

# Leaders course helps Soldiers better understand Iraqi culture

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FORT HOOD, Texas – Senior leaders from the 1st Cavalry Division took a break from their normal pace Jan. 31 through Feb. 3 to attend a course aimed at helping the division better adapt during its next deployment in Iraq.

The four-day Leader Development and Education for Sustained Peace course was meant to help First Team senior leadership better understand the culture, history and political climate of Iraq before they deploy, helping them to acclimate quicker.

“The division leadership has spent four days of very important time in this academic endeavor,” said Robert Tomasovic, the program’s director. “It will allow the leadership to be more effective during this deployment and allow them to save Soldiers lives and bring Soldiers home.”

Tomasovic, a retired colonel, has used his experiences in the Army to help develop the course. About four years ago he deployed to Bosnia with little more than a day’s notice. He said he noticed that it took about 90 days for people to process and use the information about the culture and current situation. While there, he observed several units go through the same acclimation process. He began to wonder if it was possible to shorten the learning curve.

Tomasovic said he thought, “What can we do to work more effectively with everyone involved?

What do we need to understand the Army’s operational environment?”

Those are just a few of the areas the course covers. The overall concept is to have a better understanding of the Iraqi people so that Soldiers understand how they see things and put it in terms our Soldiers can understand, Tomasovic said.

“The biggest benefit is for leaders to ask the question ‘Why?’ They’re going to observe something in theater, if they can ask why and put it in context and answer, that allows us to take the appropriate action while understanding the second and third order of effects from taking that action,” Tomasovic said.

“We have to be more sensitive about the Iraqi culture,” said Col. Stephen Twitty, commander, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. “The Iraqi culture is a large part of winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqis. If we don’t understand the Iraqi culture, we’ll never fully achieve our objectives that we’ve set out for the country.”

Each of the course’s topics is taught by someone who is an expert in that subject. Because each

course is tailored to the unit and the area they are deploying to, the academics, current and former military commanders, state department personnel and other instructors change from course to course, Tomasovic said.

The course, which has been presented to more than 15,000 deploying Soldiers, receives high marks from the Soldiers attending.

“These guys have done a great job laying the ground work,” Twitty said. “We’ve found this to be so beneficial we’re going to invite these guys out to Fort Bliss to give this to the Soldiers in the brigade.”

“We’ve had nothing but positive comments,” Tomasovic said. “The way we can really tell if we are reaching our audience is at the breaks. We tell the Soldiers to talk to the faculty they are interested in. The staff often doesn’t get a break because there’s a dozen Soldiers clustered around them. Sometimes we learn more during the break than in the lecture.”





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