Language and Culture Training for Everyone

Group Editor **Marty Kauchak** examines the trends and developments in US military language and culture training.

The Pentagon's heritage efforts to provide language and culture training and education for cadres of foreign area officers and others who may use these skills daily, have expanded. The two competencies are routinely part of exercise scenarios and pre-deployment training for wider cohorts of individuals and units, and are enabling missions in information warfare. At the same time, technology is increasingly used to deliver learning content.

Marine Corps

Elements of language and culture capabilities are typically included in the mission cycle – from planning to operational task. George M. Dallas, the director of the Marine Corps' Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL), said his service "understands that the LREC [language, regional expertise, and culture] capability during mission planning and execution, which includes the ability to understand and communicate with partners, local populations, and interagency, increases adaptiveness and therefore the likelihood of mission success." For its part, the CAOCL works to "institutionalize" the LREC capability, and has a crucial role during operational planning and completion, by developing advocacy, policy and doctrine, and, "injecting the capability into the 'DNA of the Marine Corps' through its programs."

The CAOCL supplied some eye-opening numbers when asked to quantify the service's efforts to institutionalize language and culture training. One metric, the LREC training program, supported 86,370 Marines in fiscal year 2017, which measures student population by attendance at individual events. "There were 4,886 total training hours over 1,154 training events, with an average of seventy-five Marines per event," the military expert added, and continued, "The Regional, Culture and Language

Familiarization (RCLF) program, which is accredited but not yet reached full maturity, has 45,289 Marines assigned to one of seventeen regions (12,220 Officers/ 33,069 Enlisted) with expansion to 58,000 assigned Marines by the end of 2020."

CAOCL's training and education programs previously noted, are designed to be complementary. The LREC Training Program is structured to provide "just-in-time"' knowledge skills delivered during the pre-deployment cycle to teach Marines about the area of operations they will visit to accomplish their immediate mission. The RCLF education program provides a foundational level of LREC over a long period of time based on each career-Marine's regional assignment.

The Marine Corps, recognizing the imperative to reach more service members with language and culture training, has broadened CAOCL's mission beyond providing training and education programs.

In one instance, CAOCL works to ensure Marine Corps exercises are completed with fully integrated LREC considerations. The Center also supports operational forces by not only training and educating Marines about the LREC capability, but also providing cultural advisors to units when they deploy. Dallas further

noted CAOCL delivers support to Marine Corps Resident Programs, including the Command & Staff College, the Marine Corps War College and the Sergeants School.

Navy

Leaders in the Navy, also recognize LREC capabilities as force multipliers and critical competencies that provide the ability to operate closely with allies and international partners, according to Lt. Cmdr. Jessica Anderson, Chief of Naval Personnel spokesperson. To that end, "From pre-deployment training for all sailors to advanced degrees for specialists, Navy provides LREC competencies matched to support its responsibilities to meet both enduring and emerging challenges to our nation. Navy balances language, regional expertise and culture, to deliver focused, tailored training and education to Sailors in order to develop the LREC knowledge they require to execute their responsibilities and contribute to mission success," the mid-grade officer added.

The Navy is using a blend of strategies to furnish combatant commanders and other high-level supported leaders with language and culturally trained individuals.

At one tier of expertise, the Navy has two occupational specialties where personnel are required to maintain regional knowledge and language skills, which are primary functions of their occupa-

tional specialties and essential to the performance of their duties: the Cryptologic Technician Interpretive rating, an enlisted community, and the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) community. Members of both communities attend Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center in Monterey, California to acquire necessary language skills.

Other instances of individuals requiring this training may include enlisted personnel and officers participating in the Personnel Exchange Program who receive foreign language training at the Defense Language Institute, if required for assignment. Additionally, Navy personnel are provided language and cultural training before participating as Olmsted Scholars or studying at foreign war colleges.

Navy's Center for Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (CLREC) plays the central role in providing LREC products, tools, and services to Navy personnel so they can effectively carry out

Above
Leaders in the Navy, also recognize LREC capabilities as force multipliers and critical competencies that provide the ability to operate closely with allies and international partners. To that end, pre-deployment training for all sailors (above) and other initiatives are supported by the sea service.
Image credit: US Navy.

their missions. The Pensacola, Florida-based command supplies pre-deployment cultural orientation training in a variety of forms, including: group instruction facilitated by mobile training teams; semi-automated group presentations enabled by a member of the command being trained; individual instruction using automated and non-automated presentations; and one-on-one language tutoring for flag officers who will soon take an assignment in which language training would be beneficial.

