



J.D. Leipold

TEAM FROM 75TH RANGER RGT WINS 2008 BRC

Above, on April 20 the top three teams cross the finish line of the 2008 Best Ranger Competition at Fort Benning, Georgia. From left to right are SSGs Michael Broussard and Shayne Cherry of the 75th Ranger Regiment, who placed first; CPT Jeff Soule and MAJ Greg Soule, who took second place and represented James Madison University ROTC; and SGT Jeremy Billings and SFC Jeremiah Beck, who took third representing the 75th Ranger Regiment.

This year's field of competitors included almost 30 teams from force generating units in Training and Doctrine Command to operational units from Forces Command, and both active and reserve components.

The 2008 Best Ranger Competition core events involved foot movement, engaging and destroying an enemy target, evaluating, treating and evacuating a casualty, and the demonstration of physical and mental toughness. Upon completion of the three-day competition, during which no sleep was scheduled, each Ranger team moved in excess of 60 miles, with equipment, and fired nearly 250 rounds of ammunition using multiple weapons.

(Information provided by Fort Benning Public Affairs.)



Above right, the 2008 BRC winners SSG Michael Broussard and SSG Shayne Cherry hoist the pistols they won during the BRC awards ceremony. (Photo courtesy of TheBayonet.com)

At right, SSG Jeremy Cook makes his way up the 80-foot rock climb on the second day of the competition. (Photo by J.D. Leipold)

At left, a BRC competitor negotiates the water confidence course during day 3 of the competition. (Photo courtesy of TheBayonet.com)



CULTURAL AWARENESS AND THE ARMED FORCES

KIRSTEN SANDERS

As a leader among the nations of the free world, the United States has established a presence in virtually every nation on the face of the earth. In many lands, our diplomatic representation is complemented by a concomitant military presence, which has introduced members of the armed forces into foreign lands and exposed them to cultures and customs far different from our own. The military has long understood the importance of knowing as much as possible about its adversaries, but with recent and ongoing deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and other Middle Eastern countries the need for detailed, comprehensive knowledge has become both an issue of national security and a national priority.

Although our Soldiers and their leaders are typically briefed on the cultural pitfalls of deployment to other lands, since the outset of the global war on terrorism (GWOT) our military doctrine and training have devoted far more time, effort, and assets to expanding Soldiers' cultural awareness skills than ever before in our Army's history. According to LTC William D. Wunderle, author of *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness: A Primer for U.S. Armed Forces Deploying to Arab and Middle Eastern Countries*, cultural awareness can reduce battlefield friction and the fog of war. It can

also improve the armed forces' ability to accomplish their mission by providing insight into the intent of the groups operating in the battle space, thereby allowing the military to get inside an adversary's decision cycle and outmaneuver him. In like manner, Wunderle asserts that an understanding of culture and society is also critical in post conflict stability, peacekeeping, and nation building, which in many instances require an extended commitment of forces and assets in foreign nations.

Being culturally aware means that we recognize that we — friend and foe alike — are all shaped by our cultural heritage. This influences how we interpret the world around us, how we perceive ourselves, and how we relate to others. More importantly, it enables us to better understand those unique factors of history, religion, geography, and the local economy that shape an indigenous population. And military commanders are increasingly becoming aware of the critical link between cultural intelligence and our success in the contemporary operational environment. The U.S.

Soldiers with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) talk with an Iraqi man during a foot patrol April 29.

SGT James Hunter



Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) is currently working on implementing extensive training on cultural awareness at all levels across military installations, and especially among those tasked with the training of Soldiers. On a basic level, the training is teaching military commanders and Soldiers how to not only more effectively complete their missions, but also offers ways to carry out missions within a cultural context that heightens judgment and interaction within foreign lands. Some of the things that Soldiers learn are how to better identify the leaders and centers of influence within Muslim society.

It is also important to grasp the concept of families, clans, and tribes, and the factors and loyalties that cause them to react in certain ways. We are also attempting to clarify for our Soldiers and leaders the differences between such religious factions as the Sunnis and Shiites, and which may pose a threat to operational success at any given time. Taking time to socialize — typically perceived by us as nonessential — is a key element of social interaction with the Arab world. By getting to know the local population, we may earn respect and build the bonds that establish our — and their — credibility and future approachability. Within the Arab culture, alliances and allegiances are very important. Arabs are typically loyal to their code of honor and dedicated to their tribe, clan, and family. Their primary concern is that which affects their immediate circle. To lessen hostility Soldiers are briefed to speak to locals and smile (In Arab culture, a straight face is viewed as being hostile and a smiling face is deemed as friendly). Respecting elders is also a lesson learned in recent years. When entering into villages, units have found heightened success in acknowledging the elders and consulting them for advice and/or support in cultural relations and operations. Acknowledging their presence creates an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect — a task that will inevitably take time; however, with armed forces depending on the know-how and insight of the general populace, gaining trust is a critical element in overall intelligence gathering and an effective weapon on and off the battlefield.

An issue common to military transition teams, other U.S. Soldiers in advisory roles, and any Soldiers or leaders tasked with meeting with local leaders is the fact that every member of the team must embrace the



MC2 (AW/SW) Sandra M. Palumbo, USN

Soldiers with the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, speak with Iraqi men in Diwaniyah.

mission and be prepared to accept the local cultural norms. Foods and eating habits in the Arab world are often widely different from our own, and if one member of the team grimaces or mutters something about the dinner we may well have lost the game then and there. This is a matter of discipline; the leader sets the example and his subordinates follow. An important point: we cannot ever assume that the locals do not understand English. Any foreign language instructor will tell you that one's passive understanding of a language always exceeds his active conversational ability, and the smirk or body language that accompanies a derogatory comment will speak volumes on its own.

The importance of cultural awareness is not limited to those regions where we are actively involved in prosecuting the global war on terrorism. It has relevance wherever and whenever Americans — military or civilian — routinely interface with peoples and cultures of other nations. Whether we are questioning Iraqis about their water, electricity, and transportation infrastructure or preparing to close a business deal with Chinese investors, our understanding of whom we are dealing with will pay dividends. The dividends we may achieve in the GWOT include an ability to predict enemy courses of action, greater predictability of his goals and how he hopes to attain them, a more accurate assessment of his motives and how to affect these, and a significantly improved ability to gather and assess the human intelligence that is the

cornerstone of any counterinsurgency.

The GWOT is an evolutionary conflict, and our enemies are skilled in their use of information operations. They know how to exploit both regional and international media to their advantage, and we must not miss a chance to defeat them at their own game. We need to heighten our own sensitivity toward operational security (OPSEC), because Al Qaeda and its surrogates are skilled at gleaning intelligence from our own blogs, individual Web sites, media, and open source documents, and we cannot afford to give them anything they can use against us. Cultural Awareness should continue to be an integral component of Soldiers' formal training and cultural framework. The United States and its quest for cultural awareness can be equated to a contemporary battlefield — if it is not strategically navigated with precaution, awareness and respect, our efforts can produce unforeseen repercussions and long-lasting detrimental effects. By thoroughly training and preparing Soldiers for deployment and by continued this training in theater, we can be sure that the vital combat multiplier of cultural awareness can contribute to winning the global war on terrorism and defeating the most implacable, ruthless enemy our nation has faced in decades.

At the time this article was written, **Kirsten Sanders** was serving as an editorial intern with *Infantry Magazine* from Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia.
