

This article was reproduced from the August 2004 issue of *Update*, the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's internal newsletter.

## Training to Meet the Challenges in Iraq

"There are forces that want you to fail," the counterintelligence instructor says. Listening to him, intent on their future, is a class comprised of various U.S. Government employees, including Navy Seabees, a security engineer, health attachés, and U.S. Agency for International Development employees. And so begins the first day of the Iraq-Diplomatic Security Antiterrorism Course (Iraq-DSAC) at Diplomatic Security's Training Center. "There are forces in that very city," the instructor continues with his expository on Baghdad, "that want **you** dead."

A standard antiterrorism course has been offered by DS for several years, with voluntary attendance during the summer transfer cycle. The Iraq-DSAC course is mandatory for all employees assigned to Iraq. It has been offered every week this year, graduating 645 students by the end of August. Students represent a wide range of agencies and reside in various countries, such as Russia and Australia.

Maintaining the ever-evolving, weekly class has been a "Herculean effort...on the part of the instructors involved," said one of the chief designers and coordinators of the Iraq-DSAC course, noting how difficult it is for the coordinators and instructors to maintain that level of effort for such an extended period of time in addition to their other responsibilities.

"It would be foolhardy for the Department and Diplomatic Security to sugarcoat this mission. It is truly a dangerous environment," he said, describing the gravity of the situation in Iraq. "However, what you see in the media is only one representation of what's going on there." Instead of

giving the class a sensationalized version of events in the Middle East, the first day of Iraq-DSAC is molded to satisfy the students' curiosity, not necessarily focusing on violence and gore.

Day one, by design, is a 9-hour briefing. Course designers concluded that the most important questions to be answered concern practical matters such as living and working conditions. The initial day covers such basic administrative matters as where Iraq-bound employees eat, sleep, and shower. According to those who have worked in Iraq, the single most stressful event or situation was not the fact that they were serving in a combat zone, it was the nontraditional living and working environment. Throughout the first day, students hear from experts on counterintelligence, intelligence and threat analysis, and from the Office of Casualty Assistance. Instructors acknowledge that going from relatively cozy office spaces to the more cramped and less comfortable working locales in Iraq can truly weigh on the inexperienced employee. The anxieties of this rough transition, or the Brussels-to-Baghdad assignment, can be allayed somewhat by sharing information.

*Where am I moving? When am I moving? Am I predictable? Where am I vulnerable?* These are the questions that the students are taught to ask themselves on the second day of Iraq-DSAC during a portion focused on surveillance detection. Through such questioning, the instructor teaches the students to think in the same fashion that Iraqi terrorists following the students might think. After classroom

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



instruction on what to do if being followed by another car on the road, students climb into a van and spend 3 hours on the road trying to detect their pursuers, played by role players. They attempt to identify who might be posing as innocents in cars, as pedestrians, or even as shoppers in nearby stores. While in the car, students learn to consider which kinds of roads (narrow vs. short, deserted vs. populated) are best for driving in Iraq. At the end of the exercise, the students are finally “attacked,” at which point they discover how clever they were at identifying the so-called terrorists.

On the third day of the Iraq-DSAC course, after a bus ride to Summit Point, West Virginia, Iraq-DSAC students find themselves in a protective wooden gazebo. Moments later, a car parked a safe distance from them explodes, its windshield bursting from its frame several feet into the air. The front of the car is charred. Had there been anyone inside, there seems little chance of survival. Following a briefing on several forms of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which include realistic models and some compelling video and slides, the students are taken to the wooden gazebo to see the effects of different IEDs such as the one that detonated the dynamite in the car. The IEDs come in the forms of remote controls, briefcases, and even cigar boxes, and the students are able to detonate the explosive material themselves from their safe vantage point.

Afterward, the students sit in a nearby classroom to be shown how to load and fire several guns, including the AK-47 which is widely used by adversaries in Iraq. They are also taught how to ensure a gun is safe. The hands-on approach is a necessary tool to the program and as a testament to that idea, the students go from the classroom to a nearby shooting range to try their hand at each of the guns they are briefed on in class. For some students, such as the Navy Seabees, it is

a refresher course. For others, it is nothing short of a harrowing experience.

“I will never be comfortable around guns and explosives,” said one Iraq-DSAC student who had never previously fired a gun. “I hope I never have to touch a gun ever again.”

