Medical Command conducts cultural awareness training

by Capt. Megan Leary
44th MEDCOM

The 44th Medical Command orchestrated Cultural Awareness training Oct. 13 in preparation for their deployment to Iraq.

The United States Army Intelligence Center in conjunction with the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, Forces Command, and the Department of the Army brought G-2, to Fort Bragg.

G-2 is a mobile training team program specifically designed to enhance military service members' understanding of Central Asia and the Middle East in preparation for deployments in support of the Global War on Terrorism. Since 2004, mobile training teams have trained more than 23,658 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines. This year, mobile training teams made three visits to Fort Bragg specifically to train Soldiers from the 44th Medical Command.

In July, the mobile training team conducted an eight-hour block of training for the 28th Combat Support Hospital, the 32nd Medical Logistics Battalion, the 248th Veterinarian Detachment, and the 257th Dental Detachment, all of which recently deployed to Iraq.

The objective of the training was to provide an overview of Middle Eastern cultures, geography, history, Islam and regional customs and courtesies. This training is particularly valuable to health care providers who must balance respecting local practices with providing immediate medical assistance to Afghan and Iraqi civilians.

Soldiers from the CSH had many questions about how to treat female Iraqi patients. Would it be okay for a male medic to treat an injured or sick Iraqi female? Should a female medic attempt to treat a male Iraqi patient? What is the best way to preserve the dignity of each Iraqi, while providing the best possible medical care?

In general, how do you successfully bridge cultural boundaries and communicate effectively? Fortunately, the mobile training team had the answers.

What makes this training so unique and so pertinent is that each mobile training team is composed of individuals who were born and raised, attended university or have been stationed somewhere in the Middle East or Central Asia. For example, Rafiq Antar was born and raised in Morocco, Sandy Keith is a former physiological operations noncommissioned officer from Fort Bragg who served in Afghanistan and also studied extensively in Israel. Each member of the team has a vested interest in the subject matter, is committed to presenting the most up to date, relevant information and has a desire to educate and counter some of the common misconceptions that many Americans have regarding Islam and Arab cultures. On Oct. 13, Antar and Keith made their last trip of the year to the 44th MEDCOM to train the 541st Forward Surgical Team and 550th Area Support Medical Company, two units of the 261st Multi-Functional Medical Battalion Provisional deploying to Afghanistan. Many of the medics, surgeons and medical technicians have deployed to Iraq before, but not to Afghanistan. This training highlighted the cultural differences between the two countries and provided an Afghan historical overview. Keith closed the day of training with a class called, tactical application of cultural knowledge that included practical exercises where the Soldiers decided how best to handle given situations. Because of these training teams, Soldiers across the 44th MEDCOM gained a better understanding of the cultures they're going to spend a year embedded in, and gain the confidence needed to successfully complete the mission.

For more information on CA MTT training contact Capt. Meghan Leary at Meghan.leary@us. army.mil or DSN 337-3547.

Hearts

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Besides showing the Afghan lead in the event, the CMA allowed Task Force Eagle medics an opportunity to train their Afghan counterparts.

"MEDCAP is a very good thing for ANA and townspeople alike. It shows a close relationship between ANA and locals. When we help them, it'll change their minds and they realize that the Soldiers are the good guys and are here to help them," said Sgt. 1st Class Hamidullah Sultani, ANA doctor .

Referral slips with the doctor's name and the location of the clinic in Khyr Khot were also given to patients to further show the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's commitment to improving the lives of the townspeople.

Another way American and Afghani soldiers helped win over townspeople was to hand out supplies to the children and the adults. An ANA and Task Force Eagle team led by the civil affairs team of Capt. Robert Espinoza, Sgt. Steven Battko, and Spc. Christopher Matthews with assistance from Staff Sgt. Immundo Tucker and Sgt. Reagan Cruz, provided aid to more than 150 people in desperate need of everyday supplies.

Similar to the CMA, the focus was to ensure that the ANA Soldiers were seen handing out the items alongside the American troops.

Most of the items such as the clothes, backpacks, shoes, pens, pencils, and coats were geared toward the children.

Many kids walked away with bundles of much needed items bigger than they were.

While the U.S. Army provided most of the supplies, some of the materials were donated by Soldiers' family members in an effort to help those less fortunate.

Adults walked away with staples like rice and beans, flour, and blankets for the cold winter ahead. The town elders were happy with the humanitarian assistance because they realize that some of their townspeople have very little as the winter approaches.

"The point of humanitarian assistance is to bring some assistance to people in need with the hope that they and the Government of Afghanistan will be able to help themselves for the long-term," said Capt. Robert Espinoza, CA team leader. "This is also why it is so important to have the ANA involved in such operations, to develop their ability to execute these missions and provide future assistance on their own."

The assistance helped build relations with the Afghan local nationals so they'd be more welcoming to Task Force Eagle engineers who are now conducting road construction north of their town. This demonstrates an important balance between building much needed roads and reaching out to the public in hopes that they see the benefits of such infrastructure.

The aid was also an opportunity for the ANA and Soldiers to work together towards a common goal and proved that coalition success in Afghanistan requires many facets working together towards the common goal of rebuilding the nation. Just as important, the Task Force Eagle Soldiers said they walked away feeling that they made a difference in the country of Afghanistan, illustrating that the term "winning the hearts and minds" is more than just a meaningless catch phrase.

photo by Lucille Anne Newman/Paraglide

Fire 'em up!

A Soldier with 513th Fire Fighting Detachment, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 30th Engineer Battalion, rushes past an open window filled with a roaring fire inside the fire simulation building on Pope Air Force Base during their training session Thursday. See story and photos next week.

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