force senior officers develop operational planning skills while ensuring the synchronization of ISAF and Afghan National Security Force operations.

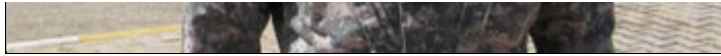
When he returned, Boling became director for a regional security elective course on Afghanistan.

“The benefit of having been to Afghanistan was being able to talk about how ‘advisorship’ worked there and what drives Afghan society, and be able to share insights about operational partnership,” said Boling. “We redesigned the course to include more on Pakistan and to re-emphasize things like patronage networks, kinship influences, the Afghan cultural setting and politics, and how Afghan society really works.”



Col. Rob Nye, foreground, attends an event where Iraqi forces demonstrated their capabilities with the M1-A1 tank for the Iraqi minister of defense, the public and the media. The event highlighted another milestone in the development of Iraqi defense forces.

Courtesy photo.



“It simply added another layer of experience in a different context to previous experiences, allowing me to bring to bear in class that much of what was done there, we teach here,” he said.

A deployment to Iraq was beneficial to Col. Eric Ashworth, director of Operations and Gaming Division at the Center for Strategic Leadership. Ashworth deployed in 2009 and served as deputy director for the Partnership Strategy Group-Iraq at the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq headquarters.

Working with the strategy group, he experienced the complexity of planning the transfer of hundreds of functions from the Department of Defense to the Department of State in helping to establish the Office of Security Cooperation.

“It is valuable to War College students to provide examples where times may have changed, the principles they learn here still can be applied to solve problems they may face after graduation,” said Ashworth. “In many ways, my deployment validated the lessons we teach here.”