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UNITED STATES MILITARY TRAINING FOR CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION

Robert D. Campbell

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Robert D. Campbell
Vice President
The Matrix Corporation
421 King Street
Alexandria, Virginia

June 4, 1969

The present number of "overseas Americans" -- that is, those who are abroad for more than six months, for whatever reasons -- is about two million. The average length of stay appears to be about a year. So every year about a million Americans go abroad -- some for the first time, some for the first stay of any duration, and some for the first time to that particular foreign area.

These Americans go overseas in a number of different roles: as members of the armed forces or employees of the federal government; as representatives of business, religious institutions, foundations, universities; even as expatriates. By far the largest group at present is the military, including dependents; probably three quarters of all Americans abroad, or about 1½ million, are so classified. And presumably the bulk of the military going abroad each year, between 500,000 and 750,000 people, are "first-timers."[1]

How many of these people are given some sort of training to prepare them for "cross-cultural interaction" I do not know. However, the military has been an active innovator in this sort of training and has supported a very respectable body of research investigating alternative approaches to preparing Americans for such traumatic experiences as role shock, culture shock, and transcultural conflict.

My purpose is to point out what seem to me to be critical omissions in both the military training programs for cross-cultural interaction and the research supporting such training. To put these criticisms in their proper perspective, it is almost necessary first to survey what has been done and is being done in both training and research.[2]

Military Training Programs for Overseas Service

There are two general categories of training programs: (1) those which basically aim to provide information about a foreign area (the "area studies" approach); and (2) those which basically aim to provide knowledge about and experience in interacting with foreigners. The majority of programs are area studies oriented.

Area studies approach. Although innovations have been suggested from time to time, the area studies approach is traditional in concept and operation. Like many college courses of instruction, the basic process here is that of transferring information to the student, either from a lecturer or from printed or audiovisual materials. The information content is factual: stress is put upon social-political history, geography, economic development, cultural institutions, etc. The goals of such programs tend to be improved cross-cultural behavior as a

result of a better understanding of one's counterparts. The assumption is that somehow knowledge will increase empathy, and empathy will modify behavior in such a way as to improve intercultural relationships. There is very little evidence to support this assumption, but on the other hand there is very little to negate it. In fact, I may as well make the point here which I will later stress: there is very little evaluative information about any cross-cultural training programs.

Area information is provided in two ways: (1) the most common is the provision of printed materials -- handbooks, manuals, pamphlets; (2) "classroom" presentations -- which vary from briefings to orientations to what amount to courses of study, involving reading, lesson preparation, and participation.

(1) Printed materials. A wide variety of handbooks and guides is presently distributed throughout the military. The Department of Defense issues "pocket guides" to various countries. The following table of contents, from A POCKET GUIDE TO KOREA,[3] is probably pretty typical: Land of Morning Calm, A Divided Country, A Rugged Country, The Korean People, Religion -- Diverse and Free, Four Thousand Years of History, An Ancient Culture, Korea's Government, Economy and Resources, Getting Around in Korea, Recreation and Holidays, Places to See, You Have Two Jobs. Appendices include: Spelling of Place Names, Korean Monetary System, Suggested Reading, and Language Guide. Somewhat more ambitious are the country Handbooks produced under

Army contract by American University's Center for Research in Social Systems. For example, the HANDBOOK FOR THAILAND[4] has four sections: Social, Political, Economic, and National Security. There are 27 chapters in all, covering just about every facet of Thai geography, life, and institutions. In addition, there are many kinds of highly abridged publications, about the size of a package of cigarettes, designed to provide useful reading for those hiatuses which characterize military life.

(2) Classroom presentations. There are probably dozens of area training programs in the military. For example, the Navy often provides carrier personnel a pre-docking orientation, carried by closed circuit television, in which a lecturer describes the people and their customs plus do's and don't's of shore leave behavior. Sailors are advised about such things as: what souvenirs to buy, what bars to stay out of, what the local confidence games are, what to see, etc. At the other end of the scale (and possibly no better, but with a different audience and for vastly different purposes), is the program presented by the Military Assistance Institute, which provides training for future Military Assistance Advisory Group officers[5]. The largest single bloc of hours scheduled for MAAG students is labeled "Country Study"; the 48 hours devoted to this subject include political, economic, sociological, diplomatic and

military subjects, plus information on the relationships between U. S. military programs and other assistance programs in the host country. The "Advisory"aspect of the program (20 hours) deals with problems of communicating with counterpart personnel, techniques of advising, the advisor's role, etc. The other parts of the program tend to be specifically job-related.

