DLIFLC hosts Pashto class of Danish military students

By Spc. Kenneth Thomas
Strategic Communications

Few within the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) are unaware of the Institute’s reputation as a world-renowned language training facility. To prove it they need look no further than the Multi Language School (MLS) where 10 students from Denmark are currently enrolled.

Comprised entirely of 1st Lieutenants from the Danish Army and Navy, this Pashto class marks the first occasion since 1994 wherein a course group consisting entirely of International Military Students (IMS) has been enrolled.

Though the inclusion of foreign military to the Presidio of Monterey’s ever shifting student body is nothing new, this particular class makes a fine case for the revolutionary Pashto program currently being taught at MLS.

All 10 students carry with them previous military language training, six in Arabic and four in Russian and Serbian/Croatian. They are attending the DLIFLC’s Pashto course in preparation for a deployment to Afghanistan where the Danish military currently has nearly 480 service members in-country, and plans to augment this number with another company sized element of a few hundred troops next year.

With the importance of this mission it was crucial that these linguists be given the best possible instruction, as no other educational institution offered such a lengthy, intensive, and rich program taught by qualified instructors. At DLIFLC the Pashto and Dari programs were developed only months after 9/11, earning the Presidio global recognition as the leading authority in the instruction of these languages.

“The Danes sent their students to DLIFLC for a good reason. There are very few viable Pashto programs in the world and DLIFLC’s Pashto Program is by far the strongest, in terms of faculty, curriculum, and technology,” said MLS dean, Dr. Shensheng Zhu.

Under the guidelines of Foreign Military Sales the Danish government, like many countries before it, provided DLIFLC the necessary funds to enroll its 10 linguist officers in the course and provide them with books, necessary equipment, and housing in Monterey.

Of their arrival to the Presidio, a base populated by 3,500 students, an average of 1,700 instructors, and over 400 staff members, one commented, “We were quite surprised when they told us we were going to a small base, when where we came from there were only 40 (people).”

Their class, which began August 17th, is lead by Laila Sharifi, an instructor of the Pashto course since 2006, who has been charged with the unique task of teaching a class of officer linguists, a situation of which she exclaims, “It feels like you’re in heaven. Even after a week they’ve learned so much.”

Though the students will be held to the same Defense Language Proficiency Test standards of all basic course graduates, Sharifi has high expectations both for her new class and her compact teaching team of instructors and one academic specialist, Mr. Farooq Babrakzai.

Babrakzai, who serves both as an in-house grammarian and a cultural specialist, lectures on the various facets of society, geography, politics and traditions exclusive to Afghanistan.

“We have a different program. In our book there are presentations on culture which are all in Pashto, but these students will be given a presentation in English, work on it the next hour in Pashto, and a week later present on the subject in the target language,” Sharifi explained.

Though the Danish officers have only scratched the surface of their DLIFLC education, they immediately came to realize that despite the shared methodology of a full immersion, DLIFLC set itself apart from their previous
language learning experiences with the inclusion of a teaching team entirely composed of native speakers.

“It is overwhelming at first but as we move along, it should be quite beneficial,” said one officer.

With the course having begun just a few months ago, the IMS class is keeping their collective eye on the prize, “We are all focused on our goal of becoming interpreters …we don’t focus on tests, we focus on our future work,” said another officer. Because they will be directly deployed from DLIFLC to the southern province of Kandahar in Afghanistan, the students’ aims are clear: working to ensure that the instructors emphasize which of the three dialects covered in the course is best suited to the region to which they will be assigned.

They intend to absorb as much of the cultural presentations as they can, for the purpose of instructing their fellow troops in the field. “The goal is to stand with the man in brown (commanding officer) and be able to explain why someone is doing what they are doing, when they are doing it, to be able to explain the cultural origins of their actions,” said a student. “We have an additional advantage with this class because everyone chose to be here. Everybody chose to learn the Pashto language.”

But for the time being, the Danish officers hope to take full advantage of their current residence at the Presidio of Monterey and the beautiful state of California, in their spare time. They have plans to travel at every opportunity from California’s major cities, Los Angeles and San Francisco, to out of state attractions such as Las Vegas and Hawaii.

Despite their busy lives, the Danish officers also find time to join members of the 229th Military Intelligence Battalion, at firing ranges and training events, making closer acquaintance with those troops of whom they say, “We’ve received such a warm welcome. Everyone who comes to talk to us is very kind, sometimes they stare, but they are very friendly.”

*The names of the Danish officers have not been provided in this article for security reasons.*

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**Navy Adm. Mike Mullen visits DLIFLC**

*By Natela Cutter*

*Strategic Communications*

Just nine days before taking the post of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen visited the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) on Sept. 21st, taking the opportunity to see the Institute, while participating in a Naval Postgraduate School frocking ceremony of three new chief petty officers.

Mullen received a command brief and visited Arabic language classrooms at the Institute’s Middle East School I, where he was able to talk with students about their studies and see some of the newest programs DLIFLC had developed for deploying service members.

Fascinated by the technology employed, Mullen joked with students and instructors as they zipped through technology demonstrations showing various interactive programs and live audio and video recordings of authentic materials. “If I only had this when I was a student,” he said with a big smile.

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**DLIFLC students run Army Ten-Miler in D.C.**