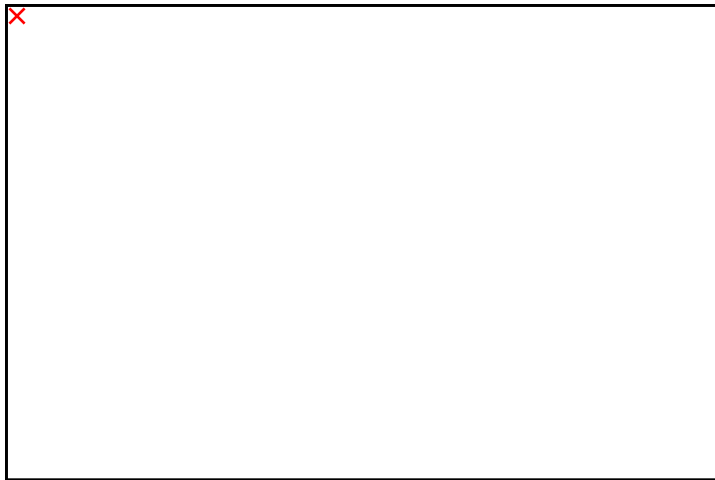


Fellows tour commands to gain better perspective

Thomas Zimmerman, Army War College Public Affairs Office

International Fellows tour commands to gain better perspective of U.S. military



Finland Lt.Col. Kaarle Lagerstam and Albanian Col. Vladimir Avdiaj, Army War College International Fellows, talk with a colleague before a session at Fort Carson, Colo., during the recent Unified Command Field Study. The trip provided the IFs with a first-hand introduction to the U.S. command structure, culture and more.

Courtesy photo.

March 31, 2010 -- After 21 days of seeing first-hand more than 20 U.S. regional commands or agencies, Army War College International Fellows returned armed with new first-hand knowledge about the U.S. military command structure and American history and culture.

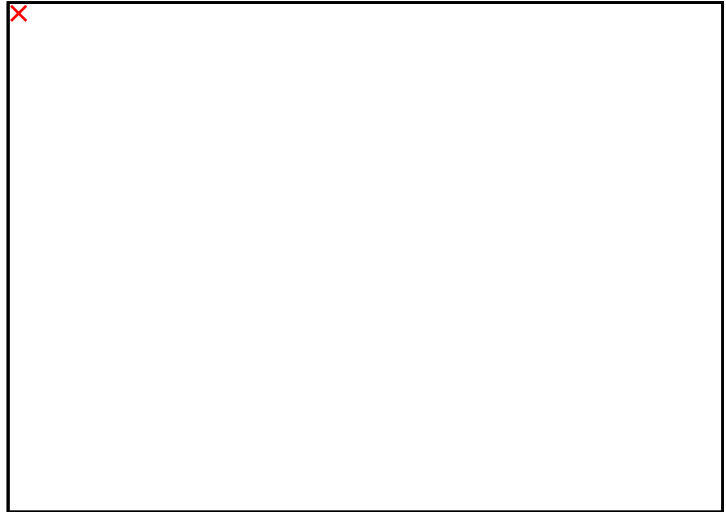
The Unified Command Field Study took place from Feb. 5-26, and provided the International Fellows exposure to the Department of Defense structure, combatant commands, and regional security issues these commands face. The three-week trip took the IFs to U.S. Northern, Southern, Pacific, Southern, Central, and Special Operations Commands as part of the officers' training in the structure and foundation of the U.S. military.

"We wanted to provide them a physical and practical application and demonstration of the elements of the U.S. military they have been learning about while at the Army War College," said Col. Alex Portelli, head of the post International Fellows program. He said that the purpose of the International Fellows program is to establish good working relationships between senior U.S. military officers and

senior officers of select foreign countries.

"It's also meant to improve the Fellows' firsthand knowledge of U.S. culture and institutions through study and travel in the continental United States," he said. "This is an opportunity for them to see places in our country that they normally wouldn't have an opportunity to. This helps to provide them with a richer understanding of American culture."