Air Force

Across the department of the Air Force, Howard Ward, the director of the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC), told *MS&T* this March that his institution "is proud to provide our content in a wide variety of delivery methods. We support very broad, culture general topics in both distance learning environments and in classrooms at core classes at Air University. We provide a faculty of unique and emergent region-specific experts, who deliver intensive classroom instruction to tomorrow's senior leaders at Air War College and Air Command and Staff College." The learning focus is on a breadth of topics that convey the importance of a human approach to today's strategic challenges, applying the 12 Domains of Culture as a method for holistically applying problems and learning to build lasting partnerships.

With regard to AFCLC's learners, the Center director noted, there isn't a single learner that the command does not focus on or does not seek to impact through its education, because AFCLC believes that language and culture can be a combined method to approaching a vexing challenge: attracting and partnering with new allies. Ward went on explain, "Skills like cross-cultural communication can be developed into a tradecraft that AFCLC is postured to applying across a continuum of education, beginning early in a service member's career and moving into more applicable deliveries as their experiences progress. Warfare specialties are of little concern presently, though our Language Enabled Airman Program participants can request job-specific lingo from their tutors, General Officer Pre-deployment Course participants request

specific phraseology or cultural mores for the environment they will be working in, and we are always adapting our curriculum to expand to specialty-specific considerations."

Synchronizing Training with Requirements

The Pentagon is expanding its language and culture knowledge baseline – and training and education requirements – to support current and planned missions.

At the Defense Department-level, the Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands Program was launched by DoD in September 2009 to develop a cadre of experts specializing in the complexities of Afghanistan and Pakistan including the language, culture, processes, and challenges.

At the service level, the US government's increased focus on the Asia-Pacific region, was one impetus for the Navy's Asia-Pacific (APAC) Hands program. The effort is designed to enhance an officer's ability to perform within his or her community, by improving regional understanding and context for the APAC region. "Navy's program aligns already existing billets and educational opportunities to enhance an officer's performance. Its intent is to build on an officer's APAC regional knowledge with additional education and experience throughout a career," emphasized command spokesperson Anderson.

One of the trends this author has noted during recent I/ITSECs, were simulation and training companies' efforts to highlight their competencies in information warfare and adjacent mission sets. CAOCL is one military office aligned to that requirement, as it not only adapts LREC instruction materials to any given region, but its mission has broadened and deepened along with the growing emphasis on the Information Environment Operations (IEO). The Center's Dallas emphasized Marines and Marine units associated with the recently established MEF Information Group are looking to CAOCL for help in attaining competency in the cognitive and informational dimensions of Information Warfare.

Above
US military personnel are increasingly obtaining pre-deployment culture and training. Here, Marine Corps BGen Bob Sofge receives guidance from regional experts, as well as joint military cultural SMEs before deploying to take over a key leadership role in Iraq.
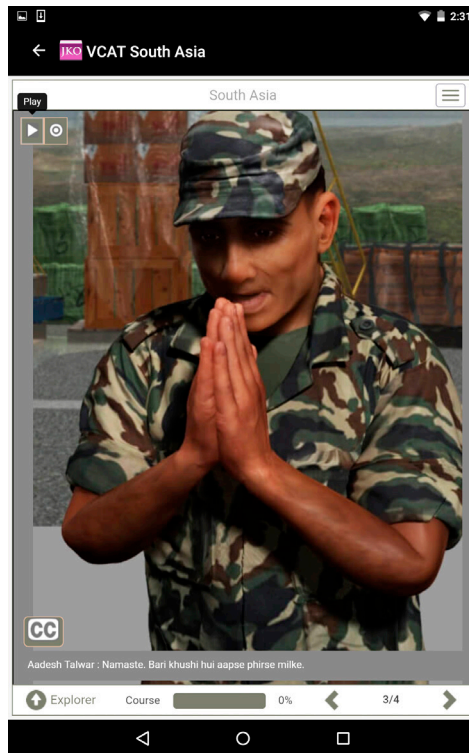Image credit: US Air Force/ Seth Maggard.