King has summarized the various criticisms of the area studies approach:

* The programs stress cognitive learning, do not teach human relations skills to any important extent, and do not provide adequate practical exercises in which the trainee can practice what he has learned.

* Intellectual knowledge of relevant data does not necessarily produce desired behavior; in other words, this approach does not markedly alter the trainee's motivation, attitudes, and values.

But as he points out, no really substantive evaluation has been made, so one really cannot say that these criticisms are valid.

Interpersonal behavior approach. This approach is relatively new, in that it involves stressing not the usual factual data about a country and a society but instead data about how its people might be expected to interact with Americans. The approach has grown out of behavioral and social science research on individual and group functioning, and as a result it is

characterized by a concern for the general principles and specific conditions determining whether intercultural contacts will involve cooperation or conflict, and the data basic to such programs are also outgrowths of such research. The basic process of training varies here from the conventional to the innovative and mixtures of both, with present programs relying heavily on lectures, printed materials, and discussions and experimental programs using role-playing techniques in a variety of ways.

Two programs are representative of this approach: (1) the "Troop-Community Relations" training program carried out by the American Institutes of Research in Korea, Thailand, Turkey, and Italy; and (2) the Personal Response Project carried out in the Marine Corps under the direction of the Chaplains Planning Group.

(1) Troop-Community Relations program. Perhaps the flavor of this program can be got by means of King's statement of their goals:

1. Develop positive attitudes toward host nationals.
2. Develop habits of dealing with each host national as an individual rather than on a stereotyped level.
3. Create awareness of the commonality and fundamental equality of all men.
4. Foster more ethical interpersonal relationships among American personnel and between Americans and host nationals.
5. Increase intellectual awareness of factors affecting cross-cultural behavior.

6. Prepare to withstand "culture shock".

7. Develop feelings of responsibility in each person for the improvement of relationships with host nationals.

8. Foster social support within one's primary groups for effective intercultural relationships.

Training methods include briefings, presenting critical incidents about U. S. - counterpart interpersonal relationships, discussions, and provision of opportunities for behavioral interaction between trainees and counterparts. Twenty one-hour discussions make up the substantive portion of the program, covering such topics as host country culture, customs, language, and the like, as well as such problems (to Americans) as sanitation, standard of living differences, theft, etc. The whole stated purpose of the program is to develop and maintain constructive and mutually satisfactory interactions between Americans and their counterparts.

(2) Personal Response Project. This rather unique project is basically designed for the Marine Corps -- and specifically for Vietnam, but it has been developed by a special unit of Navy Chaplains, members of which have collected critical incidents in the field, written all of the supplementary materials, designed the program, and at least until recently, directed it. King reports their program goals as follows:

1. To anticipate and respond to the predisposition of indigenous citizens to act consistently with

their deeply engrained religious and cultural value systems.

2. To respect the motives of indigenous citizens as a manifestation of these value systems.
3. To identify the expression of these motives and values in daily behavior.
4. To act with understanding and responsible concern in relationships with indigenous citizens.
5. To recognize that the lives, values, relationships and actions of indigenous citizens are of equal importance to those of all human beings.

The content of this program is to an important extent based on critical incident materials. Training involves four phases: (1) culture analysis, in which trainees learn the crucial social, economic, political and religious factors back of national behavior traits; (2) extended problem solving, in which trainers attempt to project trainees into heterocultural problem situations, by various means (but until now chiefly by means of discussions); (3) intensive attitude modification, in which empathic attitudes and opinions replace ethnocentric attitudes; and (4) learning reinforcement, in which techniques are used to reinforce the newly learned attitudes.

People involved in both of the above programs have informally reported considerable success in changing attitudes, but there are no published data to support this. Nor are there published data, I must admit, to support my general evaluation of the

present status of military training for cross-cultural interaction, which is that it varies from non-existent to not very good. The "not very good" is based on two observations that have occurred to others before me: (1) there is a real question that such goals as "change people's attitudes" can be achieved by the kind of training technology presently used; and (2) there is only anecdotal evidence to support the requirements for such training, and it seems clear that no training program can be termed "good" that is not directed toward some specific need.

Military-Sponsored Research in Cross-Cultural Interaction Training

The bulk of the research reported in recent years has had specifically to do with training content and technology. At the risk of over-generalizing and offending someone whose concept I have included in one of the following categories, I would list two major concepts: (1) simulation, either of role or culture, and (2) sensitivity training. To these, perhaps somewhat inappropriately, I will add a discussion of my own suggestion that cross-cultural training, whatever concepts and techniques are used, can only have real meaning when it is carried out in the context of the job one is going abroad to perform.

