

# Cultural guides a sign of focus on Asia-Pacific

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Troops deploying to the Asia-Pacific region and Africa can now take along a pocket-sized companion that will help them navigate the tricky terrain of unfamiliar countries and their cultures.

The Air Force Culture and Language Center at Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., is ramping up production of cultural guidebooks for countries in those regions as the military shifts its focus away from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mary Newbern, region branch chief for the center, said the small field guides are usually fewer than 80 pages and laminated to endure the wear and tear of being jammed into a rucksack or a pocket during a deployment.

The center, which has already published guides for 14 African countries, released its first field guide for the Philippines. Like its predecessors, the guide includes key information such as the history of the Philippines, religious traditions and basic information about the language.

Newbern said a mix of civil servants, active-duty airmen and contract employees do much of the research that goes into the guides, but the center gets help from experts at local colleges and universities for peer reviews.

She said the guides represent an expansion of the mission at the center, which was founded at Air University in 2006 to offer specialized expeditionary skills training through several platforms that include the Distributed Learning System and the Community College of the Air Force.

The center also supports education and research at schools across Air University and designs and manages the Language Enable Airman Program. The center began producing the cultural guidebooks in 2009.

Those first guides for Iraq and Afghanistan were targeted at airmen and called the "Expeditionary Airman Field Guide," Newbern said. But a request from U.S. Africa Command resulted in a name change.

The guides are now called the "The Expeditionary Cultural Field Guide" to reflect the fact that they are being made available to troops in all four services, she said.

"We get as many requests from the Army and the Navy as we do from the Air Force," Newbern said.

Newbern said it takes between three and four months to produce a guide and by next September the center will have produced an additional 10 guides for AFRICOM.

Newbern said the center partnered with U.S. Pacific Air Forces to produce the Philippines guide and she expects further collaboration in the future.

The launch of the Philippines field guide represents the growth of services by the Air Force Culture and Language Center, and program officials have said they want to continue assisting airmen performing the Air Force's global mission.

“We have to make sure our military members have the information they need to operate effectively in any environment,” Jay Warwick, AFCLC director, said in a news release. “The [Expeditionary Cultural Field Guides] are just one way we deliver the skills and knowledge necessary for cross-cultural competence.”