What's New

The services have a number of activities planned or in progress to provide more and better trained individuals with language and culture competencies.

One of several Navy developments, an updated version of the previously released Navy Global Deployer application for mobile devices became available for download this February 20. The original app provided material for six fleet concentration areas: Bahrain, Italy, Japan, Spain, the Republic of Korea, and the Philippines. Lt. Cdr. Anderson pointed out, "The update provides additional resources on language, history, geography, people, ethnic groups, religious institutions, societal norms, behaviors, etiquette, and culturally-appropriate behaviors for an additional 21 countries." Sailors can find this app and many other Navy apps at www.applocker.navy.mil. The US Navy Sea Warrior Program (PMW 240) produced the app and Tracen Technologies Inc., a company which specializes in integrated mobile and web solutions, was the software developer.

Back at AFCLC, the Center is continuing to refine several of its programs and work with a wider audience within the DoD, specifically with joint service language and culture education centers, into this year. Ward explained, as part of the newly-released National Defense Strategy for 2018, one key element repeated throughout is to strategically "strengthen alliances, as we attract new partners." Accordingly, "AFCLC takes this initiative to heart on a daily basis as our team seeks to touch all corners of the globe to empower and enable Airmen to operate seamlessly in any environment. Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base [Alabama] is the only site where AFCLC provides an open forum at our 3rd annual Language Regional Expertise and Culture Symposium (this March 28-29th). We've had some amazing success bringing joint nation service members and multi-branch operators invested in enhancing military culture education as a means of influencing the future."

Technology Enablers

Learners across the department are ben-

Above
Alelo's most widely used military e-learning products are the VCAT (Virtual Cultural Awareness Training) courses (one screen capture above), which may be accessed on Joint Knowledge Online (JKO).
Image credit: Alelo.

efiting from insertions of technology in language and culture curricula.

AFCLC's Ward highlighted one technology application used at his Center. "One exciting piece of distance learning education is our synchronous online language education that we call eMentor. It's delivered as a means of linguistic sustainment for our Language Enabled Airman Program (or LEAP) and has been a way for participants around the Air Force to remain operational within their primary jobs, and connect with a language tutor, on their scheduled off hours. This is just one way that our course participants are supporting future visions of our senior leaders and revitalizing squadrons by maintaining fighting capabilities in sync with training requirements." Language isn't AFCLC's only modality of education. Indeed, what helps the Center stay ahead of requirements in this sector, is its culture general-level courses, provided free as Community College of the Air Force classes and Advanced Distrib-

uted Learning Services, for those deploying anywhere. "They get a general sense of cross-culture competence before stepping off the ramp in a foreign country," Ward concluded.

Alelo is a widely recognized provider of e-learning language and culture learning products for the US DoD. Lewis Johnson, PhD, co-founder and board member at the company, reported its most widely used military e-learning products are the VCAT (Virtual Cultural Awareness Training) courses, which may be accessed on Joint Knowledge Online (JKO). "VCAT provide a combination of cultural awareness training and language familiarization. They are available for over 90 countries, and over 200,000 personnel have enrolled to date," the industry authority explained.

Mirroring earlier service perspectives, Johnson observed Alelo sees a major demand for training that quickly develops mission-relevant cultural skills.

Alelo is keeping innovation alive, with its recent launch of a cloud-based platform called Enskill that trains culture and language skills through realistic roleplays with artificially intelligent interactive characters. Johnson explained, "It is HTML5-based and can be used on any Web browser and device that supports speech input. Enskill continually collects speech samples and interaction data from learners around the world, which we use to train the underlying speech and language models. Since its launch last year Enskill has been adopted by educational institutions in 20 countries around the world, and was undergoing trials with military members at Fort Bragg [North Carolina] this February."

Alelo plans to extend the Enskill platform with advanced data analytics and learner feedback. This is expected to make it more effective as a learning and assessment tool, and also give instructors and training managers tools and insights to manage instruction more effectively.

"We plan to offer content creation tools so that organizations can create content for the Enskill platform themselves and exploit learner data and machine learning, to adapt and improve content," Johnson also revealed. **mst**