“The struggle was in the rice paddies… in and among the people, not passing through, but living among them, night and day… and joining with them in steps toward a better life, long overdue.”

General Lew Walt, USMC Retired
Many believed that the United States could not win in Vietnam.

The Vietcong’s ability to blend in with the local population gave them a distinct advantage.
Combined Action Platoon (CAP Program)

- Marines realized that familiarity with and respect for local culture would help their cause
- Marines lived and interacted with their Vietnamese counterparts daily
- Learned the language and history and demonstrated respect for local customs
- Knowledge of local customs and culture helps Marines accomplish the mission
OPERATIONAL CULTURE

- Cultural Differences
  - Culture Defined
  - Understand Culture Differences

- Cultural Terrain
  - Types of Cultural Terrain
  - Understand Cultural Terrain Differences

- Cultural Comparisons

- Cultural Terrain Understanding in Action
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Please Read Your

Terminal Learning Objectives

And

Enabling Learning Objectives
QUESTIONS
CULTURE is the customary beliefs, social forms and material traits of a racial, religious or social group or, a set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices of an organization.
UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

- Provides insight into the conditions on the battlefield
- Helps us distinguish friend from foe
Service members cover the globe. To maximize our success while forward-deployed, service members must constantly maintain their situational awareness.
ELEMENTS OF CULTURE TERRAIN

LAND
HISTORY
PEOPLE
RELIGION
LANGUAGE
SOCIAL HIERARCHY
LOCAL BELIEFS
LOCAL PRACTICES

+CULTURAL TERRAIN
Marines have always used their battlefield experiences to develop new tactics, techniques, and procedures.

Knowing if the cultural terrain is SUPPORTIVE, NON-SUPPORTIVE or HOSTILE is vital to mission accomplishment.
Individuals, groups or factions that are SUPPORTIVE:

✓ Share the same mission
✓ Share the same goals
✓ Share the same intent
✓ Share the same concerns

They are reliable and trusted.
Individuals, groups or factions that are **NON-SUPPORTIVE** but neutral:

- Are non-threatening
- Are innocent
- Are to be protected
Individuals, groups or factions that are **HOSTILE**: 

- Have opposing goals
- Have opposing intent
- Are **not** trusted
- Must be defeated

Killed: 2 May 2011

- **Osama Bin-Laden**
- **Abu Musab al-Zarqawi**
- **Saddam Hussein**
QUESTIONS
CULTURAL COMPARISONS

Sense of Self and Space

- Americans greet one another with a handshake

- Other cultures, may greet more or less formally including hugs, bows or exchange of business cards
Communication and Language

- Americans “cut to the chase”
- Other cultures may prefer indirect communication
- Possibility for misunderstanding exists
Dress and Appearance

- The American standard is to dress for success
- The style of dress in other cultures may indicate position, wealth, prestige, or religious restrictions
Time Consciousness

- American standard: “Time is money.”

- Other cultures: “Time is better spent establishing and maintaining relationships.”
Relationships

- American focus is on the “nuclear family”
- Value is placed on youth
- Age is viewed as a handicap or liability
- Other cultures focus on the “extended family”
- Value is placed on loyalty to the family
- Aged are given status and respect
Values and Norms

- Americans value:
  - Independence and freedom
  - Direct confrontation in conflicts

- Other cultures prefer:
  - Harmony to conflict
  - Conformity to tradition
Beliefs and Attitudes

- American standard:
  - Equality for all
  - Individuals control their own destiny

- Other cultures:
  - Circumstances of birth control your destiny
  - Respect for authority
  - Men hold the dominant roles
Work Habits and Practices

- Americans emphasize:
  - Task completion
  - Reward based on individual achievement

- Other cultures emphasize:
  - Personal relationships
  - Reward based on seniority
QUESTIONS
Fallujah, Iraq: 2005

- Marines set up an observation post inside a local residence
- Observed the area daily for insurgent activity
- Marines learned that Iraqi men avoid yard work
Fallujah, Iraq: 2005

- One morning men were observed doing yard work
- Marines also noticed the men repeatedly looking in their direction
- Their position had been compromised
At a medical clinic, a Marine Corporal realized that few Afghani women and children were coming for treatment due to security searches.

Afghani custom dictated that women were not to be touched by men who were not their husbands.

Afghani men consider violation of this custom a great insult.
Kabul, Afghanistan: 2003

- Arrangements were made for female Marines to conduct the search
- Afghan men were permitted to monitor the searches
- Word spread and more locals came in
- Respect for and knowledge of local customs helps mission accomplishment
The Al Qaeda operatives were successful in part because they:

- Enrolled in English language courses
- Avoided suspicious associations with certain mosques
- Obtained American driver’s licenses
- Took part in American pastimes
- Shaved their beards and mustaches and bought gold chains to resemble tourists
QUESTIONS
SUMMARY

- Cultural Differences
  - Culture Defined
  - Understand Culture Differences

- Cultural Terrain
  - Types of Cultural Terrain
  - Understand Cultural Terrain Differences

- Cultural Comparisons

- Cultural Terrain Understanding in Action
BACKUP SLIDES
if you are reading this...

you are not studying!
US Marines in Fallujah