USAWC International Fellows listen to an employee explain how they sift through mud and dirt for materials at the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command during their recent Unified Command trip. Courtesy photo.



Trips to the Seminole Indians in Florida and the University of Miami Center for Western Hemispheric Studies helped reinforce this point.

"We want the IFs to take back with them not just an understanding of the US military command structures but also an understanding of American culture," said van Voorst. "This trip provided them an opportunity to learn about the history, culture, and diversity of America that you just don't get in a classroom. "

The trip built on the knowledge from the previous core courses during the academic year. It allowed the IFs the liberty to examine these commands' and agencies' implementation of such subjects as national policy and security strategy.

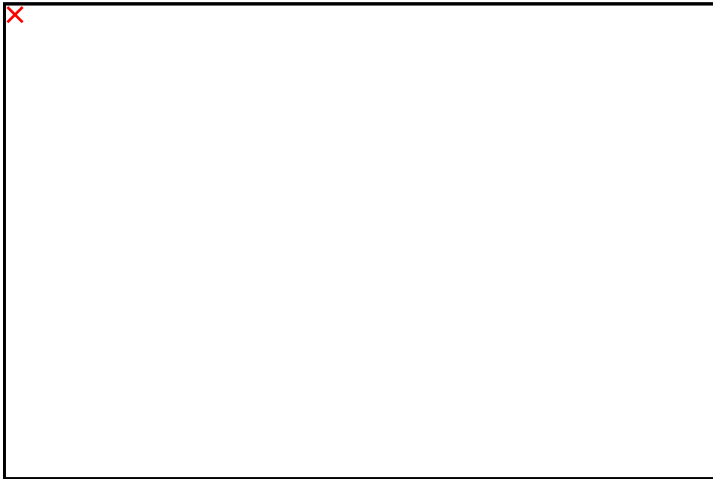
"One of the biggest benefits of this trip is that it shows that no matter what country you are from, there are issues and challenges that face the military," said Portelli. "By showing the IFs how we struggle and deal with certain issues it might help them find a solution for a similar problem in their own country."

One of the highlights of the trip was to Norfolk, Va., home of Joint Forces Command and U.S. Fleet Forces. There the international officers toured the USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75) and USS Wasp, seeing first-hand the U.S. Navy's many capabilities.

"Most of the Fellows are army officers and have not had the chance to be aboard a navy ship, even in

their own countries, so I hope they take away an appreciation for the complexities of our military structure and organization," said Carol van Voorst, the Deputy Commandant for International Affairs at the Army War College.

One of the visits was to the USS Wasp, a Navy multi-purpose amphibious assault ship. The 50 military officers came aboard the Wasp for a tour of some of the ship's vital centers. The tour was meant to educate the foreign officers on what the U.S. Navy brings to the table in the pursuit of global peace and stability.



A USAWC International Fellow raises his hand to ask a question during a session at Fort Carson Colo., during the trip.

"The fellows are learning about strategic studies in the classroom along with their U.S. counterparts, but it really drives the lessons home when you're standing on the deck of the USS Truman or talk with the head of

SOUTHCOM," said Portelli. "Seeing the physical applications of the lesson being taught is invaluable."

It wasn't just the trips to the large commands that may prove to be most valuable to the fellows as they carry on their career.

"One of the most dynamic sessions were the one we had at Ft. Carson," said van Voorst. "Here the fellows had an opportunity to listen to the leaders speak about the challenges created by the current OPTEMPO, the stress on the Soldiers and the stress on their families. No matter what country you are from this is an issue all leaders can relate to."

She said that the discussions lead to a great dialogue on how to help prepare Soldiers for deployment, how to care for the families they leave behind and how to help them when they return.

Many of our IFs have served or will soon serve in the Iraq and Afghanistan regions and this dialogue for them was extremely worthwhile."

The trip also helped to bring the fellows even closer together as a group.

"At the beginning of the trip the buses were really pretty quiet," said van Voorst." But by the end of the three weeks it was filled with discussion. This program and trip helps form the kinds of relationships that we'll need some day in the future."

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