

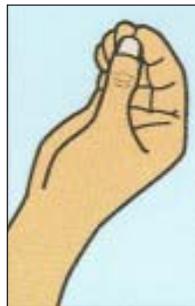


CULTURAL AWARENESS

RESOURCES CAN HELP PREPARE SOLDIERS BEFORE DEPLOYMENTS

EDWIN B. NELSON

The car rapidly approached the checkpoint. The Soldier signaled the driver to slow down by pumping his hands palms down, arms outstretched toward the ground, but the driver failed to respond. The Soldier then signaled the driver to stop by holding his arms out and his palms up towards the driver; again there was no response. The Soldier then fired warning shots in front of the oncoming car, but the driver merely swerved away from where the bullets impacted and sped up. Interpreting this action as hostile, the Soldier then fired at the driver, killing him. Surviving occupants of the car said they were only trying to get away from a hazardous area. When questioned on why they did not slow down or stop, they said that they did not know what the hand signals meant and that they thought the first shots fired were intended to hit them but missed. To an Iraqi, the hand signal for slow down is to clasp all four fingers together with the thumb over them, palm up and extend your arm with the back of the hand toward the driver (See illustration).



The incident cited above is real; it occurred during Operation Iraqi Freedom I. It is an illustration of a lesson learned about an aspect of war that the U.S. Army has had to relearn in numerous wars — cultural awareness.

The Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu said, “Know thyself but not thy enemy, find level of loss and victory.” Cultural awareness is one aspect of knowing your enemy; it is also a force multiplier in ongoing stability operations in Iraq. Soldiers with knowledge of Arabic and appreciation of Iraqi customs

and social mores are more effective in these operations because that knowledge gives them more options in situations requiring rapid decisions.

A large part of the insurgents’ fight against coalition forces consists of information operations (IO). These operations take the form of graffiti, posters plastered on walls, videos posted on internet sites, and word of mouth. Coalition forces must conduct their own information operations to defeat the insurgents. To make these operations successful, Soldiers must have some idea of how a message will be perceived by the Iraqis. Cultural awareness training is designed to provide Soldiers with basic knowledge enabling them to understand why an Iraqi might not receive the message intended.

RESOURCES

The Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, has compiled a list of resources to assist commanders planning cultural awareness training for their Soldiers. These resources are posted on the CALL Web site (<http://call.army.mil>) under the

heading “Training for War” and include the products listed below:

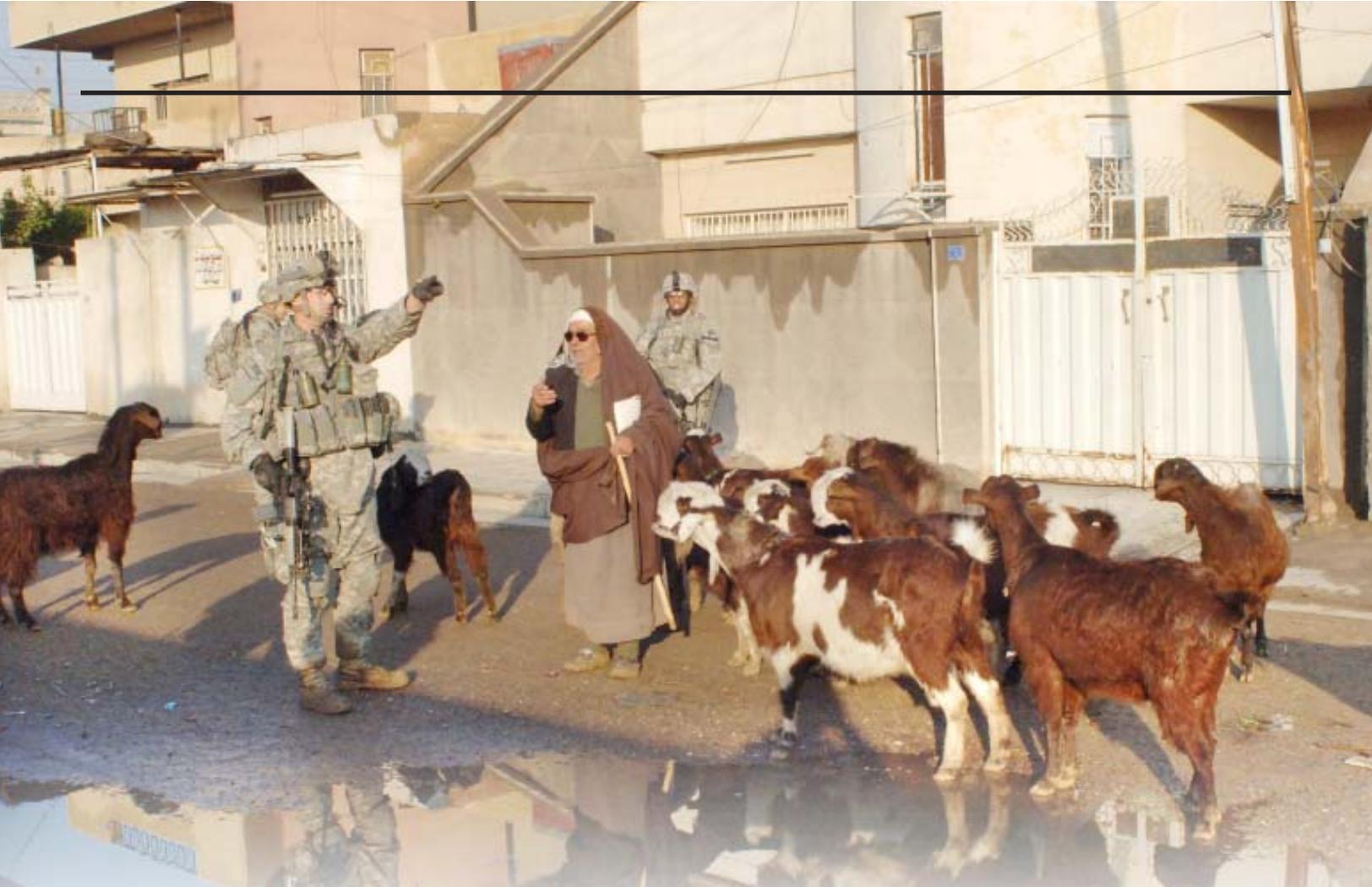
■ Graphic Training Aid, GTA 24-01-003, Iraqi Cultural Awareness Smartcard. The smartcard is intended to be carried by Soldiers in a pocket as a reference. The card includes information on useful phrases, religion, etiquette, customs, cultural attitudes, gestures, social structure, ethnic groups and other information designed to keep Soldiers from making social gaffes.