On the fourth day, during a mock scenario, the students are in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, on a diplomatic mission. They have been enjoying some time with friends in the hotel cafeteria. Suddenly, an explosion—no doubt the work of terrorists. The building is in rubble. The students are fine but their coworkers surround them. One has been impaled in the eye. Another is suffering, writhing from severe burns. Several more are covered in their own blood. The Iraq-DSAC instructor has just guided the students through an imaginary scenario to prepare them for the medical training ahead. Now the instructor asks the students, taking into account all the tragedy before them, to rank which of the victims they will attend to, knowing that they may have to postpone assisting someone else in pain. The instructor acknowledges the inexperienced and now perplexed students’ concern, knowing that they are full of questions, by frankly responding, “you may not like the answer I give you.”

The majority of the final 2 days of the Iraq-DSAC course are spent on the Safehaven Medical Workshop. Safehaven was created by the CIA and was dispersed to other agencies in the mid-1980s. Students learn how to conduct primary and secondary assessments on a victim—patting the victim down searching for any broken bones and looking for such warning signs as serious bleeding—all under the guidance of an energetic Safehaven instructor. Using models, the instructor demonstrates what to do in the event someone has been eviscerated, has been impaled, is having a seizure, or has an injury so serious as to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

necessitate a tourniquet, considered a last resort among the Safehaven instructors.

“Don’t let them put on a tourniquet! No tourniquet!” A regular DSAC guest speaker recounts the events that took place when her right arm was nearly severed during an explosion. In October 2003, she was asleep in her Al Rasheed hotel room in Iraq when the rockets began to fire. One of the rockets hit her bedroom wall, jettisoning a piece of wall into the upper portion of her arm. Through the fire, smoke, and explosions, she could not remember each and every detail of the Safehaven course, which she had taken in Guatemala; however, the bits and pieces she did remember helped her maintain some level of confidence.

During the rocket attacks, concerned bystanders offered to apply a tourniquet. She remembered learning in Safehaven that one should always resist applying tourniquets, except when absolutely necessary, especially when dealing with an upper extremity. Using a tourniquet will likely lead to the amputation of any body part located below the area where the tourniquet was applied. Using some of what she learned in the course, she tried not to panic after her arm was hit. She applied pressure to her wounded arm to stop the bleeding and with some assistance made it out of the building. She asserts in the DSAC classes today that if she had not taken the Safehaven course, she would have lost her arm.

Also included in the final days of Iraq-DSAC is a course on chemical and biological awareness and countermeasures. The instructor’s discourse includes explanations of different forms of biological terrorism, such as nerve and blister agents. Along with a slide show of different biochemical threats, students are given the chance to practice with an authentic training gas mask that they keep.

“You will not rise to the occasion, you will sink to the level of your preparation,” begins the instructor in *Coping with*

*Stress*, one of the last segments of the Iraq-DSAC. Drawing on his personal experience in Iraq, the instructor gives a frank dissertation on the threat levels in Iraq. Students are reminded that green is just a color, and they should not naively assume that the Green Zone is a safe zone. Most of his segment deals with identifying and effectively dealing with the types of emotional strains that might and probably will arise in the war-torn Middle Eastern nation. This portion of the course, as with other DSAC sections, has various effects on students, some feeling more confident after Garot’s course, others feeling more of the anxiety Dr. Garot’s course is designed to treat.

“I am now more apprehensive about going,” one student said after taking the Iraq-DSAC course. “Or perhaps I am more aware of the potential dangers. [The instructors] made them sound real and close, rather than remote or something that you just see on TV.”

“Sincere, upbeat, overall very positive,” another student said describing the instructors; perhaps a lighter view of the course. This student, a Navy captain, has had extensive training with firearms and medical emergencies in combat situations. Even so, after this course he feels less apprehensive about his deployment to Iraq. He describes that increasing awareness, one of the goals for the course, is one of its most apparent themes. Being more aware at all times in all places as well as not freezing in a critical moment is a lesson many take from the course.

Sitting in the class, one might look around at these students who have volunteered to go to the Middle East. It is often easy to spot various reactions, reflected in facial expressions, to what can sometimes be a frighteningly illuminating course. These diplomats are undoubtedly brave, but often there are looks of apprehension on even these courageous students’ faces. But many students report



## Behind the Scenes

Page 4

that the bonds formed in the course may be the most beneficial secondary gains of the class. In a course where every instructor's refrain seems to be "prepare for the worse-case scenario," it is easy for the Iraq-bound students to become somewhat

anxious, thinking about what lies ahead. Hopefully, the collective experience of Iraq-DSAC will provide a calming effect and a sense of empowerment for these heroes. ⚙️