

Public Affairs Students Benefit From Journalist's Experience

Defense Information School Public Affairs Leadership Department

FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, Md. -- June 26, 2008 -- Students at the Defense Information School spent time with an experienced international journalist Thursday during an event designed to reinforce Public Affairs skills learned here.

Public Affairs Qualification Course students were able to spend an hour of their training schedule with Ori Nir, currently the spokesman for Americans for Peace Now headquartered in Washington, D.C. Nir has served as Washington bureau chief of the Forward, reporter for Ha'aretz Daily, and studied and taught journalism at University of California, Berkeley.

Nor's discussion focused on the positive attributes Public Affairs officers should cultivate to enhance their relationship with journalists. He also gave advice for dealing with common challenges the students might face as PAOs.

Nor said the first lesson he learned as a reporter was that his "main asset is credibility." He explained how 24 years later he received the same advice and explained an Arab proverb that says "even a donkey learns from repetition."

He explained key attributes that are important to develop. "Think on behalf of reporters," and come up with interesting examples to illustrate and explain issues. He advised that while it is sometimes difficult to promote positive stories, journalists will often be more interested if you can identify an element of conflict to broaden the story's appeal. Being able to say "I don't know," said Nir, is especially important when you "think you know the answer, but are not sure."

He also recommended areas for media relations officers to avoid. "I've had both fun and frustration with military jargon;" work on speaking in plain language that is understood outside the military culture. He said that while maintaining professionalism is important, "do not be metallic." Showing a human side, even humor, will help you build trust he explained.

A student asked Nir how military spokespersons are perceived by Arab media. Nir explained that spokespersons are vulnerable in credibility because of a perceived gap between the truth of specific events and official explanations. He accounted for this as a function of a chain-of-command system and a cumulative process of "sugar coating" events as they are reported up successive levels.

PAQC is a 9-week initial course in Public Affairs that teaches subjects in eight functional areas of the profession: theory and doctrine, community relations, internal information, multimedia, media relations, communication skills and public affairs operations; the culmination of the class is a three-day final practical exercise that allows students to combine their new skills in a series of simulated scenarios. The current iteration of PAQC includes 60 students, two of whom are from Bulgaria and Taiwan.

For more information on the Defense Information School, go to <http://www.dinfos.osd.mil/>.