

Macedonia AIAD - Summer Institute in Disaster Relief and Humanitarian Assistance

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What is it like to be kidnapped or car-jacked? Is it possible to negotiate for humanitarian space with government forces during the day and an insurgent commander at night? What kind of teamwork does it take to find people buried under earthquake-strewn rubble and safely dig them out? Four cadets from West Point, Katie Fichtner (C2, 2009), Jessica Howell (F1, 2010), Kevin Gulino (E4, 2011) and Shane Smith (E2, 2011) can answer these questions and many more. The cadets participated in an Advanced Individual Academic Development (AIAD) staged in Macedonia and sponsored by Department of Geography and Environmental Engineering and the Consortium for Humanitarian Service and Education.



Cadet Fichtner gets “detained” and questioned by government forces regarding her meeting in the village. (Photo by W. Thompson, USMA)

The consortium is a joint partnership between U.S. civilian universities, the Institute for Defence and Peaces Studies in Skopje, Macedonia and the

Macedonian Ministry of Defence. The purpose of the exercise was to provide intensive, hands-on training in order to develop multi-culturally competent, problem-solving leaders. The cadets worked alongside civilian counterparts as members of a fictitious non-governmental organization, International Humanitarian Action. Together, they conducted disaster relief in a simulated conflict environment. This opportunity differed from some AIADs which as Cadet Shane Smith noted has its advantages in that working with the “American and Macedonian civilians gave me a whole new experience and helped me analyze my leadership style”.



Cadet Jessica Howell (F1, 2010) and Kevin Gulino (E4, 2011) demonstrate to Sanja Stojanoska (at left) and other Macedonian counterparts how to use a sand table to rehearse night convoy operations. (Photo by Goran Sofeski, Macedonian Ministry of Defence)

The cadets trained on topics like small unit leadership, negotiations, advanced first aid, mass casualty management, mine awareness, convoy operations, base camp logistics, over-water rescue, urban search and rescue, and cultural awareness. During Cadet Kevin Gulino, who was the incident commander said “ I organize negotiations, create a logistics analysis presentation, set up a camp for

displaced persons, maintain security within our own base, and make sure my teams were getting rest...The volume of what I had to do all within a 24 hour span was nothing I had dealt with before.”



Kevin Gulino (E4, 2011) and Leta Bardjieva (Institute of Defence and Peace Studies, Skopje, Macedonia) call forward medical evacuation assets during an urban search and rescue exercise in the village of Mushanci. Teams used police search dogs to locate actual role player victims buried beneath the rubble. (Photo by W. Thompson, USMA)

To assist in communicating with local villagers and to help them develop better cultural awareness, the American students were partnered with Macedonian students from the Institute for Defence and Peace Studies. This presented the cadets with an opportunity to bridge cultural barriers while working with coalition partners – skills they will need as junior officers.



Cadet Katie Fichtner (C2, 2009) and her Macedonian counterpart negotiate with a villager to gain access to opposition leadership. (Photo by Larry Lawson, Indian River State College)

Cadet Katie Fichtner valued the experience, commenting that “ it allowed me to learn how to work with many different types of people who may not operate in the same language, time schedule, or even hold the same customs as you. It was a great lesson as to the overall differences that various groups and organizations have, yet that at some point, there can always be found a common interest to join those same groups together.”



Cadet Shane Smith (E2, 2011) conducts a press conference following a prisoner exchange between government and opposition forces. (Photo by W. Thompson, USMA)

Not everything the cadets did in the exercise was simulated. The participants in Svetlina '09 were given the opportunity to conduct a needs assessment of three local villages to develop a work project. Each student team wrote a competitive grant proposal for the village project they deemed most worthy. Jessica Howell's team proposal was chosen as the winner and was given \$500 (US) to carry-out their village improvement project. The students worked with local craftsman and villagers to add an extension onto the pre-school in the village of Crveni Bregovi (Red Hills). The project doubled the size of the outside play. The school children decorated the new school addition to their school with painted hand-prints. The community project also benefitted the cadets as Jessica Howell noted "interacting with other cultures and seeing our own through the eyes of Macedonians helped me to broaden my perspective and become more culturally aware which is very important for a leader in today's Army."



Cadets Shane Smith, Kevin Gulino, Jessica Howell (kneeling), and Macedonian student Sanja Stojanoska pause for a photo with local "helpers" during the village improvement project in Crveni Bregovi (Red Hills). (Photo by W. Thompson, USMA)

opportunity to relax and reflect on what they had accomplished as well as visit an area of great cultural and historical significance. The cadets toured the most noteworthy monuments in the city of Athens one day and enjoyed the welcoming beaches and clear blue waters of the Mediterranean on the next. On their last night, the cadets were treated to a home visit by an Athens family. The evening was filled with conversation, Greek music, and plenty of traditional cuisine. The Athens visit was a memorable way to finish an AIAD experience that will leave the cadets with new skill sets, a better understanding of the human and physical landscape of the region, and most importantly, many new friendships.



Cadets Gulino, Smith, Fichtner and Howell tour the *Acropoli* with their friend and Athens native, Spyros Angelis (standing at left). (Photo by W. Thompson, USMA)

The cadets ended their AIAD with two days in Athens, giving them an