(1a) Simulation of role. The idea of role-playing is to simulate actual interpersonal behavior in conditions which demonstrate to the trainee involved how non-Americans might typically behave (in very un-American fashion!) and how he himself reacts to such unanticipated responses. The idea is sound, in the sense that the training focus is put on interpersonal encounters and on

actual behavior rather than cognitive learning. (If actual behavior is changed, there is then a considerably higher probability that attitudes will be modified than if the learning process is entirely cognitive.) Two thoroughly-reported experiments with role-playing are HumRRO's (Human Resources Research Organization) "contrast American",[6] in which the trainer has learned to respond in unstructured interpersonal situations with trainees in a fashion that is antithetical to modal American behavior; and the Air Force's "self-confrontation" program, in which the trainee is shown a video-tape of a cross-cultural encounter he has had.[7]

(1b) Simulation of culture. The idea here is of course to involve the trainee in making decisions (about cross-cultural situations) and either reinforcing correct decisions or correcting incorrect decisions. The culture assimilator, developed by Stolurow[8] and Fiedler, is based on critical incidents: each incident is described to the trainee, who selects one of four responses, etc. A related aspect of this program has been the work done by Harry Triandis[9] and others in developing a theory of "subjective culture" -- i.e., the characteristic ways in which a cultural group perceives and responds to its social environment.

(2) Sensitivity training. While I'm not aware of any military-supported research involving the use of T-groups for cross-cultural interaction training, its possible application has been reported by HumRRO scientists,[10] and I assume that its

use has certainly been considered by HumRRO. The key idea, which you are all well aware of, is to increase the trainee's awareness of the importance and characteristics of interpersonal processes.

(3) The significance of "job". My own research with Marine Corps problems of cross-cultural interaction in its pacification program in Vietnam led me to believe that rank and file Marines would neither perceive the significance of nor apply the "rules" of proper interpersonal behavior with Vietnamese counterparts unless the behavior was learned as a part of job training.[11] Our systems analysis of the process called counterinsurgency support pointed toward the relationship between perceiving a job and successfully performing that job. It also pointed toward specialization: not every Marine can perform every Marine job. It seemed to us, therefore, that if a Marine job required specific interpersonal skills the training should include training in those skills as part of learning how to do the job. The interpersonal skills components of different Marine jobs differ both in amount and kind. Many Marines have almost no contact at all with Vietnamese, while others have jobs which require rather special interpersonal skills. To attempt to train all Marines to empathize with foreigners, and behave accordingly, is as unrealistic as it is meaningless to the trainees.

Some Suggestions for Needed Research

It seems perfectly apparent to me that the need for cross-cultural interaction training is largely assumed or only rather

generally observed, that training is aimed at very broad goals associated with "improved" interpersonal behavior in general, and that research is concerned to a remarkable extent with training technology.

I feel that it is possible to rationalize such training only in the most general terms. A great deal has been written about the frustration, exasperation, annoyance, and bewilderment of Americans when they are first exposed to a different culture. Inferences are drawn concerning the incidence of "failure" and trauma, and about the role- and job-defeating impact of single incidents of "bad behavior". There is little substantive information to support such inferences. Failure and anxiety are difficult to define. And the evidence is that single incidents have little effect on stereotypes, because people do not tend to compare their experiences with one individual to their stereotype of the group he belongs to. Common sense suggests that very few international missions depend for their success or failure on the behavior of one person.

There <u>are</u> problems of adjustment, of course. When one moves into an exotic environment there can be, for a time, an almost complete preoccupation with the minutiae of daily behavior. But this experience creates excitement as well as frustration, joy as well as anger, enlightenment as well as bewilderment. It is the kind of change many Americans deliberately seek for their vacations and many others carefully avoid.

The question raised here is not whether Americans who are going abroad to live do -- or do not -- need training or orientation programs before they go. The question rather is, what are such training programs attempting to do? Unless one can identify specific "Americans-abroad" problems which training will help solve or mitigate, or unless one can identify specific goals and objectives which training will help attain, the training requirement will be difficult to justify and the nature of training programs difficult to formulate, let alone evaluate.