■ The Defense Language Institute (DLI) has produced several language guides with words and phrases spelled out in English, Arabic and phonetic spelling. The guides are oriented towards different military organizations (e.g. air crew, military police) or specific military operations (cordon and search, civil affairs).

■ The Foreign Language Center of DLI also maintains a Web site called www.Lingnet.org. On this site, Soldiers can access more than 1,000 lessons in 13 languages from the Global Language Online Support System as well as area studies called “Countries in Perspective.”

■ Rosetta Stone, a company that manufactures and sells computer-based language programs has developed a series of Arabic lessons for Army use. The program is run by Army e-learning and is accessible through the Army Knowledge Online (AKO) Portal. Soldiers can learn more about this program online at <https://usarmy.skillport.com/rkusarmy/login/usarmylogin.cfm>.

■ The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Culture Center (TCC) at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, provides MTTs (mobile training teams) and materials, at no cost to the unit, that are focused on cultures in the Middle East and Afghanistan. The MTTs concentrate training on cultural awareness familiarization and predeployment preparations, with the assistance of Soldiers in MOS 09L (translator) and other experienced individuals. TCC provides an in-depth view of various countries, cultures, and their peoples. TCC can provide training in module form



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A Soldier with the 8th Battalion, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, talks with a shepherd during a cordon and search mission in Iraq.

ranging from four to 40 hours based on unit requirements. The TCC Web site is <http://www.universityofmilitaryintelligence.us/tcc/cultural/default.asp>.

■ CALL has published a report on how cultural awareness impacts battle command. The report is a discourse on how cultural awareness should be incorporated into the military decision-making process and training. It is the end product of a CALL collection and analysis team (CAAT) mission to Iraq for the specific purpose of examining how a commander's knowledge of culture affects his success in battle and in subsequent stability operations. The report delineates how cultural awareness is a part of all lines of operation and examines methods of training Soldiers in cultural awareness at different times in the deployment cycle.

■ CALL provides numerous links to papers on the geography, politics, demographics, religion and other area study information developed by the TRADOC Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence (DCSINT).

A request for information (RFI) can be submitted directly to CALL if Soldiers do not find the information they need already available on the CALL Web site. CALL has also created a network of more than 40 analysts assigned to operational and institutional units. These analysts can assist a commander's training preparations by researching lessons learned and compiling information on critical subject areas. (See related article on page 46).

Many wars produce tragedies like the one cited at the

beginning of this article, memories of which stay with the Soldier forever. The purpose of these cultural awareness programs is to enable Soldiers to interact with indigenous peoples and eliminate some areas of friction, reducing the chance for future incidents.

All wars fought by the U.S. Army since the Spanish-American war have required Soldiers to have language skills and some level of cultural awareness. Cultural awareness training should be embedded into other training events as future wars promise to continue this trend. Continual exposure to foreign language and culture within the framework of normal training events will habituate Soldiers to the conditions prevailing when deployed. The end result will be that Soldiers are prepared to make rapid decisions based on sound knowledge and experience gained in training, averting tragedy in war.

Edwin B. Nelson entered the Army in December 1977. He served with numerous infantry units including the 1st Ranger Battalion, 101st (Airborne) Division Pathfinder Detachment, and the U.S. Army Sniper School. His last assignment was as command sergeant major of the 5th Ranger Training Battalion in Dahlenega, Georgia. He is currently a contractor working as a lessons learned analyst with the U.S. Army Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia.
