

International Fellows select Bulgarian officer as their president for USAWC Class of 2021

By Robert Martin, USAWC Public Affairs Specialist 31 July 2020



Lt. Col. Ivanov, prior to his arrival at Carlisle Barracks, he was assigned as the Commanding Officer of the 42nd Mechanized Battalion.



Lockheed Martin with assistance from the AWC foundation donated groceries supplied by Giant supermarkets for international fellows as they begin their 14 days of restriction movement.

One task of the international fellow's orientation each year is to select an IF president who will represent them during meetings with the USAWC leadership, be a conduit of information between the IF Program office and the fellows and, when needed, coordinate the international fellows for special requirements.

This year, due to COVID-19 and the mandatory 14-day restricted movement upon arrival, the international fellows' ability to gather and get to know each other was delayed. The 66 senior foreign officers began arriving in the Carlisle area early in July – weeks before the U.S. students' arrival – to make time for the formal IF orientation program after a post-14-day COVID-19 test. But when they gathered mid-July at last, a lone lieutenant colonel responded to the call for a volunteer leader.

“As a commander, before I nominate someone to take a certain task or mission, I have to be prepared myself to do the task also,” said Bulgarian Lt. Col. Ivaylo Ivanov, President of the international fellows. “Because of that fact I decided to volunteer, and with the support of my fellow peers, I was selected. I have to mention that I am sure each one of us, if they received this task, would be able and ready to fulfill it.”

Ivanov received his commission in 2000 as a Second Lieutenant from the National Military University and prior to his arrival at Carlisle Barracks, he was assigned as the Commander of the 42nd Mechanized Battalion.

“This is a challenge for me, but also an opportunity,” said Ivanov. “I will be able to engage with a broader audience, to interact with the international fellows and their families but also with the War College leadership and U.S. officers.”

International officers in the Army War College resident class are invited by the U.S. Government and selected by their home country. They are senior officers from allied and partner nations from every geographical command. The international leader-to-leader relationships among the US and IF students improve understanding and interoperability in a connected national security world.

“It has been challenging arriving here under an abnormal situation for us and our families,” said Ivanov. “This added to the normal stress related to traveling to another country and changes in the environment.

“The assistance of the International Fellows office was crucial in accommodating us,” he said. “By starting our arrival [preparation] virtually before we deployed here, this diminished some of our uncertainties. Thanks to the tremendous efforts of the IF office and the amount of work they did for us and our families.”

Preparation for the arrival of the international fellows and their families begins about a year earlier when the fellows are identified, vetted by multiple security reviews, and guided to prepare for health care, lodging,

English skills classes for some, and preparation for graduate level research and communication readiness offered in the in-demand customized Academic Preparation Course here in the Spring.

This year, the COVID environment added layers of complications. Restriction to lodging and essential activities only challenging for all Americans this spring, and especially so for new arrivals to country. IF were unable to start the typical settling-in actions like getting a car and establishing a bank account.

The extensive IF and IF family orientation that normally occurs in July was not possible this year due to COVID restrictions, but the Army War College Foundation, which normally supports that orientation, was able to fund welcome boxes for each IF to help with arrival. These were boxes filled with helpful personal and food items provided in the first days of arrival as the IFs began their 14-day quarantine. It gave them time to become familiar with lists of eating establishments that would deliver and with local home non-contact delivery systems. The Foundation obtained the generous support for these welcome boxes from Lockheed Martin Corporation.

When the IF-specific orientation period ends August 3, the IFs will take their places in the 24 seminars of the class alongside U.S. students, and participate with their seminars in all elements of the Army War College experience. The term 'international fellows' acknowledges their roles as both students and educators, enhancing U.S. students' awareness of regional geography, history, culture, and trends that are relevant to effective security arrangements. Simultaneously, they'll learn about the role of land power as part of a unified/combined force in support of U.S. national military strategy. They develop knowledge and skills for command and leadership at the strategic level.

"It's all about the people," said Ivanov. "It is a great opportunity that will facilitate further engagements after I graduate from here, this is the most important thing for me."

I anticipate challenges but it is also a rewarding academic experience here at the War College. It will demonstrate and fully develop skills as a professional, as a writer, as a speaker, and as a senior leader as a whole," said Ivanov.