This is not to argue that such problems and goals do not exist. But if they do, there is little but anecdotal evidence to point to their existence. A survey of the literature* on training programs for those who are about to live abroad reveals two features common to most of them: (1) there is a heavy emphasis on description of the other culture, and (2) there is a growing emphasis on learning the other language. Now, there is certainly nothing wrong with such training. But it would be interesting to know how, and how much, information about the other culture contributes to the individual's success or failure, adjustment or lack of adjustment; and it would be equally interesting to know what percentage of Americans who learn another language actually use that language when they go abroad.

A survey of research* in cross-cultural interaction training reveals a preoccupation with method rather than with system -- that is to say, with techniques rather than with objectives. This

* Including all kinds of non-military training and research.

emphasizes the fact that the specific nature of the need is vague: the general purpose of most new techniques is to help the American empathize with his counterpart, or communicate with more effectiveness in his interpersonal relationships. (Whether it is possible to change adult interpersonal behavior in general is a moot point. It is even difficult at times to change some specific aspect of such behavior associated with the learning of a discrete task.)

Perhaps the argument can be summarized in this way. If the point of predeparture training is to change basic personality patterns of Americans going abroad, then there is little question that the outcome will be disappointing. If the point is simply to educate -- to provide additional information in the hope that it will be of use -- then evaluation is impossible. But if the point is to prevent job failure and improve job performance, then most programs are not designed to accomplish this and presumably are not accomplishing it.

I believe that most Americans involved in such training believe that the excuse for its existence is specifically to improve job performance. Even the training provided dependents would be more cogent if put in the context of their major activities -- such as running a household, or going to school. If such is the case, then some effort should be made to determine the impact of culture differences on job performance. This very specific kind of research orientation should tell us not only whether problems of cross-cultural interaction do in fact degrade performance of a necessary (and possibly measurable)

activity, but also, if they do, what kinds of problems are related to what kinds of jobs. Training then would have not only some job-specific content, but it would also have some definite objectives, and the results of training could be evaluated.

Footnotes

1. Campbell, R. D., "Introduction to Chapter 1. Americans Abroad," in Education and Training for International Living, unpublished ms. Burt King, John Nagay and the author are editing a book which is intended to cover all aspects of contemporary American publications on the topic.

2. King, Burt T., "Introduction to Chapter 9. Military Training Programs and Related Research," unpublished ms., is used as a basis for the bulk of the treatment of training.

3. A Pocket Guide to Korea, Armed Forces Information and Education, Department of Defense, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1964.

4. Smith, Harvey A., et al. Area Handbook for Thailand, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., September 1968.

5. This program is conducted by the American Institute of Research under contract with DOD.

6. Danielian, Jack, Live Simulation of Affect-Laden Cultural Cognitions, The George Washington University, September 1967.

7. Haines, D. B. and H. T. Eachus, A Preliminary Study of Acquiring Cross-Cultural Interaction Skills Through Self-Confrontation, AMRL TR 65-137, Aerospace Medical Research Laboratories, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio, September 1965.

   King, P. H., Cross-Cultural Interaction Skill Training - A Field Test of the Self-Confrontation Technique, AMRL TR 67-206, Aerospace Medical Research Laboratories, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio, December 1967.

8. Stolurow, Lawrence M., Culture Assimilators -- An Approach to Cross-Cultural Training, U. S. Army Human Factors Research and Development, 12th Annual Conference, U. S. Army Infantry Center, Ft. Benning, Georgia, October 1966.

9. A whole series of papers. For example:
   Triandis, Harry C. and Vasso Vassiliou, A Comparative Analysis of Subjective Culture, Department of Psychology, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, October 1967.

10. Foster, Robert J. and Jack Danielian, An Analysis of Human Relations Training and Its Implications for Overseas Performance, The George Washington University, Washington, D. C.

11. Campbell, Robert D., A Marine Counterinsurgency Support System, The Matrix Corporation, Alexandria, Virginia 1 October 1968.

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13. ABSTRACT

The largest numbers of Americans living abroad are members of the armed forces and their dependents. Length of stay varies, but one can project something just under a million "new" military "overseas Americans" annually.

The armed forces currently employ a wide variety of programs which have either the cognitive objective of preparing individuals to understand foreign areas and peoples better or the behavioral objective of preparing individuals to interact more effectively with members of other cultures. To expedite an overall view of these programs -- an assessment of the current state of the art -- they are divided into Area Studies Programs, Interaction Skills Programs, and Multi-Media Programs.

The bulk of the research supported by the military has been concentrated on developing methods of training people to interact effectively. Such concepts as the contrast American, personal response, and the culture assimilator, to name only a few, suggest ways of "sensitizing" Americans to the values and interpersonal behavioral modes of non-Americans.

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